

# UN says Myanmar waging 'campaign against journos'

AFP, Geneva

Myanmar, facing international outrage over the jailing of Reuters journalists for their reporting on a massacre of Rohingya Muslims, is conducting a "political campaign" against independent journalism, the UN said yesterday.

A fresh report from the UN rights office decried "the instrumentalisation of the law and of the courts by the government and military in what constitutes a political campaign against independent journalism".

It slammed the "failure of the judiciary to uphold the fair trial rights of

those targeted".

UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet yesterday warned in a statement that the situation was "hardly conducive to a democratic transition" in Myanmar.

She called on authorities in the country to "cease the legal and judicial harassment of journalists and to initiate a review of ill-defined laws that facilitate attacks on the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression".

The rights office pointed to the "particularly outrageous" and high-profile example of the conviction of Reuters journalists Kyaw Soe Oo and Wa Lone.

Last week, a judge jailed the two --

both Myanmar nationals -- for seven years under a draconian state secrets act over their reporting of the Rohingya crisis.

The UN report said there were many other examples of detentions and prosecutions of journalists and their sources, indicating "wider trends of suppression of freedom of expression".

According to the report, laws on telecommunications, official secrets, unlawful association, electronic transactions, import-export and aircraft have been used against journalists in a number of cases.

In Myanmar, it has become "impossible for journalists to do their job without fear or favour," it said.

## JS body finalises report

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"computer or digital spying" as "violating state secrecy" under section 32 and incorporating Official Secrets Act, 1923.

Scrutinising the bill, the standing committee on post, telecom and ICT ministry also suggested inclusion of the definition of "spirit of Liberation War" in line with the constitution to tackle propaganda against the 1971 war and its ideals.

The parliamentary body ignored journalists' concerns on sections 8, 28, 29 and 31 that deal with hurting religious values, disrupting public order, dishonouring or defaming information and causing law and order deterioration through publishing anything in website or electronic form.

On July 4, the committee at a meeting with Editors' Council, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) placed an 11-point change to the proposed Digital Security Act for their consideration.

Representatives of the three organisations told the committee that they will share their opinions on the changes later, following discussions in respective forums.

The House committee set July 16 for further discussion with the organisations on the bill. But the meeting was postponed and no fresh date was announced afterwards.

Earlier on May 22, it invited presidents and general secretaries of the Editors' Council and BFUJ and president and senior vice president of ATCO to a meeting to hear their views.

At the meeting, the three organisations voiced concerns over sections 8, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, and 43, saying these would greatly hamper the freedom of speech and independent journalism.

The Editors' Council, an organisation of the country's dailies, also placed a written proposal regarding the eight sections.

The committee in its report recommended changes to sections 21, 25, 32 and 43, among others.

The Digital Security Bill, 2018 was placed in parliament on April 9 amid growing concerns among journalists and rights activists that freedom of the press and expression would be seriously jeopardised if the bill was passed as it was.

The committee was given four weeks to place its report before parliament following scrutiny of the bill. The House on June 7 extended the time limit by two months and on

September 10 by another month.

Contacted last night, Naem Nizam, editor of the daily Bangladesh Pratidin, said it's not fair that the committee finalised its report without addressing the concerns of journalists.

Imran Ahmed, a ruling Awami League MP and chief of the standing committee, said they have finalised the report with 16 changes in the light of the concerns expressed by senior journalists.

Talking to reporters at his office in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday, he also said the committee is likely to place its report in the ongoing parliament session scheduled to continue till September 20.

### SOME PROPOSED CHANGES

The committee recommended replacing the title of section 32 -- "crime and punishment for computer and digital spying" -- with "crime and punishment for violating state secrecy".

As per the recommendation, section 32 says if a person commits any crime or assist anyone in committing crimes under Official Secrets Act, 1923 through computer, digital device, computer network, digital network or any other electronic medium, s/he may face a maximum 14 years in jail or a fine of Tk 25 lakh or both.

The committee suggested reducing jail term and the amount of fine under sections 18, 21 and 28 that deal with illegal entry to computer and digital device, propaganda against the Liberation War and hurting religious sentiment.

On section 25, the committee recommended dropping a sub-section that says a person may face up to three years in jail or Tk 3 lakh in fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast in a website or electronic form something which can make someone dishonest or disgruntled.

