

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



2,252
New cases in 24hrs



4,73,991
Total cases



6,772
Deaths



3,90,951
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,519,382
Deaths



65,962,478
Total cases

Attacks against lawmakers rising worldwide

Says the International Parliamentary Union

AFP, Geneva

Threats and attacks targeting lawmakers worldwide are rising, an international watchdog has said, warning that some governments were using the pandemic as an excuse to crack down on opposition MPs.

Over the past year, the the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) said its investigative committee had examined 552 cases, across 42 countries, of parliamentarians who allegedly faced threats, intimidation, violence and other rights violations.

That marks a hike from the 533 cases investigated in 2019, and the highest number of cases ever probed since the creation of the IPU committee more than four decades ago.

Eighty-three of the cases -- more than half of them in Venezuela -- were filed over the past year, while the remainder were follow-up cases, the IPU said on Thursday.

While much of the abuse was part of a continuing trend, the organisation warned that some governments were using the coronavirus crisis as an excuse "to act against opposition MPs".

In countries like Ivory Coast, Venezuela, Uganda and Zimbabwe, governments were "using lockdown laws to detain or otherwise infringe upon the rights of opposition parliamentarians", it said.

Overall, the most common complaints to the committee this year

have been over undue suspension and loss of parliamentary mandate, followed by a lack of fair trial.

Threats and acts of intimidation meanwhile moved up from fourth to third place this year, the IPU said.

It warned that women parliamentarians were being disproportionately affected.

Women MPs still only account for around a quarter of the world's lawmakers, but the IPU said its figures showed they were "significantly more exposed to torture, ill treatment and acts of violence" than their male counterparts.

It pointed out that a full 34 percent of cases of women parliamentarians it had considered involved such acts, compared to 18 percent for the men.

The IPU, a grouping of 179 legislative chambers that seeks to improve representative democracy worldwide, also highlighted regional differences.

For the fifth year running, the Americas counted most alleged violations of MPs' rights, accounting for nearly a third of all the cases investigated.

In crisis-hit Venezuela especially, the IPU said it was continuing to monitor the cases of 134 opposition parliamentarians.

Ahead of Sunday's parliamentary elections, IPU said virtually all of the opposition MPs had been "attacked, threatened, harassed or otherwise intimidated by pro-government supporters."

Antigen test begins in 10 dists

FROM PAGE 1

tests look for past presence of the virus and a possible immune response to the infection.

Based on the testing protocol finalised by the health ministry, nasal swab samples from the patients with Covid-19 symptoms will be tested in those district hospitals and one medical college hospitals.

"We have trained up staffers in those hospitals. Only people with symptoms will be tested," Prof Tahmina Shirin, director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked whether they have any target how many people will be tested, she said, "It depends how many people will come. Also, there is an issue of sufficient reagent. I have no idea whether reagents in bulk amount have been imported or not. The DGHS high ups can say it."

Earlier on Wednesday night, DGHS spokesperson Habibur Rahman told this newspaper that necessary reagents are waiting for release from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka.

Following recommendations given by the National Technical Advisory Committee, the health services division of the health ministry on September 17 approved the antigen rapid testing kit after months of bureaucratic exercises.

It aimed at setting up antigen testing

facilities at 39 public hospitals and specialised institutes in areas which did not have RT-PCR testing facilities.

The country is conducting around 15,000 tests a day in 118 authorised laboratories. It is ranked at the bottom in the world in terms of conducting Covid-19 tests considering its population of over 160 million.

24 DIED, 2,252 INFECTED

Meanwhile, 24 people died of Covid-19 in the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, according to a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With this, the total number of deaths reached at 6,772 and the death rate was 1.43 percent.

In the same 24 hours, a total of 2,252 new infections were recorded, taking the total number of people infected to 473,991, added the release.

Against a total of 15,430 tests in 118 labs countrywide, the positivity rate was 14.59 percent, while the overall positivity rate was 16.71 percent.

Meanwhile, around 2,572 Covid-19 patients recovered in those 24 hours.

The total number of recoveries now stands at 390,951 and the recovery rate at 82.48 percent.

Among the 24 deceased, 20 were males.

One of them aged between 21 and 30 years, two between 31 and 40, two between 41 and 50, two between 51 and 60, and 17 above 60 years, added the release.

