

# DELHI 2020 RELIGIOUS RIOTS

## Amnesty accuses cops of rights abuses

AGENCIES

Police in Delhi were “complicit and an active participant” in the February violence in which 53 people, mostly Muslims, were killed, according to an investigation by Amnesty International India.

“The Delhi police personnel were complicit and an active participant in the violence that took place in Delhi in February 2020, yet in the last six months not a single investigation has been opened into the human rights violations committed by the Delhi police,” the rights group said in a statement yesterday.

Amnesty said it spoke to riot survivors, witnesses, human rights activists and retired police officers and analysed several user-generated videos for the investigation that reveals a “disturbing pattern of grave human rights violations committed by the Delhi police during the riots”.

The rights group called on the Indian government to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into the alleged human rights violations committed by the police in what was the worst religious violence seen by the capital in decades.

“The Delhi police reports to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and it is shocking that there has been no attempt by the MHA to hold the Delhi police accountable till now,” Avinash Kumar, executive director of Amnesty International India, said in a statement.

Deadly violence broke out in February after weeks-long peaceful sit-in protests by Muslims in northeast Delhi against a controversial new citizenship law were targeted by Hindu nationalist mobs. More than 500 people were also injured, according to the government.

The police were accused of either supporting the mobs or looking the other way as the capital burned.

Other violations included excessive force on protesters,

torture in custody and dismantling of protest sites, the Amnesty investigation revealed. The police and the government have denied the accusations.

“This ongoing state-sponsored impunity sends the message that the law enforcement officials can commit grave human rights violations and evade accountability. That they are a law unto themselves,” Kumar, the Amnesty International India head, said.

The Delhi Police has yet to respond to Amnesty’s request for a comment on the investigation.

The investigation corroborates numerous media reports of police bias against Muslims.

The UK-based rights group launched the investigative briefing into the riots, documenting the timeline of the alleged police brutality and analysing the role of political leaders who made hateful speeches in the build-up to the violence.

Mostly Muslims and less than a dozen Hindus were killed between February 23-29, with many of the dead said to have died of bullet wounds.

In addition to street battles, there was also immense destruction of public and private property, with homes, shops and mosques set ablaze.

“Delhi has witnessed two major communal violence incidents across a period of four decades - the 2020 riots and the 1984 Sikh massacre,” Amnesty said. “A common link between both the incidents is the human rights violations committed by the Delhi police.”

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was passed last December, sparking nationwide peaceful protests largely led by Muslims.

The law eases the path for non-Muslims from neighbouring Muslim-majority nations to gain citizenship. The UN has termed the law “fundamentally discriminatory”.

## Rahat Khan no more

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reported that on July 29, doctors from Birdem suggested that he be kept under home care. He was bedridden since.

Last night, his body was kept at the mortuary of Birdem General Hospital. His namaz-e-janaja is scheduled to be held at 11:00am today on the National Press Club premises. He will then be buried at Mirpur Martyred Intellectual Graveyard.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed deep shock and sorrow at the death of Rahat Khan. In a condolence message, the prime minister prayed for eternal peace of his departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family.

Born on December 19, 1940, in Kishoreganj, Rahat Khan wrote his first story as a student of class three. He completed a degree in economics and philosophy at Ananda Mohan College. He did his MA from the Department of Bangla Language and Literature at Dhaka University in 1961. For the next eight years, he

taught Bangla at various colleges, including Jagannath College in Dhaka.

In 1969, Rahat Khan joined Bangla daily Ittefaq as assistant editor. He spent over four decades at the newspaper, eventually becoming its editor. In 1972, he published his first collection of short stories, Onischito Lokaloy (Uncertain Human Habitation).

The following year, he received the Bangla Academy Literary Award for his short stories.

He produced further volumes: Ontohin Jatra (The Eternal Journey), Bhalo Monder Taka (Money for Good and Evil), and in 1983, Apel Songbad (News of the Apple). In the early 1980s, he published his debut novel, Omol Dholel Chakri (Milk-White Service). He continued writing novels into the 1990s.

