

## DIGITAL SECURITY BILL CPJ urges govt to review

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Committee to Protect Journalists in a letter to the Bangladesh president expressed deep concern over the Digital Security Act passed on Tuesday by parliament, and urged him to return it for a review.

If this legislation is allowed to become law, it would violate constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press, the independent press freedom advocacy organisation said on Friday.

It would create extensive legal dangers for journalists in the normal course of carrying out their professional activities, the letter published on its website by Steven Butler, Asia programme coordinator of CPJ, added.

"CPJ respectfully urges you to exercise your constitutional authority to return the legislation to parliament for revisions that would eliminate these dangers."

It specifically outlined concerns that have been expressed repeatedly by the community of journalists in Bangladesh and urged the legislators to address them.

"One of the most worrisome provisions of the Digital Security Act is an amendment added at the last minute in Section 43, which will allow police to arrest or search individuals without a warrant. In addition, the Digital Security Act includes problematic aspects of Section 57 of the Information and Communications Technology Act, despite public promises by government ministers to eliminate it."

Section 57 has repeatedly been used to imprison journalists in defamation cases. Government ministers had previously acknowledged that police have misused the section, and had promised that procedures would be established to prevent this. Instead, journalists continue to be subject to the danger of arbitrary arrest in the normal course of their activities.

Also of concern is the inclusion of the colonial-era Official Secrets Act in the Digital Security Act, which seems to contradict the right to information provisions included elsewhere in the legislation. The extension of the Official Secrets Act into the digital

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## Impossible

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Minister Sheikh Hasina and that government would only discharge routine duties and the Election Commission would hold the national polls, he said.

"The government's main job is to assist the Election Commission in holding the polls, and the polls-time government of Sheikh Hasina will do just that," he said.

Citing examples of other countries, Tofail said elections in those countries are held with the incumbent government in power. In India, parliament is not dissolved, he added.

Meanwhile, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader at a rally in Feni yesterday said, "The people of the country will not accept any unity excluding the Awami League."

An international survey suggests that 66 percent people support Hasina while AL's popularity is 64 percent, he said.

No national unity would be forged without a popular party like AL, he said, referring to the initiative of Dr Kamal Hossain-led Jatiya Oikya Prokriya's "greater national unity".

## Is the hat real?

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Even DNA testing was done -- comparing samples taken from the hat to Lincoln's blood recovered from the night of his assassination in 1865.

The result: inconclusive.

Historians wrote a report telling the museum it "might want to soften its claim about the hat" given the fact that its origins cannot be definitively authenticated.

The results were not shared with the public until Chicago radio station WBEZ uncovered them this week.

Museum chief Alan Lowe expressed frustration over the foundation's secrecy, but downplayed the DNA test results, saying it would be hard to get a perfect match from an 180-year-old item handled by many people.

"It is important to understand that neither of these initiatives produced new evidence about the hat's origins," Lowe said in a statement.

Thanks to the publicity, the museum will begin a new search for evidence about the hat's past, he added.

"What we learn, no matter what it says about the hat's origins, will be shared with the public."

For now, the hat is stowed away.

The museum will decide how to present it to visitors once the additional research is completed.

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## Greater unity taking shape

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Representatives of some smaller political parties and some civil society members also joined the rally, organised by Jatiya Oikya Prokriya as part of its efforts to forge a greater national unity to ensure a "functional democracy" through a credible national election.

The Oikya Prokriya also announced a decision to hold rallies across the country from October 1 to involve people in its unity process.

Engineer Sheikh Muhammad Shahidullah, convener of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas and Mineral Resources, Power and Ports, read out a declaration, while Dr Kamal presided over the meeting, held at the Mahanagar Natya Mancha.

The declaration called for formation of committees under the banner of "greater national unity" in all districts, upazilas, unions and wards, comprised of leaders and activists of political parties, individuals, civil society members and people from all walks of life, who believe in the spirit of the Liberation War, to realise the demands through united and peaceful programme.

Portraying a sorry state of the country, it stated that there are no freedom of speech and freedom of assembly at present and people are deprived of their constitutional rights.

The rally organisers said they had wanted to arrange it at the Suhrawardy Udyan. But they could not do so as police did not give them permission.

The process for "national unity" saw light on August 20, when B Chowdhury and Dr Kamal announced they had decided to work jointly in the "interest of the nation".

On September 15, the two leaders formally announced forging a "greater national unity" to ensure that people elect their representatives through a fair election.

