

Protect civil society space

UN envoy calls on UK
DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai, yesterday warned against a series of measures resulting in the "closing of space for civil society in the UK".

Kiai highlighted that the UK takes its role as one of the global leaders in human rights seriously and added that "many people around the world look to the UK as a model for democracy and human rights" and emphasised that "the UK truly should consider its civil society a national treasure."

The special rapporteur came up with the observations after a four-day visit to the country.

According to a UN press release issued in Geneva yesterday, Kiai noted a number of his 2013 recommendations that had been implemented. He commended the government for its continued willingness to constructively engage on human rights in general and on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in particular.

"I am concerned about a series of separate measures by the government -- some implemented and others proposed -- which, put together, suggest that the government has a negative view of civil society. These moves have, in many instances, been subtle and gradual, but they are unmistakable and alarming," said the expert.

The government's focus on countering "non-violent extremism" without a narrow and explicit definition was worrisome, Kiai noted.

He specifically referred to the prevent strategy which focuses on individuals and groups that appear contrary to the "British Values" of democracy, pluralism and tolerance, and who are seen as being predisposed to respond to terrorist ideologies.

"The lack of definitional clarity, combined with the encouragement of people to report suspicious activity, have created unease and uncertainty around what can legitimately be discussed in public," said the expert.

Pressure on free regulatory regime for NGOs

FROM PAGE 20

The report released by the foreign office listed 30 nations, including Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and Russia as "human rights priority countries" where it plans to "prioritise engagement".

The countries were chosen using the human rights situation, their human rights trajectory, and Britain's ability to influence change.

An overloaded justice system and delays in processing through the courts contributed to a culture of violence in Bangladesh where people take the law into their own hands, according to the report.

It said NGOs reported that excessive use of force, extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances were conducted with impunity, while the death penalty remained a legal punishment for a wide range of offences.

Last year, at least five people were executed, including three war criminals convicted by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT).

About the unresolved political tension between the ruling Awami League and opposition BNP, the report said the confrontational actions during the first quarter of 2015, including the arrest of senior BNP leaders, an indefinite BNP-led transport blockade, and repeated harts impacted on people's security and livelihoods.

The report lauded women's considerable contribution to the Bangladesh economy. It however said women still do not enjoy the same social status as men, and gender-based violence remains a substantial problem. Child marriage also remains a significant concern.

Bangladesh has a growing economy and aspires to reach middle-income status by 2021, the report pointed out. "We encourage the Bangladesh authorities to ensure that this is matched by a positive human rights trajectory during 2016 and beyond."

The UK, said the report, remains clear that an effective justice system, and a vibrant civil society and free media, able to challenge and hold authority to account, are fundamental to a successful democracy.

"Free, fair and participatory elections are also crucial; we encourage all political parties to work towards achieving this at the parliamentary elections in 2019."

About the global rights situation, the report said despite progress achieved at the UN level and elsewhere, significant challenges remained, including ending the many forms of violence against women, securing sexual health and reproductive rights, achieving gender equality at the workplace and in political and public life, and women's economic empowerment and equal access to education.

TIB lauds RMG

FROM PAGE 1

progress, challenges and way forward". The TIB has been conducting studies on governance in the apparel sector for the last three years after the Rana Plaza building collapse in April 2013.

After the Rana Plaza disaster, the government and the international stakeholders took 102 initiatives in the RMG sector to improve safety in workplace and labour rights.

Of them, the TIB conducted a research on 68 initiatives last year and found that six of them had been implemented fully while the progress in 39 was satisfactory, 10 were in slow implementation and the progress of 13 initiatives was stagnant.

"Of the total initiatives, Bangladesh achieved a remarkable progress in 77 percent of initiatives while the progress is slow for the remaining 23 percent for establishing governance in garment sector," Iftekharuzzaman said.

The TIB also praised factory owners for the achievement of 44 percent repair works so far after the inspection by three agencies including Accord, Alliance and the one by the government.

"However, the government and the private sector entrepreneurs have to keep up the safety progress and complete the remaining initiatives for making the sector sustainable," Iftekharuzzaman said.

After the worst industrial disaster, he said, Bangladesh had made a remarkable progress in allowing unionism in the factories. However, the factory owners would have to bring a change in their mindset so that trade unions could function effectively for realising the demands of the workers.

