

Attacks on journalists rose in 2015

Says EU human rights report

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The European Union in its annual global report on "Human Rights and Democracy" says attacks on freedom of expression multiplied and intimidation of journalists and editors also increased in 2015.

Besides, measures were taken to undermine the economic viability of some prominent newspapers, the report adds.

"In 2015, Bangladesh witnessed a diminishing democratic space and a steady deterioration in civil and political rights, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and restrictive action against opposition and human rights activists," says the report released on Tuesday.

Narrating the attacks on freedom of expression, the EU report on Bangladesh says the killings of four 'atheist' bloggers and one publisher in 2015 proved the country was not immune to the threats of rising religious extremism.

The deteriorating security situation was underlined by the killings of two foreigners. On the positive side, some progress however was achieved on social and economic rights.

The EU strongly condemned the murders of bloggers in several statements and called on the authorities to undertake proper investigations in order to bring the perpetrators to justice.

It also said its main priorities in the area of human rights and democracy remained judicial reform, a death penalty moratorium, implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, support for the Rohingya, rights of persons belonging to minority communities, human rights defenders, women's and children's rights, support for civil society and implementation of labour rights.

To that end, the EU continued its human rights and democracy dialogues with Bangladesh at the

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addressing "Leaders Summit on Refugees" organised by US President Barack Obama at the UN headquarters in New York on Tuesday.

PHOTO: PID

PM for lasting

FROM PAGE 1 said, adding this poses many social, economic, environmental and political challenges.

About the Myanmar refugees in camps, she said her government kept investing in their security, health, education and skills.

"For other displaced Myanmar nationals in Bangladesh, we've recently carried out a census. We are planning to give them an identity document titled 'information card'... This will help them access justice, health, education and other services."

Hasina said the present world has been witnessing a mass movement of people across national borders while armed conflicts, poverty and climate change are compelling people to flee their countries and undertake perilous journeys.

She observed that despite their different needs, refugees, migrants and other displaced people face some common challenges. "We need to treat them with compassion, solidarity and fairness."

During Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971, she said, 10 million refugees had migrated to India.

The premier remembered Senator Edward Kennedy's visit to refugee camps and performances of George Harrison and Ravi Shankar at a historic concert in New York.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, PM's Principal Secretary Abul Kalam Azad and Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque were present.

Local cattle meet 80pc Eid demand

FROM PAGE 1 Over the last one and a half years, many cattle farms increased their capacity after beef prices rose in the domestic market for dwindling flow of cattle from India.

According to data of the National Board of Revenue, flow of cattle from India dropped to 11.5 lakh in fiscal 2015-16 from 14 lakh in the previous year.

The number was 21 lakh in fiscal 2013-14.

According to stakeholders, when vigilance in border areas was lax in the past, flow of cattle from the neighbouring country was high and farmers were less enthusiastic about cattle farming.

But they geared up farming as supply from India slumped and beef prices soared.

Early this year, Bangladesh Bank

launched a refinance scheme offering low-cost loans with an interest rate of five percent, giving a further boost to cattle farming.

In recent times, cattle farming has seen a rise not only in the well-known cattle farming zones in Pabna and Sirajganj but also in areas surrounding Dhaka as well as some northwest and southwest districts.

This has helped raise the supply of locally grown cattle during the Eid-ul-Azha.

Some traders claimed a sudden rise in cattle supply in the capital on the day before this Eid caused their prices to fall sharply, dashing the hope of many farmers.

The BMMA secretary general said farmers had to take back nearly two lakh cattle, failing to get fair prices because of ample supply of animals in

the capital the day before the Eid.

Mohammad Imran Hossain, owner of Sadeeq Agro near Mohammadpur embankment, said prices of cattle dropped by 20-50 percent depending on their size.

Rezaul Karim Daud, a trader from Pabna's Ishwardi, had to take back 39 of the 76 bulls he brought to Dhaka and Narayanganj markets, failing to get buyers.

"It will be tough for me to recover from the losses," he said, adding that he would have to incur losses up to Tk 12 lakh.