And the BNP, which had boycotted the 2014 national election and remained neither in the opposition nor in power for the first time since 1991, has long been trying to build up a national unity among opposition political parties.

With its chief Khaleda Zia in jail since February, several top leaders of



Dr Kamal Hossain and Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir talk while Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury looks on on stage during yesterday's rally at Mahanagar Natya Mancha in the capital.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

the party in recent weeks sat with Dr Kamal and B Chowdhury for waging a movement against the government to realise their common demands.

Addressing the gathering yesterday, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "We must get united. We've made a good progress over forging of the national unity through this rally. We hope we'll be able to realise this very soon."

Saying that most leaders at the rally made almost similar demands, including installation of a neutral election-time government through discussions among political parties, and dissolution of parliament for holding the next polls in a fair and credible manner, Fakhrul called upon all to launch united movement to force the government to meet their demand.

He also demanded release of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and all political prisoners and said the government is now implicating their party leaders and activists in "ghostly" cases.

Yesterday's rally declaration too demanded ensuring Khaleda's legal rights as "she has been jailed

unfairly by hindering the normal process of law".

BNP standing committee members Khandaker Mosharrof Hossain, Moudud Ahmed and Abdul Moyeen Khan, Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Zafrullah Chowdhury and barrister Mainul Hosein, among others, spoke at the rally.

Addressing as the chief guest, Prof B Chowdhury said, "We think our efforts will succeed with today's presence.... Now it was time for putting up resistance and realising our demands."

He asked why opposition political parties need to take permission from police to hold rallies while the ruling party can do it anywhere anytime.

"We'll hold rallies by taking permission from people, not from police, in the days to come," said the former president.

Dr Kamal, also chief of Gonoforum, said they are trying for the national unity to ensure a "functional democracy", neutral enforcement of law and restoration of people's constitutional rights.

"The public response to our call is

tremendous as people are united over the basic issues. The time has now come to unite the like minded parties. I believe our efforts will yield positive outcome."

The jurist said ousting a political party or alliance and bringing another political party or alliance in power will not be the aim of this national unity.

Rather, he said, the main objectives of the unity will be ensuring equal opportunity for all in the light of the constitution, reforming the three organs of the state -- legislative, executive and judiciary -- to ensure people's political empowerment.

He alleged some people are sensing conspiracy behind the national unity process and suspecting that it is aimed at going to power.

Dr Kamal, one of the architects of the constitution said, "Bangabandhu had given me the responsibility to formulate the constitution of the just-liberated country. It's my best achievement. Personally, I have nothing else to get. As a political activist, it's my sacred duty to ensure empowerment of people as per the constitution."

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## 2 UPDF men shot dead in Rangamati

UNB, Rangamati

Two activists of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), a Chittagong Hill Tracts-based political organisation, were killed in a "gunfight" between two rival groups at Ramsuparipara in the district's Naniarchar upazila early Friday.

The deceased were identified as Sumanta Chakma and Akorshan Chakma.

Locals said Sumanta and Akorshan, former activists of Parbatya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), had recently joined the UPDF.

Abdul Latif, officer-in-charge of Naniarchar Police Station, said the gunfight took place in a remote area (Betchhari-Mahalchhari bordering area) around midnight.

Police have been sent to the spot, said the OC.

Earlier on May 3, Shaktiman Chakma, 55, chairman of Naniarchar

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## 6 Bangladeshis hurt as BSF fires rubber bullets

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Six Bangladeshis were wounded when Indian Border Security Force (BSF) fired rubber bullets on them at Madla frontier in Brahmanbaria's Kasba upazila on Friday evening.

BSF personnel also picked up a Bangladeshi man, Khaleq Mia, 70, from the area.

Four of the six injured were identified as residents of Madla village. They are Shahjahan Mia, 55, his son Tushar, 16, Faruk Mia, 25, Nannu Mia, 57, and his son Rasel Mia, 20.

Afterwards, a flag meeting was held between the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and the BSF battalion, following a letter sent by BGB protesting the incident. After the meeting, BSF returned Khaleque and BGB gave back a rifle left at the spot by BSF members.

Confirming the incident, Major Md Saiful Islam, acting commanding

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## 2 schoolgirls

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student of Sujanagar Shahid Dulal Pilot School, was gang-raped after she was taken to the house of the ward-2 councillor on the pretext of getting her married off to the boy.

