

VIOLENCE AGAINST MINORITIES

250 incidents in 4 months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Religious and ethnic minority communities in the country faced at least 250 incidents of violence, including murder, rape and illegal occupation, in the last four months, according to a report.

Although such violence was showing a downward trend in the last two years, the number of incidents -- that took place within the last few months -- indicates that repression on minorities is on the rise again, said the report.

Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad, a representative body of religious minority communities, prepared the report based on news published in different national dailies and information collected from social media and their activists.

The report was unveiled at a press conference held at Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

According to the report, at least 23 minorities were murdered, six found dead (suspected to be murdered) and 188 were assaulted in the last four months.

Besides, seven women were raped, five gang-raped and 10 others sexually harassed within the timeframe.

In addition, over 31 houses and business institutions of minorities were looted, while 162 were illegally evicted from their properties, said the report. It also said at least 29 temples had been attacked since April.

The Oikya Parishad in its previous reports found that the total number of violence against minorities were 1,471 in 2016, which came down to 1,004 in 2017. Last year, the total instances of violence was 806.

At yesterday's press conference, Oikya Parishad General Secretary Rana Dasgupta said there is no doubt that repression on minorities is increasing. "Minority rights situation has improved in recent years... But the incidents of violence, between January and April, is a reason to worry about," he said.

"The condition of the minorities will worsen if the government cannot implement its commitment to zero tolerance against communalism," added Dasgupta.

He also announced to carry out a countrywide demonstration on May 25, demanding arrest of those involved with violence against minorities.



Floating hawkers seek temporary "shelter" on the road median in New Market area with their products wrapped up in bundles, as police conduct an eviction drive on the footpaths which they usually occupy. They go back to their previous spots once police leaves. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Not enough deradicalisation programmes in the country

Speakers say at roundtable on preventing extremism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Lack of family bonding and proactive parenting, intolerance to different views and unhealthy use of social media are some of the reasons leading the youth towards violent extremism, speakers at a roundtable said yesterday.

The state should also apply soft approaches like deradicalisation programmes to prevent extremism in society, they said.

Bangla daily Prothom Alo and rights group Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) organised the roundtable on "prevention of radicalisation and extremism through social harmony", at a conference room of CA Bhaban.

Speaking at the programme, Air Cdre

(ret'd) Ishfaq Ilahi Chowdhury, registrar of East West University, said the radical forces have gained power, so the challenge is getting more difficult.

Meanwhile, there has been no significant investment in social programmes to prevent violent extremism, he pointed out.

"The accused in extremism-related cases are sent to jail. But inside prison, there is no deradicalisation programme... In fact, they are becoming more radicalised there..." Ishfaq Ilahi said.

MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam said the government and non-governmental organisations worked hard to tackle extremism after the Holey Artisan attack.

"But we should now give more attention

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Discussants at the roundtable at CA Bhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Include online sexual exploitation in nat'l curriculum

Activists recommend

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Issues regarding online sexual abuse should be incorporated in National Curriculum and Textbook Board programme to generate awareness among children and ensure their safety, educationists and rights activists said yesterday.

They were speaking at a views-exchange meeting arranged by rights organisation Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) at the capital's Cirdap.

ASK has been implementing a project on "online sexual exploitation" funded by Terre des Hommes (TDH) Netherlands at 28 schools under four districts, where they raise awareness among students, said ASK's Child Rights Unit Coordinator Ambika Roy.

Online sexual exploitation of a child could happen in various ways like via e-mail or using social networking platforms, she said, while presenting a keynote paper.

After building communication, a child could be exploited through sending indecent texts or videos, through building emotional bond and later forcing in sexual activities, or sending gift or money and later provoking to demonstrate sexual attitude, she said.

Children encountering such exploitation at any point could suffer psychological issues and live in constant fear of being exposed, said Prof Mahzabeen Haque of the Department of Psychology at Dhaka University.

Children's mental development and growth can be hampered as a result, she said.

These children might grow up with lack of self-esteem and confidence and they often cannot communicate with their families properly, she added.

Prof Mahzabeen said incidents of sexual exploitation should be minimised, even if it is not possible to completely uproot this evil from society, and for this different initiatives are required.

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Quader sets goals for his 'second innings'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said bringing back discipline to the transport sector and completing the ongoing mega projects are his biggest challenges now.

"I almost died, but I'm still alive... Insha'allah, I will play my second innings now. I have finished my first innings," Quader told media as he joined office yesterday after more than two months.

He said projects for metro rail, tunnel under Karnaphuli River and Elevated Expressway have witnessed significant progress. "So, we want to complete these projects."

Bringing back discipline to road transport sector is a challenge, he added. "It would be my biggest challenge in my second innings. We will overcome it under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina," he said.

As Quader -- also the general secretary of ruling Awami League -- arrived at his ministry at the secretariat, officials of his ministry and other agencies including Roads and Highways and Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, welcomed him with flowers.

Quader signed some files before joining a views-exchange meeting with journalists in presence of top officials of the ministry, including Road Transport and Highway Division Secretary Nazrul Islam.

ROADS COMPARATIVELY BETTER THIS YEAR

The minister said the condition of roads and highways before Eid holidays is better in comparison to the previous years.

He also announced that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the second Meghna bridge and second Gumti bridge on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway on May 25.

The PM will also inaugurate two bridges, two flyovers and four underpasses on the Dhaka-Tangail highway on the same day, the minister said.

This will significantly reduce rush on both the highways, which usually experience the worst traffic during the Eid holiday rush, he added.

SALE OF BRTC BUS TICKETS STARTS TODAY

Quader said Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) will start sale of advance Eid tickets from today at

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Post-deprived BCL leaders begin sit-in at DU

DU CORRESPONDENT

The faction of Bangladesh Chhatra League leaders who were deprived from posts, yesterday began an indefinite sit-in on the Dhaka University campus protesting a "fresh assault" on them.