After leaving Ittefaq, he was the advisory editor of Dainik Bartoman. He also served as the chairman of the board of directors of the national news agency, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS).

## Beximco Pharma ties

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The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is an adenovirus vector-based vaccine, currently undergoing large-scale phase-III trials in Brazil, India, and the US and UK.

The UK trials are well underway and have shown very encouraging results and are expected to receive approval by the end of this year, reports Economic Times of India.

“Beximco will be the exclusive supplier of the vaccine in Bangladesh and will facilitate the needs of the government of Bangladesh by offering the opportunity for it to reserve the desired quantities for priority supply at prices to be agreed between the government and the SII,” the statement said.

Beximco will secure additional quantities of the vaccine to be distributed to the private pay market in Bangladesh, it said.

“The complexity of the market and production means that any financial implications of this arrangement are difficult to forecast at the current time so the company will provide the market with any further meaningful updates in due course,” Adar C. Poonawalla, chief executive officer of SII, and Shayan F Rahman, principal of Beximco Pharmaceuticals, said in the joint statement.

They said they are excited to bring together two of the leading pharmaceutical companies of Bangladesh and India with the scale and capabilities to bring a hugely

promising treatment to the people who need it the most.

“Between us, we can go a long way towards helping to mitigate the health crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.”

The development comes when many countries of the world are racing for the most essential vaccine amid the pandemic that has caused deaths of 836,364 out of 24,663,197 infections as of yesterday.

The death toll in Bangladesh as of yesterday was 4,174 and the total number of infection 306,794, shows government data.

Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of the Bangladesh Pharmacological Society, said the best option for Bangladesh is to go for a joint venture with the vaccine developer and produce it in the country.

“In that case, Bangladeshi drug manufacturing companies will develop their capacity and the prices of the vaccines will be more competitive,” he told The Daily Star.

Under an contract between icddr,b and Sinovac, the Chinese company would provide 110,000 free vaccine doses to Bangladesh if the Phase-III trial of the vaccine is proven safe. Besides, the company has committed to transferring the technology of the vaccine production in a bulk amount to a “qualified” Bangladeshi producer at a discounted price “to meet the need of the larger population of Bangladesh”, said icddr,b officials.



Artists paint pictures of pet animals on a wall on Dhanmondi Road-10 in the capital yesterday as part of an awareness campaign by People for Animal Welfare Foundation. The organisation launched the two-day campaign to save stray animals amid a move by Dhaka South City Corporation to leave 30,000 stray dogs outside the limits of the capital. Story on page 3

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Collective failure made it perennial

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Of the total drainage lines in the capital, 385km is under Dhaka Wasa. This key utility service provider is also responsible for the maintenance of 26 canals with a total length of 74km and box culverts of 10km.

However, experts said it would be unfair to blame Wasa alone.

They said it was a collective failure -- of two city corporations that manages some 2,500km surface drains in the city, the deputy commissioner's office that owns canals and many water bodies, and the Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) which owns city lakes including Hatirjheel and which is the custodian of many flood flow zones and retention areas.

Besides, Bashundhara Residential Area authorities and Cantonment Board are two entities who enjoy autonomy in water management of their respective areas.

“Several organisations are tasked with managing drainage in the city. That said, there is a culture of lack of coordination, unhealthy competition, and shifting blame, which compounds the waterlogging problem,” read a Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) statement on July 26.

TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said the city corporations cannot avoid responsibility for the failure in drainage mismanagement and waste disposal by placing all the blame on Wasa.

He also questioned whether the 2,500km of drains under the jurisdiction of the city corporations are waste-free or operational.

Since it has been a shared responsibility and that has not worked to solve waterlogging in the capital, some experts think one organisation with full authority could be a possible solution.

WHAT THE MAYORS SAY

Talking to this correspondent on Wednesday, Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Atiqul Islam said they have requested the ministry concerned to hand them over the charge of Wasa regarding drainage system along with all manpower and equipment; otherwise, it will not be possible for them to play their role properly.