Govt moves to resume probe

FROM PAGE 1

Only one of the cases has been disposed of, in Bagerhat. All the accused were acquitted as neither the police nor the prosecutors could prove them guilty of the charges of attempted murder, arson and vandalism, officials said.

Police have pressed charges in 18, and gave final reports in two other cases. Investigations of the 62 have been stalled.

Several police officials requesting anonymity said the government's lack of interest in moving forward with the cases was a reason why the investigations went into hibernation.

Asked for comment, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said, "Police had many pending tasks which they had to prioritise to finish."

"Now they will gradually complete investigation of the cases."

Fifty-three of the cases, including seven for murder, were recorded in the capital against more than 50,000 people.

DMP Additional Commissioner (DB) AKM Hafiz Akhter said the investigation of any of the cases might pick up the pace any time. "We are investigating. Nothing can be disclosed now," he added.

Mahbub Alam, joint commissioner of DMP DB, said they are looking into whether any of the accused of those

cases are among those involved in "different movements".

As police and other security forces flushed out several thousand Hefajat men from the capital's Shapla Chattar at the dead of the night on May 5, they clashed with law enforcers at different places while returning home.

At least 30 more cases were filed in Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bagerhat, Barisal and Chattogram on May 6 and the following couple of days over the fierce clashes.

The police, government officials, relatives of the victims, Islamic leaders, businessmen, shop owners, employees of different offices and political parties filed the cases.

Hefajat leader Junaid Babunagari, the main accused in the sub-inspector Shahjahan murder case, was arrested on May 6, 2013. He secured bail on May 29 that year on health grounds. He has been on bail since then.

Shahjahan was killed during a clash between Hefajat men and law enforcers in Motijheel.

Although Hefajat claimed that 2,000 of its leaders and activists were killed in the incident, the government put the death toll at 13, including three policemen.

The Hefajat could not provide names and addresses of its men who it claimed to have been killed.

13 killed in two road accidents

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40, grandfather Hore Krishna, 67, grandmother Khukibala, 63, and auto-rickshaw driver Jamal, 30.

In another accident, six people were killed and 10 others wounded when a truck hit a parked bus in Mirzapur upazila yesterday morning.

The accident happened on Dhaka-Tangail highway in Kumi area around 7:00am, said Mozaffar Hossain, OC of Gorai Highway Police Station.

Driver of the Dhaka-bound bus from Rangpur parked the vehicle along the highway to repair one of its wheels.

At that time, most of the passengers got down from the bus and stood in front of the vehicle.

Suddenly, a vegetable-laden truck hit the bus from behind, crashing it into a roadside house. Four people died on the spot.

Locals rushed to the spot and took the injured to Kumudini Hospital, where two others died.

The injured truck driver was undergoing treatment at the hospital. However, the bus driver managed to flee, said Shawkat Hossain, traffic inspector in Mirzapur.

Police seized both the vehicles.

Meanwhile, vehicular movement on the Dhaka-bound lane of the highway was suspended for around an hour after the accident.

The deceased include truck driver's helper Chunnu Mia, 32, and five bus passengers. Two of the passengers were identified as Ashraful Islam, 34, and Sirajul Islam, 31.

Of the injured, five were in critical condition, said police.

[Our correspondents in Manikganj and Tangail contributed to this report]



Policemen baton-charge a protester in the capital's Bijoynagar Water Tank area yesterday as they disperse a procession against setting up of sculptures in the country. A group of protesters tried to stage demonstrations on the issue after offering Juma prayers at the Baitul Mukarram national mosque.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Don't undermine or misinterpret

FROM PAGE 1

While talking to this newspaper yesterday, the foreign minister expressed frustration that the international community has not done enough to create pressure on Myanmar to pave the way for Rohingya repatriation.

"While international agencies make noise about facilities in the Rohingya camps or Bhasan Char, none had the courage nor sincerity to approach Myanmar to create a conducive environment leading to the Rohingyas' repatriation to their own country in safety and security, and in a dignified way for the wellbeing of Myanmar," Momen said.

He also thanked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her prudent and decisive action to relocate a section of the Rohingyas to Bhasan Char in order to avoid deaths and accidents due to landslides and other untoward incidents in the overcrowded hilly areas of Kutupalong.