On section 5, the committee recommended inclusion of two directors to the Digital Security Agency alongside the director general. It also suggested inclusion of a representative of BFUJ to the Digital Security Council.

Regarding the concerns of journalists about section 43 that says a police official can search or arrest anyone without any warrant issued by a court, the committee suggested that police would carry out the job following the director general's approval.

However, the committee didn't address journalists' concern regarding section 28 that says a person may face up to seven years' imprisonment or Tk 10 lakh in fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast something in a website or in

electronic form or gets it done to hurt one's religious sentiment and values.

The committee also didn't say anything about sections 29 and 31.

Section 29 says a person may face up to three years in jail or a fine of Tk 5 lakh or both if he or she commits the offences stipulated in section 499 of the Penal Code through a website or in electronic form.

Section 31 says a person may face up to seven years in prison or Tk 5 lakh in fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast something on a website or in electronic form which can spread hatred and create enmity among different groups and communities, and can cause deterioration of law and order.

### EU MIGRANT CRISIS

## Over 100 died in boat wreck off Libya this month

AFP, Paris

More than 100 migrants, including at least 20 children, died when two boats sank off the coast of Libya early this month, according to Doctors without Borders (MSF), citing survivors.

The witnesses told MSF that two inflatable boats had left the Libyan coast on September 1, each with 160 people on board, the medical charity said in a statement.

The migrants were from Sudan, Mali, Niger, Cameroon, Ghana, Libya, Algeria and Egypt, MSF said.

According to a survivor, the motor broke down on one boat while the other continued until it "began to deflate... there were 165 adults and 20 children on board".

As the boat began to sink, "few passengers had life jackets or knew how to swim, only those who held onto the hull of the boat managed to survive," said the witness to the tragedy.

There were only 55 survivors, the source added.

On September 2, the Libyan coast-guard brought 276 people to the port of Khoms, among whom were the survivors of this sinking.

The group was transferred to a detention centre under the control of the Libyan authorities, MSF said.

MSF, which treated the survivors, said there were pregnant women, children and even babies. Some had suffered burns from escaped fuel, others had caught pneumonia from staying so long in the water.

## Mozammel

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for passengers' rights, at his Sanarpar house in Narayanganj around 3:00am on September 6, two days after the extortion case was filed with Mirpur police.

In the case statement, complainant Md Dulal alleged that Mozammel, claiming to be a transport leader, demanded Tk 2 lakh from him and took Tk 10,000 from him in front of Sony Cinema in Mirpur on September 3.

Mozammel was placed on one-day's remand for interrogation hours after the arrest.

On Monday, Sub-Inspector Kazi Raihanur Rahman of Kafrul police filed a petition with the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka to show Mozammel arrested in a case filed for creating anarchy.

Raihanur, investigation officer (IO) of the case, also sought a 10-day remand for Mozammel. The court fixed tomorrow for hearing the plea.

The case, filed with Kafrul police on February 4, accuses more than 50 people of creating anarchy. Mozammel's name was not included in the First Information Report (FIR).

## Arrest order

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of the Penal Code of 1860, a person shall be punished with death or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine for committing murder.

Suman Kadri made the plea in the afternoon after the two accused, at around 11:00am, were already out in bail.

Senior Judicial Magistrate MM Morshed of the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court in Kushtia delivered the order on the plea and issued the arrest warrants at around 6:00 pm.

Akifa was critically injured when she fell from the arms of her mother Rina Khatun after they were hit by the bus on August 28. She succumbed to her injuries at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) on August 30.

The following day, Akifa's father Harunur Rashid filed a case with Kushtia Model Police Station against bus owner Jainal, driver Altaf and helper Mohid Mia.

The CCTV footage obtained by police shows the bus was stationary when Rina started crossing the road with Akifa in her arms.

When she was about to cross the stationary bus, its driver set off without warning, hitting the two before speeding away.

As Rina was hit, the baby slipped from her arms and fell onto the road, suffering severe head injuries. Akifa was rushed to Kushtia General Hospital from where she was transferred to DMCH.

Nasir Uddin, officer-in-charge of Kushtia Model Police Station, said police were trying to arrest bus owner Jainal and driver Altaf.

## Three killed

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chasing them.

The Rab returned fire and after a shootout of five minutes found Dulal injured. He was declared dead at Mohonpur Health Complex, the release said, adding, different goods including a foreign pistol, a magazine with one bullet and 506 pieces of yaba tablets were seized from the scene.

