

Rights situation was alarming in 2013

Says rights body ASK's report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The overall rights situation in Bangladesh was alarming in 2013, amid continuous political violence throughout the year, says an annual report published by Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) yesterday.

Although some steps were taken to establish and ensure the economic, social and cultural rights of people, political violence and the deteriorating law and order situation created panic and a sense of insecurity among people, the report mentions.

Forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and deaths in police custody continued along with communal violence, harassment and killing of journalists, gender-based violence and violation of workers' rights, it adds.

Abu Ahmed Faizul Kabir, senior investigator of the rights organisation, presented the summary report styled "Human Rights Situation in Bangladesh, 2013" at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity in the capital.

The report highlights as the most positive step the continuation of the trial of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and as the most disastrous event the Rana Plaza incident in which

1,134 workers of six garment factories lost their lives.

The two international crimes tribunals gave verdicts against six war criminals last year. One of them, Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah, was executed after his case went through the due legal procedures.

Centring on the verdicts and rows between political parties over the upcoming general elections, as many as 848 political clashes took place last year. The clashes left 507 people, including 15 members of the police and two of the BGB, dead and 22,407 people injured, says the report.

Since the announcement of the polls schedule on November 25, over 100 people have died across the country during hartals and blockades enforced by the opposition from the following day.

Seventy-five of them died during hartals and blockades between November 25 and December 15, while 30 others died during clashes sparked by the execution of Mollah, the report adds.

Clashes took place in around 50 districts during the period, the worst of which was Sakhira, a district that virtually turned into a battlefield, says the ASK report.

Subhan indicted

FROM PAGE 16

Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim and Justice Anwarul Haque, yesterday read out the charges one after another.

Subhan sat still in the witness box as the tribunal chairman read out the charges. He was wearing a white tupi, khaki shawl, panjabi [antique brass colour], white pyjama, black sandal and eyeglasses.

He was produced before the tribunal around 10:45am. Tribunal asked Subhan to have a seat at the witness box so that he could hear the charges to be brought against him.

Other charges brought against Subhan include killing of five and injuring three others in his presence and under his leadership at Juktitala village in Ishwardi on April 13, 1971.

Accompanied by local Jamaat leaders and Biharis, Subhan abducted three persons, who had taken shelter in a local mosque, on April 17-18 in 1971. Later, they were killed before him.

Led by Subhan, the Pakistani army raided Sahapur village in Ishwardi on May 2, 1971 and killed five people and looted several houses before setting those on fire.

Subhan allegedly abducted two persons from Arankhola cattle market in Ishwardi on May 16, 1971. The hostages were tortured at District Dak Bungalow in Ishwardi.

The Jamaat leader also led the Pakistani

MAULANA ABDUS SUBHAN

Present status:

Nayeb-e-ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami

Status in 1971:

Alleged vice-chairman of Pabna Peace Committee, MNA in 1971

Type of crimes:

Genocide, murder, abduction, confinement, torture, looting and arson

Number of crimes: Nine

Time and area of crimes: April 13 to October 30, 1971, in Pabna.

Investigation: April 15, 2012 to September 12, 2013

Witness: 43 persons

army in alleged attacks on Kulniya and Dogachi villages in Pabna sadar on May 11, 1971. Five people were killed and several houses were torched at that time.

On May 20, 1971, under the leadership of Subhan, the Pakistani army allegedly picked up 18 people from Varara village in Pabna and killed one of them instantly. Others had been tortured at Nurpur Power Plant. Later, some of

them were killed near Debottar Bazar.

At least 18 people were killed in the incident.

In the first week of September, Subhan, accompanied by local Razakars, abducted two pro-liberation persons from Dublia Bazar under Pabna sadar and killed them inside a temple at Kuchiamara village.

On October 30, 1971, Subhan and local Razakars attacked Betharia village in Ishwardi and looted several houses before setting those on fire. Four people were also abducted from the village and later killed.

After the charges were read out, the tribunal chairman asked Subhan if he would plead guilty or not.

In response, Subhan said, "I am completely innocent. I don't have any involvement in the charges brought against me."

If convicted, he could get the capital punishment.

The prosecution have so far planned to examine 43 witnesses to prove the charges.

Subhan, son of Sheikh Naimuddin and Nurani Begum of Tailakundi village of Sujanager upazila in Pabna, was arrested on September 20, 2012.

After a 17-month-long probe against Subhan, the war crimes investigation agency submitted its final probe report to the prosecution on September 12. Three days later the

India won't interfere in Bangladesh affairs

Says New Delhi

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India has no intention to "interfere" in the internal affairs of Bangladesh, said New Delhi yesterday.