The TIB chief also said currently 92 percent of factories pay the minimum wage to workers, which is very satisfactory.

Although safety conditions in member factories of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, two major trade bodies in the apparel sector, improved a lot, the

conditions did not improve in 700 sub-contracting factories.

So the government and the garment owners have to work to improve the safety conditions in the sub-contracting factories, majority of which are not the members of the two garment trade bodies, he added.

Iftekharuzzaman also urged immediate punishment of those responsible for the Rana Plaza building collapse.

Regarding compensation of the victims, the TIB boss said the payment was made following the guidelines of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). So the compensation payment was transparent, he said.

However, he said that another research could be conducted to find whether the money, which had already been paid to the Rana Plaza victims, was enough for them considering the seriousness of their injuries.

He said the lowest amount paid from the ILO-arranged Rana Plaza Trust Fund was Tk 1.95 lakh while the highest payment was Tk 10 lakh.

The TIB boss also criticised the international retailers and brands, which source garment items from Bangladeshi factories, for not increasing the committed price of products for factory repair work after the inspection by the Accord and Alliance.

The international retailers and brands had committed to pay more for the garment items as a measure to complete the factory repair, he said, adding, "Rather, the prices of Bangladeshi garment items decreased by 41 percent over the last 15 years," Iftekharuzzaman said.

He also urged the Bangladesh Bank to keep the interest rate of loan of the remediation fund by the international donor agencies, like Japan International Cooperation Agency and the World Bank, at 1 percent so that the factory owners could use the fund easily.

Reports that the banks might disburse the money from the remediation fund at 10 to 15 percent interest rate surfaced recently, although the donor agencies offered the money at 0.01 percent to 0.1 percent interest rates to the central bank, he added.

Obama

FROM PAGE 20

the summit with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The president added in his statement that all the leaders were committed both to the fight against Islamic State and to de-escalating regional conflicts, and addressed the Gulf countries' concerns on Iran.

"Even with the nuclear deal we recognise collectively that we continue to have serious concerns about Iranian behaviour," he said.

There was no denying the strains that have afflicted ties between Washington and its Gulf partners, though, even as they have worked together on shared concerns such as the wars in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, however.

"What is true between the United States and the GCC, as is true with all of our allies and friends is that at any point of time there are going to be differences," Obama said.

Footage and photographs aired on state media showed the leaders at a large circular table under a chandelier, with Obama sitting with King Salman on his left and the Abu Dhabi crown prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahayan on his right.

Years of frustration among Gulf countries, aggravated by more recent stumbles, may have made Saudi Arabia and its regional allies less receptive to Obama on his fourth and most probably final trip to the kingdom.

The Middle East is mired in a contest for influence between a bloc of mostly Sunni countries, including the conservative, pro-Western Gulf monarchies, and revolutionary Shia Iran and its allies.

Most of the GCC states have been bitterly disappointed in Obama's presidency, during which they believe the United States has pulled back from the region, giving more space to Iran.

They were also upset by Obama's remarks in a magazine interview that appeared to cast them as "free-riders" in US security efforts and urged them to "share" the region with Tehran.

"On the core issues, there's agreement about where we want to go," Ben Rhodes, Obama's deputy national security adviser, told reporters at a briefing in Riyadh.

He said strains in ties in recent years reflected differences over tactics rather than goals. "This summit allows us to align our approaches and strategies," he said. Several pages of photographs of Obama's meetings with Salman and other princes.

In keeping with a noticeably low-key approach by Saudi Arabia's government, however, neither that photo opportunity, nor the GCC meeting's opening statements, were broadcast on live television, as has often been the case before.

20 rogue drug

FROM PAGE 20

The companies facing the action are Aexim Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Avert Pharma Ltd, Bikolpo Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Dolphin Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Drugland Ltd, Globe Laboratories (pvt) Ltd, Jalpa Laboratories Ltd, Kafma Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Medico Pharmaceuticals Ltd, National Drug Pharma Ltd, North Bengal Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Remo Chemicals Ltd (Pharma Division), Rid Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Skylab Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Spark Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Star Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Sunipun Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Today Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Tropical Pharmaceuticals Ltd and Universal Pharmaceuticals Ltd.

According to the report on the evaluation done by the experts for two years, the medicines produced without following the good manufacturing practices (GMP) will not meet the standards and might inflict damage to public health.