With this, at least 225 suspected drug traders or peddlers were killed since the nationwide anti-narcotics drive began on May 4. Most of them were killed in so-called shootouts involving police and Rab.

In Narayanganj, an alleged robber was killed in a gunfight with police at Bandar upazila early yesterday.

Police claim Mohammad Ibrahim, 42, son of Abdul Berek of Rugganj upazila, was a member of an organised robbers' gang. He was accused in several cases filed with different police stations in Narayanganj and other districts.

Bandar police OC Shaheen Mondal said 15-16 robbers were taking preparations to commit robbery in Sonachara Ramnagar area around 3:30am. On information, the police raided the area and came under fire. The police also retaliated. At one stage, the robbers fled leaving behind bullet-hit Ibrahim.

He was declared dead at Bandar Upazila Health Complex. His body was sent to Narayanganj General Hospital for an autopsy.

In another incident, police recovered the body of Delwar Hossain alias Raja, 28, son of Ful Miah of the capital's Gandaria area, from Rugganj in the district yesterday. The police claim he was also a member of a robbers' gang and was accused in several robbery cases.

OC Md Moniruzzaman of Rugganj police said the robbers were engaged in a gunfight over sharing of booty around 3:30am.

On information, the police rushed to the spot and recovered the bullet-hit body of Delwar. The law enforcers also recovered one shooter gun and a bullet from the spot.

## No alliance with BNP

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"They [Jamaat] can be in the 20-party alliance [led by BNP], but they are not supposed to be with us. There is no possibility to form an alliance with Jamaat.

"We assume the BNP will form the alliance leaving Jamaat. They [BNP] know what is our position," said Dr Kamal.

Replying to a query about the BNP's ties with Jamaat, he said, "Our party will not form the alliance with Jamaat in it. I don't know whether other parties will do it or not. I didn't do it in my entire life. Why should I do it in the end?"

He also described Jamaat as a non-political party as its registration had been cancelled.

After the press conference, journalists asked him who would lead the alliance if it was formed. He said, "We will forge the alliance together. I would say that the leadership should be a joint kind."

"I sincerely believe in joint leadership. I don't even want that the leadership would be mine only."

Recently, Dr Kamal, who leads Jatiya Oikya Prokriya, and Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, who leads Juktfront, held several meetings to forge a greater unity.

BNP leaders said their party was ready to make "sacrifices" to forge the national unity.

As part of the efforts, Dr Kamal announced that his party would hold a rally on September 22 at Mohanagar Natya Mancha in the capital's

Gulistan.

**CONCERNED ABOUT DETENTION**  
Speaking at the briefing, Dr Kamal expressed concern over the recent detention of opposition party leaders and activists as well as students.

"Some law enforcers in plainclothes pick up people without arrest warrants and it has become a matter of concern. The concern grows when they [law enforcers] deny it."

Termining such incidents a violation of the country's existing law, Dr Kamal said the government is supposed to discharge its duty obeying the law, which does not support picking up of anyone without warrants.

"If such incidents happened in one or two cases, we would think that it might happen in some particular cases. But it is happening regularly now. Law is being violated regularly," he said, urging the government to stop this.

"If the government doesn't use its power as per the constitution, it is using the power illegally."

The government is supposed to maintain a peaceful environment for the upcoming national election so that all political parties can participate without fear, but it is doing just the opposite, he alleged.

The eminent jurist said there was no reason now to try BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at Old Dhaka Central Jail.

Criticising the government for not allowing her to have treatment at a specialised hospital, Dr Kamal urged the government to do so.

## Students gain weight

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drank an especially large amount of juice containing aloe vera pulp -- considered to stay in the body longer than other food.

Nearly every able-bodied South Korean man is required to enrol by age 28 in the military, for a minimum of 21 months.

Those deemed too overweight or underweight, or diagnosed with certain diseases or disabilities, are exempted and usually assigned to positions in places like courts or public libraries.

The 12 wily students were judged too overweight for conscription and were ordered to work for government services instead.

Two have already finished their public service, while four are currently doing it and six are waiting to be assigned to positions at state offices.

The military said it had used "digital forensic technology" to uncover the ruse, suggesting it may have seen messages from the chatroom used by the students.

Officials have sent the case to prosecutors who will decide whether to charge the group.

If the students are later found guilty, they will have to undergo the physical examination again -- and may have to serve their time in the military after all, the army warned.