It also said it wanted that the people of Bangladesh, which is witnessing violence in the run-up to the January 5 polls, overcome their differences through peaceful means.

"We do not have any intention to interfere in the internal affairs of Bangladesh. But as a friendly neighbour and as a well-wisher, we do hope that the people of Bangladesh and their leaders can arrive at solutions and at outcomes which enable the people here, who are living in Bangladesh to realise their aspirations," said the spokesperson at the external affairs ministry.

He added that as a neighbour of Bangladesh

and as the two countries that shares such a long border, neither India nor Bangladesh could remain unaffected or be indifferent to what happens in each other's country.

"We have an interest in what happens in Bangladesh and I am sure Bangladesh has a similar interest in what happens in India.

"That is because at one level, the destinies of our two peoples and our countries are very, very closely linked, more than perhaps any other two countries in the region," he said.

The spokesperson also said: "We would wish them [Bangladesh] to overcome their differences to be able to resolve their differences in a manner which is peaceful, which is done through dialogue, through discussion. And the outcome should be such that is acceptable to all the people of Bangladesh."

Jamaat leader killed

FROM PAGE 16

party's district unit.

AKM Nahidul Islam, superintendent of police (SP) in Meherpur, said a team of joint forces arrested Jabbar from his residence at Hijuli village on Monday morning in connection with recent violence unleashed by Jamaat and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir in the district.

Two cases were filed against him earlier.

During the interrogation, Jabbar disclosed the identity of the party men in the area, and a cache of arms possessed by them, the SP said.

Shibir cadres led by Abdul Matin, Khulna divisional coordinator of Jamaat, were scheduled to meet him in the village on the night, the SP said quoting Jabbar.

Following the confessional statement, a team of joint forces conducted a raid in the village around 2:00am yesterday, said Reazul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Sadar Police Station.

Sensing the presence of the law enforcers, Jamaat-Shibir men opened fire on the joint forces, while the law enforcers fired gunshots in response, the OC said.

At one stage, Jabbar, who was staying with the team during the raids, jumped out of the police van to flee the scene, and was caught in the line of fire, the OC said.

His cohorts, however, managed to escape.

Police claimed that three members of joint forces had sustained injuries. The law enforcers also recovered firearms and bombs from the spot.

Jabbar was taken to Meherpur General Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries around 3:30am, the OC added.

The body was handed over to the family members.

Arrest order for Delwar

FROM PAGE 16

December 22, submitted a charge sheet to the court and sought arrest warrants for six of the accused, including Delwar and his wife, as they were on the run.

The four other fugitives are the garment unit's manager Abdur Razzak, quality manager Shahiduzzaman Dulal, production manager Mobarak Hossain Monju and engineer Mahbubul Morshed.

The court asked the officer-in-charge of Ashulia Police Station to submit a report by February 25 on execution of the arrest warrants.

As many as 112 workers, mostly women, were killed and scores of others wounded in the fire at Tazreen Fashions Ltd in Ashulia on the outskirts of the capital on November 24, 2012.

The following day, Ashulia police filed a case.

The fire at Tazreen, which used to produce and supply garments to international brands like Walmart, created a huge outcry at home and abroad.

In April last year, three anthropologists filed a writ petition with the High Court, seeking directives on the government to bring Delwar to book for his criminal liability for the deaths.

The next month the HC asked the government to explain why it should not be directed to prosecute Tazreen owner Delwar for his alleged negligence in protecting his workers from fire.

Delwar appeared before the HC at every hearing on the petition, complying with a court order.

In June, a probe body formed by the home ministry submitted a report to the HC, saying there was "unpardonable neglect" on the part of the owner.

According to the charge sheet submitted by the CID, Delwar and his wife had constructed the building on a faulty design by the engineer, and illegally used the ground-floor walkway as a warehouse.

The garment unit did not have any fire exit whereas a provision of the labour law stipulates that there must be two exits in every factory, it said.

Managers and security guards were charged as they had insisted that workers should continue working, even though smoke was billowing from the ground floor where the fire began.

Fire alarms rang as soon as the blaze broke out. Panicked, the workers tried to rush out before the fire could spread to the other floors of the eight-storey building. But managers and security guards told them that it was nothing serious, the charge sheet reads.

The other seven accused are manager (admin) Dulal Uddin, store-in-charge Hamidul Islam and Al Amin, security-in-charge Al Amin and Anisur Rahman, security guard Md Rana and loader Shamim Mia.