The experts suggested avoiding drugs of these non-compliant companies as the medicines could be fatal.

A day after the meeting of the parliamentary body, the health ministry sat with officials of the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA).

Health Minister Mohammed Nasim asked the DGDA to implement the decision immediately, according to a statement of the ministry.

Yesterday's meeting chaired by the minister accepted in principle the other recommendations and decided to implement those after a review.

The expert committee identified 14 drug companies as incapable of producing quality antibiotics, and so recommended canceling their licences for producing all sorts of antibiotics.

The companies are Ad Din Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Alkad Laboratories Ltd, Belsen Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Bengal Drugs & Chemicals (Pharma) Ltd, Bristol Pharma Ltd, Crystal Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Indo-Bangla Pharmaceuticals Ltd,

Millat Pharmaceuticals Ltd, MST Pharma & Healthcare Ltd, Orbit Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Pharmik Laboratories Ltd, Phoenix Chemical Laboratory (pvt) Ltd, Rasa Pharmaceuticals Ltd and Save Pharmaceuticals Ltd.

The expert committee also recommended canceling approvals given to 22 companies as those were found incapable of manufacturing antibiotics of penicillin and cephalosporin groups.

The companies are Amico Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Aztec Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Bengal Techno Pharma Ltd, Benham Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Central Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Descent Pharma Ltd, Dr TIM'S Laboratory Ltd, Global Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Greenland Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Inova Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Maks Drugs Ltd, Medim Laboratories Ltd, Modern Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Mystic Pharmaceuticals Ltd, National Laboratories Ltd, Organic Healthcare Ltd, Oyster Pharma Ltd, Premier Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Prime Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Seema Pharmaceuticals Ltd, United Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals Ltd and White Horse Pharmaceuticals Ltd.

They, however, have the ability to produce quality antibiotics of non-penicillin group, according to the report.

Three units of Techno Drugs Ltd failed to produce antibiotics of penicillin and cephalosporin groups and anti-cancer and hormonal medicines, complying with the GMP.

Therefore, these companies' licences to produce the said drugs should be scrapped, experts said.

Bangladesh has already earned reputation in manufacturing drugs of international standards and has a good export market, Prof ABM Faruque told The Daily Star.

The authorities should ensure that all drug makers follow the GMP so that lives can be saved from adulterated drugs and also the image.

Campaign ends today

FROM PAGE 1

plying of motorcycles has already been banned since Wednesday.

Besides, outsiders must leave the electoral areas by 6:00am today, according to the electoral rules.

Voting to around 620 UPs in the third phase will start at 8:00am tomorrow and continue until 4:00pm.

Fourteen registered political parties, out of 40, are participating in the polls, and the number of chairman aspirants is 2,672.

Meanwhile, the EC yesterday asked the police authority to withdraw three police officials. They are superintendent of police in Gazipur and officers-in-charge of the district's Kapasia and Sreepur police stations.

"The commission has made the decision for the sake of a fair election," EC Secretary Sirazul Islam told The Daily Star yesterday evening. However, he did not explain more about it.

Eleven UPs of Kapasia and eight UPs of Sreepur will go to the polls tomorrow.

'ATTACK' ON BNP LEADER'S HOUSE

At a press briefing at his house in Ramganj upazila yesterday, former BNP lawmaker from Laxmipur-1 constituency Nazim Uddin alleged that AL men attacked his house at Poietpur.

Nazim, also president of Ramganj upazila unit BNP, said some AL activists attacked his house early yesterday when he was campaigning for a BNP-nominated chairman candidate.

Solaiman Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Ramganj Police Station, said they were looking into the matter.

AL MEN SUSPENDED

Chandpur district unit AL has suspended its 12 grassroots leaders and activists from the party for contesting chairman posts as rebel candidates, defying the party's decision, reports a correspondent there.

Elections to 725 UPs were held on March 22 in the first phase and 639 UPs on March 31 in the second phase. Polls to 743 UPs are slated for May 7 in the fourth phase and 733 UPs for May 28 in the fifth phase. Around 667 more UPs will go to the polls in the sixth phase in June this year, according to the EC.

AL'S MEETING WITH EC

The EC also asked the ruling Awami League leaders to direct its grassroots leaders and activists to refrain from committing violence and irregularities in the polls, Election Commissioner Shah Nawaz told reporters after a meeting with an AL delegation yesterday.

