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PRESS FREEDOM

Bangladesh slips four notches

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh slid four notches and is now 150th in the World Press Freedom Index revealed by the Reporters Without Borders yesterday.

The situation was worrying in Bangladesh, where reporters covering protests and the election were the targets of unprecedented violence, says the index, available in its website.

Press freedom was in good health in less than quarter of the 180 countries covered by the index, with the United States sliding to 48th place, it says.

India, the world's biggest democracy, slid two

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



This photo taken last year shows Rohingyas carrying logs on a hill slope in Ukhia. Researchers say the main reasons for deforestation in Cox's Bazar include cutting down of trees to make space for Rohingya camps, build homes and to use as fuel.

PHOTO: MOKAMMEL SHUVU

Cox's Bazar forests in grave danger

More than 2,000 hectares of forests already razed; Rohingya influx, human interventions key reasons

PORIMOL PALMA and MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAT

The critical biodiversity areas in Cox's Bazar -- Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary, Himchhari National Park and Inani National Park -- face a grave risk of peril due to high level of human interventions following the Rohingya influx, according to two recent studies.

Already, more than 2,000 hectares of forest have been lost as a result of the expansion of campsites after the arrival of over 750,000 Rohingyas since August 2017. Before the latest influx, more than 300,000 Rohingyas were already living in the area.

Over the last one and a half years, tens of thousands of trees, both big and small, have been cut down to set up camps, make furniture and cook food, researchers have found.

The financial cost of this destruction of forest in Ukhia and Teknaf upazilas

stands at about Tk 1,865 crore, but the long-term consequences are more environmental than financial, according to a separate report by the Cox's Bazar Forest Department.

"Clearing of forests and vegetation enhances soil erosion and promote landslide," said Sharif Ahmed Mukul, director at the Applied Ecology and Conservation Research Lab at the Independent University, Bangladesh.

He is one of the seven environment experts who wrote an article titled "Rohingya Refugees and the Environment" published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science in the prestigious Science Magazine early this month.

His fellow researchers include Prof Ainun Nishat, Saleemul Huq and Atiq Rahman.

"Expansion of the old SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Autistic girl, 15, raped in Narayanganj

2 more girls raped in Bandarban, Jamalpur



STAR REPORT

Two girls, including an autistic teenager, were allegedly raped in Bandarban and Narayanganj on Tuesday and Wednesday.

In Jamalpur, police rescued a Pakistani schoolgirl from Mohishakani area of Sarishabari upazila early yesterday, two days after she was allegedly kidnapped and raped by her Bangladeshi cousin.

Law enforcers in Rangpur yesterday detained three people for allegedly trying to cover up the rape incident of a fifth grader.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Impunity, moral decline to blame

Experts say about recent surge in rape, sexual violence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A culture of impunity, moral degradation and culprits' getting political backing in many cases are the major reasons why incidents of rape and sexual violence continue unabated in the country, according to experts and rights activists.

Stressing on imparting moral education and ensuring exemplary punishment to the culprits, they said the government must act immediately to stop the crime.

Rights body Manusher Jonno Foundation says at least 47 children were either raped or subjected to attempted rape and sexual harassment in 15 days since April 2. Of them, 39 were raped during this period.

According to statistics of another rights group Ain o Salish Kendra, at least 189 females, including 123 children, were raped across the country in the first three months of this year. The number was 187 during the same period last year.

Talking to The Daily Star, noted rights activist Sultana Kamal said, "Culture of impunity is a big reason. People are committing crimes but they rarely get punished. This is one of the main causes behind the surge in sexual harassment."

She said lawlessness was prevailing in the society.

In the name of religion, she added, a section of people were spreading hatred through their speeches, but they were not being held accountable to anyone.

The incidents of rape have increased and so did the the reporting on them. People are now more brave and courageous to raise their voices, she added.

According to police and court sources, less than 2 percent of all rape cases filed in between 2012 and 2016 ended in conviction. This is mainly

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Man wanted electricity but landed in jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

A day labourer was allegedly sent to jail on Wednesday for not paying electricity bills, even though his house at Mochagora village in Muradnagar upazila had no electrical line.

On Thursday evening, Chief Judicial Magistrate Sohel Rana granted him bail after hearing a writ petition filed by MD Sanaullah, a BLAST lawyer.

Abdul Matin, 55, and his family didn't have any electricity in his home for four years.

Speaking to journalists, Matin's wife Amena Begum, 45, said, "My husband and some other families of Mochagora village had applied for electricity connection [for their homes] at Palli Bidyut Samity-1 four years ago. He also paid Tk 4,000 to Abul Kalam, a sub-contractor of Palli Bidyut Samity. But Kalam demanded Tk 15,000, which we were not able to pay."

She alleged, "Kalam and Abul Basar gave the connection to our neighbour



Abdul Matin

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

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