He said the number of buyers fell on the last day before the Eid while the supply of cattle soared.

Traders said cattle supply in the capital increased significantly in the last couple of days before the Eid as many of the cattle-laden trucks that

had remained stuck on highways and ferry terminals entered the city.

The DLS director general said cattle prices were high in the first few days but that fell on the last day before the Eid.

"Many farmers didn't get expected prices for their cattle," he added.

Imran of Sadeeq Agro said the supply of cattle was 10-15 percent higher than the demand in the capital, and some big farms near Dhaka couldn't sell half of their cattle meant for the Eid market.

"This year's losses will demoralise farmers and its effect would be felt in the next year's Eid."

Imran said the government should take initiatives to protect the interest of farmers and encourage people to take up cattle farming.

210 accidents

FROM PAGE 1 746 suffered injuries in 121 road crashes during this year's Eid-ul-Fitr holidays.

Last year, the number of accidents during Eid-ul-Fitr holidays was 109 in which 122 lives perished. Eighty-seven accidents took place during Eid-ul-Azha holidays in which 107 people were killed that year.

Ninety-eight people lost their lives in 77 road accidents during Eid-ul-Fitr holidays in 2014, and 78 people died in 56 road crashes during the Eid-ul-Azha holidays the same year.

"Commonly, a bus at speed overtakes a slow-moving vehicle on a highway. But when overtaking becomes frequent, bus drivers forget to take precautionary measures. Thus accidents happen," said Kazi Md Shifun Newaz, assistant professor of the Accident Research Institute at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet).

Had there been separate service roads for slow-moving vehicles, the number of accidents would have been much less, Newaz said at the conference.

Bus drivers often race each other to reach destinations within the shortest possible time, which also causes accidents, he said.

Newaz suggested bringing bus operators under a single platform to refrain drivers from overtaking.

Mozammel Haq Chowdhury, secretary general of the association, presented the report at the press conference.

Of 193 road crashes, 72 were head-

on collisions between vehicles in which 112 people were killed and 557 others injured. Twenty-nine were killed in incidents of buses running over people, he said.

Thirty-four people died and 264 others were injured after vehicles veered off the roads and fell into ditches, Mozammel said.

Ten people were killed and 30 others injured in eight accidents in waterways. Seven people were crushed under the wheels of trains and over 50 others suffered injuries as they fell from the roof of moving trains, he added.

"As roads are being repaired and developed, many city dwellers go to their homes in private cars, which is one of the major reasons for higher number of accidents. Many car drivers have no experience of driving on highways," he said.

Apart from risky overtaking and reckless driving, the association found absence of central reservations on roads, breaching traffic rules, unskilled drivers, faulty roads, lack of awareness among passengers, overloading and unfit vehicles as the major reasons for the accidents.

It also recommended separate lane for slow-moving vehicles, keeping provisions for stern punishment in the proposed Road Transport Act, regular audit on road safety, setting up of medians, increasing the number of trained drivers, introducing separate police unit to investigate road accidents, checking overloading and examining vehicles' fitness to minimise the number of accidents.

Recovering from shock

FROM PAGE 16 people killed, transformed Istanbul from a tourists hotspot to an almost "tourists no-go".

Selma had to struggle to find work. She is however hopeful.

"The situation is gradually improving. I believe better days are coming for me," she said, adding, "Everything seems normal now and under the control of the government."

Like Selma, Omer Celal Tabak, media relations specialist of Turkish Airlines, is hopeful of good days ahead for the Turkish national flag carrier.

"We have been badly hit by political instability. We are trying hard to overcome the situation," Tabak told this correspondent at the headquarters of Turkish Airlines in Istanbul recently.

High-profile company Turkish Airlines has taken a hit due to the economic fallout from the attempted coup. The number of tourists had dropped and many passengers were avoiding the Istanbul airport as transit to travel to other countries.

The airline gets 60 percent of its revenue from transit passengers.