He came up with the remark in response to a question whether the EC gave any directives to the AL delegation.

A four-member AL team, led by the party's Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif, held a meeting with the chief election commissioner (CEC) and other commissioners at the CEC's office.

After the meeting, Hanif told journalists that they conveyed a message of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to the EC that the premier does not want any irregularities and violence in the elections.

The party would take action against the AL men involved in irregularities and committing criminal activities, he said.

The AL delegation also urged the EC to take strong measures to avert any irregularities and indiscipline in the next phases of polls, he added.

BNP'S BRIEFING

The party's Senior Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed yesterday alleged that the government was harassing and intimidating the BNP men in different electoral areas by using law enforcers to ensure the AL candidates' victory.

He claimed that the AL activists were attacking the BNP candidates, supporters and its agents, while law enforcers were arresting the BNP men on a large scale in electoral areas.

Speaking at a press briefing at BNP's Nayapaltna central office, Rizvi also alleged that the EC was playing a silent role in taking action against those intimidating voters and attacking the opposition leaders and activists.

Wife buys

FROM PAGE 1

Mozammel, who is serving 10 years' jail in a case over the 2009 Pilkhana carnage. The couple got married about a year before the BDR mutiny that killed 74 people, including 57 top and mid-ranking army officers.

Authorities of the Dhaka Central Jail sent Mozammel, also known as Moazzem, to the DMCH around 11:30am after he fell ill. His wife got news and rushed to the hospital to meet him with some food.

She allegedly bribed two prison guards -- Wahiduzzaman and Jasimuddin -- for arranging the meeting. Police learned about it half an hour later and asked the women to go home, police and hospital sources said.

"It was the first time in six to seven years that we met face to face. That's why we were talking. I didn't know it is not allowed," Mozammel, a soldier, told reporters after the incident.

"The two prison guards have been handed over to the prison authorities. Masum [the hospital employee] was released upon undertakings," said Mozammel Haque, in-charge of the DMCH police outpost.

Senior Superintendent of Dhaka Central Jail Jahangir Kabir told The Daily Star that the two prison guards were suspended for allowing the meeting without permission from the authorities.

Such meetings between relatives and convict persons without prior approval are unlawful, he added.

"After a very long time, I was speaking to my husband in private. But now, it has become a great chaos. This is not right," said the woman, asking not to be named.

It's not clear if the couple has any kid.

More than

FROM PAGE 20

Pradesh, officials said. Some 43 were believed to have died in neighboring Odisha, although an official there said each of the deaths was being investigated.

Y K Reddy, a director at the Indian Meteorological Department, said Telangana has recorded its highest April temperatures since at least 2006.

Reddy said there were worries the death toll in Telangana could rise and his department was issuing heat-wave warnings to advise people to stay indoors.

Schools in Telangana were shut last week two weeks ahead of their summer holidays. As an emergency measure, Odisha has ordered schools to remain closed until April 26 and banned construction work during the hottest times of day.

Some small-scale businesses were already suffering.

"I am closing my shop before noon because it is too hot," said Tulu Sahu, a small grocery seller in Bhubaneswar city in Odisha. "You cannot stay in the shop."

Pakistan, where extreme heat killed more than 1,000 people during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan last year, has started gearing up to tackle any sudden rise of patients who report heat-related illnesses.

"We have enough supplies and staff to meet the possible situation," said Seemin Jamali, head of the accident and emergency department at Karachi's Jinnah Hospital.

UK Queen's

FROM PAGE 20

of well-wishers.

At an event in Windsor's town hall, the queen was presented with a cake baked by Nadiya Jamir Hussain, the winner of the "Great British Bake Off", a hugely popular television cooking competition.

The Muslim mother-of-three presented the orange drizzle cake, with orange curd and orange butter cream, to the queen personally.

The Queen cut a piece of her birthday cake prepared to the tune of another rendition of Happy Birthday.

Nadiya was asked by Buckingham Palace to make a cake for Her Majesty's 90th birthday and since then she has been in her kitchen at home working on the creation.

Born on April 21, 1926, Elizabeth shows no signs of retiring let alone abdicating.

An Ipsos MORI poll last week found 70 percent wanted her to stay queen compared to 21 percent who thought she should abdicate or retire.