"My daughter and a ninth grader of the school loved each other and they were going to get married on Wednesday. They were intercepted by a few local youths, who took them to the house of ward councillor Shaheb Ali on Wednesday night," she said.

She claimed that afterwards, the councillor's brother, Nayeb Ali, called her and demanded Tk 50,000 for returning her daughter but they could only give Tk 20,000.

While her mother was arranging the money, the girl was taken to another place near the councillor's house, where she was "gang-raped and beaten throughout the night".

The next morning, the girl's mother came with the money and found her daughter in critical condition. The girl was admitted to Sujanagar Upazila Health Complex before being transferred to Pabna Medical College Hospital (PMCH) on Friday.

When reached, Shaheb Ali denied the allegation and claimed that though the girl was brought to him, he had asked for her to be sent to her parents, adding he had no idea how she was raped.

Following the filing of the case, police arrested Anwar Hossain Anai, among five others, but Nayeb Ali went into hiding after the incident.

The arrestees were sent to jail on yesterday.

"Police are trying to nab Nayeb and others," the OC said.

Talking to this correspondent, Shamima Khatun Poly of PMCH, confirmed the rape.

"She was raped and physically tortured," she said.

Elsewhere, in another incident, an 11-year girl was allegedly raped by a neighbour at Boroichora village in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila on Thursday afternoon when she was returning home from school. The victim, 11, a class-three student of Boroichora Government Primary School is currently undergoing treatment at PMCH. **HOUSEWIFE RAPED, ONE ARRESTED**

Meanwhile, a group of criminals raped a housewife, aged 35, of Sholakia village in the upazila on Thursday night.

A case was filed accusing seven locals.

OC Alam confirmed the incident and said the seven gang-raped the woman while she was alone at home.

Police have so far arrested one of the suspects and are conducting drives to nab the others, he added.

## Terror hits Iran's pride

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The bloodbath struck a blow to security in OPEC oil producer Iran, which has been relatively stable compared with neighbouring Arab countries that have grappled with upheaval since the 2011 uprisings across the Middle East.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC), the most powerful and heavily armed military force in the country, have been the sword and shield of Shia clerical rule in Iran since its 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The Guards play a big role in Iran's regional interests and have a vast stake worth billions of dollars in Iran's economy.

A video distributed to Iranian media showed soldiers crawling to escape gunfire. One picked up a gun and scrambled to his feet as women and children fled for their lives.

A video on state television's website showed confused soldiers. Standing in front of the stand, one asked: "Where did they come from?" Another responded: "From behind us."

State television blamed "takfiri elements", a reference to Sunni Muslim militants, for the attack. Ahvaz is in the centre of Khuzestan province, where there have been sporadic protests by minority Arabs in predominantly Shia Iran.

The gunmen were trained by two Gulf Arab states and had ties to the United States and Israel, according to Shekarchi.

"They are not from Daesh (Islamic State) or other groups fighting (Iran's) Islamic system ... but they are linked to America and (Israel's intelligence agency) Mossad," he told state news agency IRNA.

There was no immediate Gulf Arab comment on his remarks.

Tensions between mainly Shia Iran

and mostly Sunni Saudi Arabia have risen in recent years, with the two countries supporting opposite sides in wars in Syria and Yemen and rival political parties in Iraq and Lebanon.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani ordered security forces to identify those responsible for the violence, the semi-official ISNA news agency said.

"The response of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the smallest threat will be crushing", Rouhani said on his official website, reported AFP.

The attack occurred a day before Rouhani heads to New York to address the annual UN General Assembly next week.

"Rouhani will use the terrorist attack to justify Iran's presence in the Middle East... The attack will strengthen the IRGC's position inside Iran and in the region," Tehran-based political analyst Hamid Farahvashian said.

Iran will face pressure to respond to

the high-profile attack on the Revolutionary Guards.

"The attacks are doubtlessly meant to tarnish the prestige of the IRGC, but I believe the terrorist incidents will strengthen the IRGC's standing and even mobilise some public support," said Ali Alfoneh, senior fellow at the Gulf Arab States Institute in Washington.

Hardliners like the IRGC have gained standing at the expense of pragmatists in Iran's multi-tiered leadership since President Donald Trump decided in May to pull the United States out of the 2015 international nuclear deal with Tehran and reimpose sanctions in moves to isolate the Islamic Republic.

Kurdish militants killed 10 Revolutionary Guards in an attack on an IRGC post on the Iraqi border in July, where armed Kurdish opposition groups are active.

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