Attempts to dodge conscription are not uncommon, with efforts including deliberately dislocating arms or shoulders.

Celebrities are not exempted, although the government rewards Asian Games gold medals and

Olympic medals of any colour with an exemption.

Tottenham Hotspur star footballer Son Heung-min recently avoided being called for military service by leading South Korea to a gold medal in the recent Asian Games in Jakarta.

## Panic grips

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The attackers vandalised and looted 32 tin-roofed houses, 10 tents and 25 shanties. At least 10 houses were torched and 110 snakes were burnt to death. Six bedes were injured in the attack.

On information, police went to the spot and fired 70 shots in the air to bring the situation under control. After the incident, some bedes left their homes in fear of further attacks.

A tense situation is prevailing in the area.

Locals said they often locked in altercations with the bedes over "illegal activities" at the Bede Palli.

Two cases were filed with Sudharam Model Police Station in connection with Monday's incident. Five people were arrested.

Anwar Hossain, officer-in-charge of the police station, said Zaker Sarder, on behalf of the bedes, filed a case accusing 25 people by name and several other unknown ones.

Delwar Hossain, father of Tarek, lodged another case against 13 people by name and some unknown ones.

A police camp has been set up in the area to avert any further untoward incident, the OC said.

## Shahidul Alam denied bail

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directed the lower court concerned to dispose of the plea by yesterday.

During the hearing, Sara alleged that her client was implicated in the case as part of a conspiracy to harass him. She argued that Shahidul, a renowned photographer winning a series of awards, should be granted bail for ensuring justice.

Opposing the argument, Dhaka Metropolitan Public Prosecutor (PP) Abdullah Abu said Shahidul had "instigated students to continue a [recent] movement against the government and such activities damaged the image of the government at home and abroad".

Shahidul also should be charged with sedition for his remarks on the government, the PP said, adding, "So, we appeal to scrap the petition".

The court then rejected the bail prayer.

Shahidul, 63, is now in Dhaka Central Jail, in the case lodged under the controversial section 57 of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act. Police charged him with "spreading propaganda and false information against the government".

He was picked up by plainclothes men from his home in the capital's Dhanmondi on August 5.

Police filed the case against him and produced him before a Dhaka court the following day. He was then placed on a seven-day remand.

According to the case statement, Shahidul in a Facebook live video said:

"The present AL [Awami League] government is non-elected and so [it] does not have any mandate to continue. Bank looting is conducted by the people in power and their associates. Extra-judicial killing is conducted every now and then."

The case statement also said, "Personally he believes that without the caretaker government no free, fair and neutral election is possible in Bangladesh. So, the present government must be overthrown."

In court, Shahidul said he was tortured in custody. Police, however, denied the allegation.

On completion of his seven-day remand, Shahidul was denied bail and sent to jail by a Dhaka court on August 12.

On September 4, a judge of another HC bench felt "embarrassed" to hear Shahidul's bail petition in the case. The same day, the bench forwarded the petition to the chief justice for a decision.

The bench, however, did not disclose any reason for the move.

Many notable personalities, including Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and 11 other Nobel prize winners have called for immediate release of Shahidul.

### 'CRUEL AFFRONT TO JUSTICE'

Responding to the denial of bail to the photographer, Saad Hammadi, South Asia regional campaigner at Amnesty International, said, "The decision to deny Shahidul Alam bail is a cruel affront to justice."

In a statement yesterday, he said, "Shahidul should never have been

detained in the first place, since all he did was peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression. Now, he is being subjected to prolonged detention for no justifiable reason whatsoever."

"Beyond the injustice to Shahidul Alam himself, the case risks tarnishing Bangladesh's reputation globally. There has been a widespread outcry against the appalling treatment of this much loved photographer. He must be released immediately and unconditionally," he said.

## JS sitting

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in the chair at that time, suspended the remaining proceedings of the day at 6:15pm.

Later, he told the media that the day's business was adjourned due to power disruption.

The deputy speaker added the problem arose due to technical problems at Meghnath Power Plant, which supplies electricity to the Parliament Bhaban.

"We've adjourned the day's business after running the session with power supply from a generator for an hour," he said.

A call on meeting between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and US Ambassador Marcia Bernicat was scheduled to be held in parliament but it was shifted to the Gono Bhaban due to the power disruption.

The parliament session is scheduled to resume at 5:00pm today.