Our last Great Hornbills

FROM PAGE 20

bird with a large bill sitting proudly in the heart of the city and probably wondered if this bird belongs to our land. During my travels to the remote parts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, I witnessed numerous skulls of the Great Hornbills in almost every indigenous village I visited. I waited for hours and sometimes days underneath fig trees to watch the Great Hornbill landing on the tree canopy, hopping from one branch to another, plucking fruit, tossing it up in the air, swallowing it and then soaring into the sky to find another feast, spreading the enormous wings and emitting huffing sounds that echo through the land.

There were days when we covered great distances in the secluded Bandarban to find our last hornbills, to understand its population status, to capture their behaviour in frames and to share with others who have not visited the vast valleys and high hills of Bangladesh. There is a profound pleasure in finally having seen a sight or reached a destination that has occupied the heart and mind for months, a view or encounter that is comprehensible yet mysterious to one's experience. This happened to me in June 2014 when my travel mate Prince and I travelled towards the source of Matamuhuri river in search of the Great Hornbill.

Monsoon is not an ideal season for expeditions to hilly terrains but this was our only feasible option to invest our time in finding hornbills, as they are less mobile during the nesting season. Our spirit was soaring high even after several failed attempts to have a glimpse of the hornbills in the past few winters. The rain was a constant company as we travelled through the Matamuhuri river on a small wooden motorboat packed with locals. It was a happy crowd, as the jovial spirit of hill men revived with frequent giggles.

Every Mro carried a black umbrella and kept the canopy unfolded, firmly holding the wooden rib even when it did not rain. When it rained, the sound of sharp drops on the umbrellas, on moving water and on riverside vegetation conveyed a sense of harmony, even the noise of engine did not intrude. I peered out from the cluster of umbrellas, looked at the blurred hills where trees had gone wild to fight the mighty wind by gripping the russet soil with great strength of their roots.

The boat dropped us off at our destination just before dusk. From there, we had to climb a few hundred feet to a Mro village. The hike was tiring, yet pleasant with tree ferns and dense undergrowth embellishing both sides of the narrow trail, the high-pitched calls of Hooded Pitta, sporadic shrills of Bay Woodpecker and the outline of the waning sun's golden-brown hue behind the fence of thick foliage. Sliding and slipping in the

rain, we reached a ridge where the village stood with only a few bamboo huts. I dropped my rucksack at the village headman's hut and looked out over the dark and motionless hill in the distance where the Great Hornbills roamed.

It rained all night and then there was silence, the rustling of leaves stopped, the wall of vegetation stood around the village like a piece of heavy cloud. No bird flew or sang, even the cicadas were quiet and the army of ants vanished underneath the ground. I felt the humidity on my face and the intense light momentarily blinded me as I looked up to the morning sun.

After a heavy meal we set off through the Jhum land to find our birds. The Great Hornbill has disappeared from much of its range but still occurs in good numbers in and around Sangu-Matamuhuri and Kassalong Reserve Forests of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Habitat loss, hunting and poaching of chicks are the main threats to these magnificent creatures.

The barren hill was still wet and when the sun shone on the soil layers of scorching air rolled over the land. We descended and ascended for five hours to get to the next green spot, where my Mro friend saw a hornbill's nest exactly 11 months ago. At 1,800ft, we stopped at a Jhum hut to catch our breath where a lone Rufous-bellied Eagle circled overhead. While the elation of finding this rare eagle was still fresh, my Mro friend whispered to listen to the wind cautiously. I held my breath and immediately heard whooshing sounds, followed by raucous calls. We jumped out of the hut and witnessed two Great Hornbills flying above us. They roared as though they are the tigers of the sky and ruled the air with wings spanning five feet.

The excitement grew as we approached towards the nesting site and when the carpet of wet leaves underfoot felt thicker, an unfathomable forest loomed ahead of us. The pebbly streams were murky. The sunlight reached the ground across the stream where vegetation lacked and reflected a subdued tone below the canopy with its very glittering nature.

All went well until we found the empty nest and later thought that poachers took the chicks and sold them at a local market for a meagre amount. We saw the parent hornbills screaming around the bare nest. Would people, I wondered, still buy these wild birds from poachers if they hear the cry of hornbill parents or see the freedom in their fights?

The writer is a Conservation Biologist, currently working on threatened species conservation and research in Bangladesh and abroad.