He said they want to get the jurisdiction over not only the canals but also the banks of the canals from the deputy commissioner's office so they can make plans to build walkways and plant trees to protect them from encroachment.

About flood flow zones, many of which have already been encroached upon or filled up, the mayor said coordination with Rajuk is extremely necessary in this regard.

As Dhaka South City Corporation Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh is

now abroad, The Daily Star could not reach him for comment.

However, during a coordination meeting held at the LGRD ministry on July 22, he blamed Dhaka Wasa and BWDB for the city's waterlogging.

While visiting some canals and pumping stations after the meeting, the mayor said the two entities -- mainly responsible for curbing waterlogging in the city -- did not carry out their duties properly.

“Although it is the duty of Wasa and the water development board to solve waterlogging, both the organisations have totally failed. Give us the duty to solve the problem through long-term planning.”

City dwellers have been suffering for years because Wasa and BWDB have not been discharging their duties properly, he added.

In another programme organised by the LGRD ministry on August 13, Taposh expressed his resentment for the Detailed Area Plan not being implemented by Rajuk.

Asked about transferring the charge of drainage management, LGRD Minister Md Tazul Islam on August 16 said things are at an evaluation stage. And the whole process involves some legal issues and capacity building of the city corporations.

“It will take time and also the capacity of the city corporations will also have to be increased. Wasa has the manpower, technology and logistics. If we suddenly hand it [the responsibility of drainage management] over to the city corporations, both organisations might suffer,” he added.

A DECADE OF FAILURE

Under-fire Dhaka Wasa Managing Director Taqsem A Khan, who in his 11-year-long tenure has failed to provide safe drinking water to over one crore city dwellers and solve waterlogging, told The Daily Star in a recent interview that waterlogging during monsoon cannot be solved with only an artificial drainage system.

And in this context, Prof Adil Mohammad Khan said conservation of water bodies like rivers and canals, wetlands, water retention areas, and flood flow zones are all vital for drainage of storm water as well as for sustainable ecological balance, heat absorption and biodiversity.

The flood flow zones and lakes are under Rajuk. But over the last one decade, those zones have been greatly reduced due to encroachment, he added.

According to a 2019 study by the Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP), individuals, businesses, real-estate developers, organisations, and even government agencies have gobbled up 1,072 acres (57 percent) of the 1,879-acre flood flow zones in Dhaka metropolitan areas in this decade.

## Ailing Abe quits as Japan PM

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The resignation shocked the markets, with Tokyo stocks plunging more than two percent towards the end of afternoon trade when reports of Abe's decision first emerged.

“It was a big surprise”, said Shinichi Nishikawa, a professor of political science at Meiji University in Tokyo.

“His resignation comes at a time when Japan is facing tough issues, including measures against the coronavirus,” Nishikawa told AFP.”

Abe had been expected to stay in office until the end of his term as LDP leader in September 2021, and the jockeying for position to succeed him was still in its early stages.

Still, some potential successors have already emerged, among them Finance Minister Taro Aso, chief cabinet secretary Yoshihide Suga, former defence minister Shigeru Ishiba and LDP policy chief Fumio Kishida.

Kishida is rumoured to be Abe's personal choice, while Aso commands one of the strongest blocs within the ruling party.

Most of the potential successors are seen as unlikely to break significantly with Abe's policies.

Abe declined to be drawn on who he would like to see take the top job, saying he had “no intention” of influencing the election, and that those often floated as candidates were

all “highly capable”.

Experts said the election process was likely to happen in the coming weeks, with a new parliamentary session possible by October.

Abe's decision to step down will be bitterly familiar for the man who was forced to leave office just one year after becoming the country's youngest-ever prime minister.

He has since become Japan's longest-serving premier, forever associated with the economic policy that bears his name: Abenomics.

He said his legacy would be for others to decide but pointed to his efforts to bring Barack Obama to Hiroshima, making him the first sitting US president to visit the site of the atomic bomb attack, as among his proudest achievements.