The company has been badly hit at a time when it was attempting to carry out an aggressive plan to turn Istanbul into a global transit hub that connects Europe, Asia and the Americas.

According to the plan, the first phase of a new airport was to be opened in Istanbul in 2018, which

would serve more than 80 million passengers a year. There were plans to eventually serve 150 million a year at a later stage.

Terror attack and the coup attempt and subsequent brutal clampdown by the government on military officials, civil servants and others for their alleged involvement in the coup have hurt Turkey's consumers and companies, especially those in the tourism sector, said analysts.

It has hurt the Turkish economy in two main ways -- by reducing domestic consumption and tourist arrivals amid political uncertainty, and by making it harder for companies to obtain financing.

"Tourism, a crucial foreign-currency earner for a country in constant need of foreign currency to plug a yawning current account deficit, has borne the brunt of the economic fallout," said news agency AP in a report on September 18.

That's mainly due to a precipitous 89 percent drop in Russian tourist arrivals after a diplomatic fallout between the two countries brought on by Turkey's downing of a Russian warplane last year. Russia was Turkey's second-largest tourist market with 4.5 million Russians visiting places like Turkey's tourism capital Antalya in 2014, it added.

With many Russians holidaying elsewhere, Turkey stands to lose between \$8 and \$10 billion in tour-

ism revenue by the end of the year, according to Cetin Gurcun, Secretary General of Turkey's travel agency association TURSAB. No amount of deals could fully plug that gap, said AP.

Turkish Airlines was still reeling from the shock. Officials of the airlines said the national flag carrier, as they said Europe's best airline for six years in a row, and flying to more countries and international destinations than any other airline in the world, is now highlighting the continued growth of Turkey as a business and tourism hub.

It touches around 116 countries and 294 destinations, including 243 international, said officials of the airlines.

"I want to make it clear how safe people are here. Our foreign exchange, capital markets and the economy are making great progresses. We are continuing all operations despite all the things that had happened," Ilker Ayci, chairman of the board and the executive committee of Turkish Airlines, told a group of visiting journalists in Istanbul recently.

It is important to dispel fear for building brotherhood and solidarity which will lead to commercial investments and tourism, he said at the headquarters of Turkish Airlines.

He highlighted the all-round growth and the socio-economic progress of Turkey and Turkish Airlines, in addition to the airline's future growth strategies

US Republicans push for more Israel aid package

REUTERS, Washington

Republican US lawmakers launched an effort on Tuesday to modify a \$38 billion military aid agreement with Israel by providing more money and easing controls on how it is spent, setting up a showdown with President Barack Obama over the package days after it was signed.

Senators Lindsey Graham, Kelly Ayotte, John McCain and Ted Cruz told a news conference they had filed a measure to give Israel an additional \$1.5 billion in military aid, while renewing US sanctions on Iran.

and goals, and its commitment to expand its destination network.

"We successfully welcomed 62 million passengers worldwide in the last year. Our overall strategies will play a key role in reaching approximately 65 million passengers by the end of this year," he told journalists.

At least 80 journalists from 18 countries, including Bangladesh, India, China, Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Malaysia visited Istanbul in early September at the invitation of the airlines.

In early August, another group of journalists from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq visited Istanbul.

Officials of the airlines said another group of journalists from the UK, the US and some other countries would visit soon.

Turkish has been inviting them to tell the world about normalcy prevailing in Turkey.

During The Daily Star correspondent's visit, all they wanted to show was how normal Istanbul was.

There was a sense of insecurity but then again that sense is there in many parts of today's world.

"If you write, going back to your countries, what you saw in Istanbul, this will help reduce misgivings about Turkey," said Omer Celal Tabak, media relations specialist of Turkish Airlines.

Govt revives new int'l airport plan

FROM PAGE 1 conduct feasibility studies, selecting the site and making a master plan for the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib International Airport.

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) Chairman Air Vice-Marshal Ehsanul Gani Choudhury and Deputy Director General of Nippon Koei of Japan Toshikazu Kambara signed the deal yesterday.