They claimed that BCL General Secretary Golam Rabbani and his followers attacked them inside Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) around 2:30am.

Fifteen minutes into the attack, the agitated BCL men started a hunger strike at the base of Raju memorial sculpture. But in the morning, they said they would stage an indefinite sit-in instead of observing a hunger strike.

"We first started a hunger strike to protest the attack. Later, we decided to go on an indefinite sit-in considering the month of Ramadan," said Tanvir Hasan Saikat, a former central committee leader of BCL.

They will continue the demonstration until they get justice for the attack on them. They also want assurance from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that their demands over the "controversial" leaders in the newly formed BCL central committee will be fulfilled, said Tanvir.

Saif Babu, spokesperson of the post-deprived BCL faction and also former publicity affairs secretary of the student organisation, said BCL President Rezwatul Haque Chowdhury Shovon and General Secretary Golam Rabbani held a meeting at TSC last night with a delegation of the "deprived" leaders to resolve the problem.

The meeting came following the instruction from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina over the allegation that "controversial" leaders have been

included in the newly formed BCL central committee.

"They [Shovon-Rabbani] are trying to save the 16 listed controversial leaders although the Awami League top-brass told us the list came from Gono Bhaban. We were asking them about this matter," said Rakib Hossain, former programme and planning affairs secretary of BCL.

"Suddenly Rabbani charged against BM Lipi Akter, BCL deputy cultural affairs secretary, for giving a speech against him at a media talk show," Rakib said.

He alleged that Rabbani was furious with Lipi's reply; he verbally abused and slapped her.

"Some of Rabbani's followers also attacked other deprived leaders," Rakib and Babu said.

Around 3am, Shovon and Rabbani tried to calm down the protesters amid rain but they told both leaders to leave.

At one stage, BCL leader Golam Rabbani told the protesters that he would submit resignation letter to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today, the strikers claimed.

Denying the allegations made by the agitating BCL leader, Golam Rabbani told the Daily Star, "No one was attacked. There were some heated exchanges. They are (deprived leaders) doing this under the instructions of a special syndicate."

On May 13, at least 200 deprived leaders and activists staged a demonstration on the DU campus, protesting the inclusion of "controversial" persons in the central committee.

At least 15 BCL activists were injured as followers of those who had secured posts attacked during a press conference of the post-deprived faction at Madhur Canteen.



Cookies and cakes made in a bakery operated by Dhaka Metropolitan Police being sold at a police van. The photo of the mobile shop was taken in Gulistan area yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

ATTACKS ON OIL ESTABLISHMENTS Foreign ministry fears adverse impacts on security in the Gulf

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Attacks on oil establishments in the Gulf will have adverse impacts on the overall security in that region, Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said, expressing deep concern over the matter.

In a statement yesterday, it said Bangladesh has observed with deep concern the secret drone attacks on the oil pumping stations in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province.

Equally disconcerting is the news of attacks on the Saudi Arabian and Emirati oil tankers in the UAE territory, said the foreign ministry following reports of sabotage of oil tankers and ships last week amid tensions between the US and Iran.

Saudi Arabia said two of its oil tankers were attacked while sailing towards the Persian Gulf last week, adding to regional tension, according to international media.

The Saudi tankers were damaged in "a sabotage attack" off the United Arab Emirates coast, state-run Saudi Press Agency reported. The vessels were approaching the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most important chokepoint for oil shipments.

Also, the UAE foreign ministry reported an attack on four commercial ships near its territorial waters. No one has claimed responsibility.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' statement said:

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Yaba shipped via courier service

Rab arrests two in Uttara with one lakh pills

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday arrested two drug traders while they were trying to smuggle one lakh yaba pills to Dhaka from Cox's Bazar via courier service.

Both arrestees -- Kashem, 31, and Morshed, 33 -- are from Cox's Bazar.

Acting on information that a consignment of yaba is being shipped into Dhaka through courier service SA Paribahan, a Rab team took position near its Uttara Sector-6 office in the morning, said Rab-3 Commanding Officer Lt Col Emranul Hasan.

As the duo arrived to receive a parcel around 11am, the Rab team detained them and recovered the yaba pills from inside a

parcel of oyster shell ornaments, he added.

During preliminary interrogation, the arrestees admitted that they shipped the contraband items to Dhaka from Cox's Bazar through different courier services, the Rab official said.

Meanwhile, a team of Coast Guard on Saturday night recovered a package of 1.4 lakh pieces of yaba floating on the Bay of Bengal in Cox's Bazar.

The yaba traders dropped the pills in the sea and fled after a Coast Guard team carried out a drive on information of yaba smuggling through a trawler, Saiful Islam, Lt Commander of the Coast Guard's east zone told our Cox's Bazar correspondent.

RAMADAN TIPS

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Fasting and Cancer

Cancer Patients with a strong motivation to fast are usually encouraged to fast as spirituality and being involved in the religious activities plays a major role making patient feel more active. Hence patient feels less depressed and isolated. Scientific evidence shows fasting activates certain nerve pathways releasing nerve-nourishing factors which enhance mood and relieve pain. Fasting beneficially impacts immune system thus enabling cancer growth control; fasting also sensitizes tumor cells and improves the outcome of radiation therapy. However cancer patients should consult their Oncologist before a fast. Those with metastasis or particularly disseminated aggressive forms of cancer or with history of non-compliance to treatment and those who need to maintain their desired body weight by high calorie high protein diet should not fast.

Dr. Md. Rashid Un Nabi
Consultant, Radiation Oncology

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