Among his greatest disappointments, he said, was his inability to bring home Japanese people kidnapped by North Korea decades ago.

Tributes poured in from leaders around the world, with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi praising Abe's “wise leadership” for strengthening ties and wishing him a speedy recovery, while the Kremlin hailed Abe's “invaluable contribution” to relations.

Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted he had “achieved great things”.

## UN rights office says Blake shooting was ‘excessive’

REUTERS, Geneva

The UN human rights office yesterday said that the images of the shooting of Black man Jacob Blake in Wisconsin appeared to show that the police officer had used “excessive” force that was likely discriminatory in nature.

Sunday's shooting, captured on video, showed Blake was shot in the back by a white police officer as three of his young children watched. The footage has gone viral and set off angry protests.

“From the images available that we've seen at this point, the police appear to have used force against Jacob Blake that would seem to be excessive,” Rupert Colville said at a virtual briefing in Geneva, saying the use of force did not appear to comply with international standards.

## Covid danger

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At the same event, Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, additional director general of the DGHS, said, “Although there are limitations in measuring the situation-based cases in hospital settings, an analysis of symptomatic and asymptomatic cases indicate that transmission rates have fallen in some areas while increased in many.”

“If measures like social distancing and the use of masks are not ensured, it will not be long before transmission increases,” she added.

Prof Iqbal said “misleading remarks” from the government will only worsen the situation.

“We heard similar comments in March when the pandemic had not yet turned serious... Now such comments may turn the situation more complex,” said the biochemistry professor who is also a member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19.

“We took the wrong track at the outset. And such comments are proof that we are still not on the right track.”

The leader of the pro-Awami League association of physicians also observed that respiratory infections in patients are more severe nowadays.

“Patients are needing more oxygen support now than they did 10 days ago. The number of patients requiring ICU support is also increasing.

“Those who are saying Covid-19 transmission has reduced or is under control are not saying things based on data.”

Renowned virologist Prof Nazrul Islam, also a member of the NTAC, said there is no evidence suggesting that the outbreak has been contained.

“The positivity rate has been falling over the last few days. However, it cannot be said right now that the transmission has reduced. We have to observe one more week... If the transmission rate continues to go down for two consecutive weeks, we might say the transmission will stay that way [in the future],” he told The Daily Star.

Prof Dr Rashid-E-Mahbub, former president of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), also thinks there is no basis for the minister's statement.

“A smaller percentage of people are testing positive these days. But we are not testing en masse,” he said.

The situation could be assessed if antigen or antibody based rapid tests were done in the communities.

“There is no scientific basis behind claims that the transmission has reduced,” he said, adding, “If we want to understand the level of transmission, we have to survey the people en masse.”

He warned of bitter outcomes if the government chose to reopen everything and health rules are flouted.

“And I don't see any sign of people obeying the rules,” he added.

## Weekly count

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The death toll was 258 in the second week of August and it rose to 270 in the third week.

Yesterday, 47 people died of Covid-19 in the country, according to a press release issued by the DGHS.

Among the deceased, 32 were male and 15 were female, while four were aged between 21-30 years old, one between 31-40, five between 41-50, 11 between 51-60, and 26 were above 60 years old.

The total number of deaths has now stood at 4,174 and the death rate stands at 1.36 percent comparing to the total number of patients.

A total of 2,211 new infections were recorded in the 24-hours from Thursday morning, taking the total number of people infected to 3,06,794.

The current positivity rate is 16.09 percent, while the total positivity rate stands at 20.26 percent.

Bangladesh is currently 15th in the list of worst-affected countries in the world in terms of the number of coronavirus cases.

The position is one step ahead of Pakistan and one step behind Saudi Arabia, according to worldometer.info.

A total of 13,741 samples were tested across the country in the last 24 hours.

The total number of recoveries stands at 1,96,836 and the recovery rate at 64.16 percent.

Five hundred and sixty-nine people were put under isolation in the last 24 hours, the release added.