Of them, only security-in-charge Anisur is now behind bars while the six others are on

US, UK move to break

FROM PAGE 1

polls must be held first, and then it could sit with the BNP to decide on the next course of action, according to sources in the AL.

The meetings took place amid rising tensions over the opposition's "march for democracy", which was foiled by the government on Sunday and Monday. The BNP-led 18-party combine, meanwhile, has announced a non-stop blockade of road, rail and waterways from today morning.

Though both the USA and the UK were well aware of the rigid stances of the ruling and opposition parties, they wanted to give it another try to resolve the deadlock, said diplomatic sources.

The foreign diplomats in Dhaka, who remained silent following UN envoy Oscar Fernandez-Taranco's failure to break the ice between the two rival camps, are concerned over the recent political developments.

Meanwhile, the US has once again expressed disappointment at the absence of a political consensus on the holding of a credible election in Bangladesh.

"We believe it's more urgent than ever for the major parties to redouble their efforts to engage in constructive dialogue to find a way forward to holding free and fair elections that are credible and reflecting the will of the Bangladeshi people," Marie Harf, deputy spokesperson of the US Department of State, said at a press briefing in Washington DC on December 30.

"We are disappointed that the major political parties have not yet reached a consensus on a way to hold free, fair, and credible elections."

The USA is prepared to reengage its efforts and in particular its observation efforts at a later time if there is a more conducive environment, she said. "But we are disappointed that so far they haven't done so."

On the escalation of violence in Bangladesh, Harf said, "As we have said repeatedly, violence is not acceptable for a number of reasons, but in part because it subverts the democratic process. And we've called on it to stop immediately."

"That's certainly our position. We know there's a lot of work still to be done there, but hopefully we can see some progress being made."

Replying to a query whether the US State Department had made any phone calls to Bangladesh's political leaders, Harf said, "I am sure some phone calls have been made from this building. I am happy to check and see what our outreach has looked like."

When Harf was asked if the US supported the BNP-led opposition's demand for a non-partisan polls-time government, she refrained from giving

any clear answer.

"I haven't -- I quite frankly haven't seen those reports. I am happy to see if there's a response from our team."

In Dhaka, US Ambassador Dan Mozena has voiced concern over the arrests of senior opposition leaders and called for ensuring political space for the opposition and avoiding the path of violence.

He made the call in a statement after meeting Khaleda at the latter's Gulshan residence yesterday afternoon.

The US ambassador and the opposition leader discussed the democratic process in Bangladesh, the government's responsibility to provide political space to the opposition, and also the opposition's responsibility to use this space peacefully.

The ambassador noted that Sunday's incidents at the Supreme Court, Jatiya Press Club and Dhaka University were disturbing, as they were contrary to the democratic process and must not be allowed to recur, US Embassy Spokesperson Kelly S McCarthy told The Daily Star.

Mozena urged all parties to put a stop to violence, saying it was unacceptable and not consistent with the democratic process.

He also underscored the need for the parties to engage in serious dialogue immediately to find a way forward to the holding of a free, fair and credible election.

McCarthy said that the ambassador also noted the US government's concern at the arrests of senior political leaders, given the intimidating effect it has on those who wish to peacefully exercise their democratic rights and whose participation is critical for the success of future dialogue between the two sides.

Earlier, British High Commissioner Robert Gibson held an hour-long meeting with AL General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam at his minister's residence.

The British envoy emphasised the need for the ruling party to engage in dialogue with the main opposition party to bring an end to the current political deadlock.

In response, Ashraf said let the election would be held on January 5 and then they would have further dialogue with the BNP, said sources in the AL.

The diplomat told Ashraf that when he went to meet the BNP chief at her residence on Monday he noticed that Khaleda was virtually confined to her house.

In reply, Ashraf said it was the BNP chairperson who kept people confined by calling the non-stop blockade, said the sources.

Neither Gibson nor Ashraf talked to the press after the meeting. Gibson also made no comments

Please do not hold Jan 5 polls

FROM PAGE 1

Why should Awami League and the PM consider doing the above?

1. Since 153 MPs have already been elected without any vote being cast and since the results of the remaining 147 MPs are mostly known, the parliament and the government that the 5th January election will produce will be devoid of demonstrated public support and that crucial "popular mandate" that every democratic government must enjoy in order to govern effectively.

2. The Constitution clearly envisages an election that reflects "Peoples' Will" as evidenced through adult franchise, which will be totally absent in this election.

3. The argument that this election has to be held to ensure Constitutional continuity and to prevent legal vacuum are both misplaced, ill conceived and may even be mischievous. A postponement of 90 days is possible well within the present legal framework. A reconvened 9th Parliament can address any legal lacunae if there are any.