CAAB will pay for the studies from its own funds.

Under the agreement, Nippon Koei, founded in 1946, will finish its job in a year and a half, the CAAB boss told reporters after the signing ceremony at its Kurmitola office.

According to the Nippon Koei website, the group has approximately 700 technical specialists in necessary fields and offers solutions to an enormous range of technical issues. It has presence in 12 countries.

In the briefing, the CAAB chairman said eight to nine places have been

kept as preliminary selection and the one which is deemed best would be chosen.

He refused to name the places.

However, talking to some reporters later in his office, he hinted that any of the vast deserted char areas in the country's southern part was a likely site for the airport.

Highly placed sources yesterday told The Daily Star that the government high-ups had instructed the civil aviation ministry to keep Char Janajit of Shibchar in Madaripur, which is around 75km from the capital, as a possible site for the airport.

Two other prospective areas are Keyain in Munshiganj's Sirajdikhan and Char Bilashpur in Dhaka's Dohar.

The CAAB chairman said the present infrastructure facilities of the country's existing airports were not enough to meet the growing air traffic.

He said Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport was constructed in the 60's for domestic use with just one runway. The airport has an annual

capacity to deal with 8 million passengers, he added.

The CAAB chief also said it was not possible to expand the airport due to residential areas near by and that the maximum capacity of the airport would be utilised between 2028 and 2035.

"The government has taken the initiative to construct a modern hub airport considering the country's importance in bridging the east and the west."

About the process of selecting Nippon Koei, the CAAB chief said some 14 international companies bid for the job and the CAAB picked the Japanese firm following scrutiny by experts.

About providing security to Nippon Koei officials and employees, he said the government would provide fool-proof security for them until the project was completed.

According to CAAB, the country has three international and 12 domestic airports. At least 38 airlines use Bangladeshi airports.

In 2011, then Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib International Airport Construction Cell had selected four locations for the airport -- Keyain in Munshiganj, Char Bilashpur and Char Latubdi in Dohar upazila of Dhaka, and Char Janajit.

Before that, the cell had also selected Trishal in Mymensingh, Baghiar Beel in Madaripur-Gopalganj and Bhanga in Faridpur for a possible site.

In 2011, the government, without any feasibility study done, finalised Arial Beel to build the new airport and a satellite city in line with the election manifesto of the ruling Awami League.

The government then had to back-track in the face of violent protests by locals. The clashes that ensued left a policeman dead and many locals and law enforcers injured.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in February, 2011, announced that a new site would be chosen "on the other [south] side of the Padma river".

14 die in Barisal

FROM PAGE 1 The river was facing erosion for the past few days due to heavy rain and current.

Yesterday, the weather was bad with strong winds blowing since morning, said some local trawler operators.

Rokasana Begum, one of those rescued, said when the big chunk of the earth struck the launch, all the passengers rushed to one side in panic, resulting in an instant capsizing.

Divers involved in the rescue operation said the river was quite deep at the spot, which was making the rescue efforts difficult.

The police, coast guards, fire service and the local administration are jointly conducting the salvage operation.

Rescuers already located the launch, but the rescue operation was suspended around 7:00pm because of poor visibility. It was expected to

resume this morning. According to the information centre set up by the district administration, 13 bodies were recovered while 13 people were missing.

Another woman later died at the Banaripara Health Complex.

Those who died are Shanta, 10, Kohinur Bagum, 60, Sagar Mir, 25, Shukhen Mallik, 40, Hira Begum, 26, Mozammel Mollah, 60, Rabeya Khatun, 45, Rehana Begum, 30, Firoza Begum, 50, Joynal Hawladar, 60, Razzak, 60, Sattar, 25, Shahana Begum, and Saleha Begum.

The age of Shahana and Saleha could not be known immediately.

A nine-member committee headed by Zakir Hossain, additional deputy commissioner of Barisal, was formed to investigate the incident.

Gazi Mohammad Saifuzzaman, the deputy commissioner, announced Tk 10,000 in compensation for each victim.