4. A voter-less election will greatly corrode people's confidence in the electoral process, thereby damaging people's faith in democracy.

5. The election will produce a virtual one-party government reviving public suspicion as to what Awami League's real goal is. This suspicion, which will appear well grounded, will significantly damage AL's democratic credentials and reduce its image and appeal in the immediate and long term, affecting the party's chances of winning a truly contested election in the future.

6. The future that AL is seeing for itself through the 5th Jan election is unsustainable and hence elusive. We repeat that once the election is over, voters who have not been able to vote will hold a 'grudge' against the ruling party and are likely to lend their sympathy, if not active support, to the opposition even though they may not support either their cause or the party. A sense of deprivation or of being 'cheated' out of their right to vote may motivate them to go against the present

ruling party with disastrous consequences for the future.

7. Going for a credible election will help the Awami League much more than forcing a voter-less election on our people. It needs to regain its self confidence that it can win.

8. Awami League appears to have forgotten the basic psychology of our people, which is always against the establishment and a bit sympathetic towards the underdog. The government is strengthening the "underdog" image of the opposition through its all pervasive repressive measures. The deployment of police, BGB and Rab, the indiscriminate arrest of opposition leaders, the reckless harassment of the general public in the name of maintaining law and order, the obvious and blatant support that police and Rab are extending to ruling party activists, etc., are all adding to the sympathy for the 'underdog'.

9. There is a real chance for a very low voter turnout on Jan 5. Some overvalued party leaders and activists may fail to resist the temptation to try and hike up the number of voters casting their ballots. This may lead to spuriously hiking the numbers with some conniving election officials. This will lead to embarrassment and ignominy for the present ruling party for indulging in activities of the kind BNP fell victim to -- such as the infamous Magura elections. Awami League should really try to avoid this possibility by desisting from holding the Jan 5 elections.

Whatever game plan the PM may have is unlikely to succeed as is evidenced by the following:

1. So far the government has failed to create a sense of confidence among the public about the credibility of the 5th. Jan. elections. In fact the very opposite has become the case. Even before it is held 52 per cent voters have been deprived of their right to vote. Which means that out of 9.2 crore more than 5 crore voters will not 'own' this election because they did not take part in it. This has already shattered the stature of the election as a credible process reflective of "People's Will".

leading to the house, he said.

"We are passing an idle time and incurring losses, as we did during the opposition blockades," he said.

Mohammad Alamgir, owner of the truck, said he had to count a loss of around Tk 6,500 per night.

"After the opposition blockades, we got a few days to operate. But then law enforcers have taken the truck and I don't know when they'll release the driver and the truck," he said.

Abdullahpur-based sand supplier Mohammad Zakir, from whom the truckers used

The trucks that never made it to airport

FROM PAGE 16

On the night of December 28, the eve of the Dhaka march programme, police first placed five sand-laden trucks on the roads. Three of them used to carry sands for the airport renovation work while the two others were brought from the capital's Banani area on their way to Badda.

Then on the night of December 30, the second day of the opposition march, these five trucks were replaced with four others. Three of them were engaged in the upgrading work of the airport's taxiway and the other one was empty.

The pulling out of the trucks is hampering the

renovation work being implemented under a project funded by the Danish International Development Agency, said a top official of the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh.

Such an action has also created panic among truck owners and many of them have stopped carrying construction materials for the project.

"Previously, 500 trucks used to carry construction materials for the project. But following an arbitrary requisition of some trucks, only 150 to 200 trucks are now carrying construction items," said a trader who supplies such materials for the project.

Babul Miah, driver of a sand-laden truck, told The Daily Star that two traffic police forced him to take his vehicle to the customs house of the airport on the night of December 28.

After checking the papers, police took him and his helper to Gulshan Police Station. Around 10:15pm, they led the truck towards Khaleda's house and placed it on a road leading to the house, he said.

Police found his papers all right, but they still took him and his helper to Gulshan Police Station. Around 10:15pm, police took the truck towards Khaleda's house and placed it on a road

to collect sands, apprehends he might incur losses as well because the supply was being hampered.

Asked why those trucks have been kept on the roads, Khandker Lutful Kabir, deputy commissioner (Gulshan division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, declined to make any comment.

However, some cops who were on duty around Khaleda's house were found joking about it: "The trucks have gone out of order."

The joke was readily picked up by a truck helper, who, when his truck was allowed to leave on Monday night, told newsmen: "We're leaving as the truck that had gone out of order is now ok."