Two attempts at repatriation have failed so far as Rohingya refugees say there is no guarantee of citizenship, safety and basic rights in Myanmar. The UN and rights bodies have said the situation in Rakhine has not improved despite Myanmar facing a genocide case at the International Court of Justice, which ordered the country to prevent further genocidal acts in Rakhine state.

The UN Security Council has also failed to take any concrete actions against Myanmar mainly because of opposition from China and Russia, who hold veto powers. Meanwhile, Bangladesh continues to bear the brunt of sheltering the Rohingya

refugees in Cox's Bazar, a tourist district that is facing socio-economic, environmental and political challenges due to the Rohingyas' presence.

Illegal drug smuggling, human trafficking, conflicts between Rohingyas and locals, and clashes among various factions of Rohingyas that led to several killings in refugee camps have become matters of concerns in recent times.

Momen has said on different occasions that regional development will also be affected if there is not a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis as soon as possible.

In its statement, the foreign ministry said the government decided to relocate the Rohingyas in the face of growing concern over the extreme congestion in the Cox's Bazar camps and to avert risks of death due to landslides and in other unwarranted incidents.

"The deteriorating security situation due to prolonged stay of these frustrated people in Cox's Bazar also compelled the government to come up with a contingency plan and develop Bhasan Char from its own budgetary allocation."

The statement said the government has invested more than \$350 million to develop the housing project on 13,000 acres, containing year-round fresh water, uninterrupted electricity supply, agricultural plots, cyclone shelters, two hospitals, four community clinics, mosques, warehouses, telecommunication services, a police station, recreation and learning centres and playgrounds. Bhasan Char can withstand natural

disasters such as cyclones and tidal waves. Super cyclone Amphan proved the strength of the structures there as, despite the heightened tidal wave, all 1,440 houses and 120 shelter stations on the island remained unharmed, it said.

In addition to government agencies, around 22 NGOs are already there to extend all possible support to the relocated Rohingyas.

The foreign ministry said the relocation was a part of the broader plan of repatriation. The livelihood opportunities that the Rohingyas would be able to avail on Bhasan Char and the acquired skills would prepare them for their reintegration in Myanmar.

"The generous people of Bangladesh offered all kinds of assistance to these persecuted Myanmar nationals before any international humanitarian agency stepped in.

"We set another unique example of humanity in the world by developing a modern island to temporarily accommodate some of these persecuted Rohingyas," the statement said.

At this stage, it is only practical that the international community, including the UN, fulfils their responsibility and meaningfully engage with Myanmar to commence the repatriation, it said.

"We would encourage human rights groups to put their efforts in creating conducive environment inside Myanmar for their quick, safe and dignified repatriation to their land of origin, Myanmar," the foreign ministry said.

New homes, new hope for Rohingyas

FROM PAGE 1

a Tk 3,100-crore housing project by the Bangladesh Navy.

They said they had been living in poor conditions in makeshift homes in the Cox's Bazar camps. On top of that, fighting between rival gangs in the camps made their lives miserable.

But now, they believe, they will be able to lead a better life with greater access to healthcare, education, and the fact that they can work in Bhasan Char.

Most importantly, the decision of living here was voluntary, a Rohingya man said.

A total of 1,642 Rohingyas were taken from Chattogram to Bhasan Char yesterday, amid concerns expressed by the United Nations and other development partners who demanded an independent assessment of the housing project before any relocation.

A UN team has still not been allowed to visit the island. The Rohingyas were brought in on seven vessels, which left for the island around 9:00am along with two other vessels carrying goods, Lt Commander MK Zaman Shamim, an official related to the project, told this paper.

Two vessels, two response boats and four country boats followed the vessels with the Rohingyas on board. Naval vessels Shah Paran and Shah Makhdum, carrying 1,019 pieces of luggage, had reached on Thursday.

On Thursday, the Rohingyas reached Chattogram from Cox's Bazar. They stayed overnight at BF Base Zahur in Chattogram.

The government plans to relocate 2,500 Rohingyas to the island and these people were the first batch. Bangladesh Navy has prepared accommodation for nearly one lakh Rohingyas there. HOPE OF A NEW LIFE

As the Rohingyas boarded the vessels in queues in Chattogram, Bangladesh Navy officials handed masks, water bottles and life jackets to each of them. Onboard, disinfectants were sprayed on their feet.

Many of those Rohingyas came to Bangladesh even before the 2017 influx. Some arrived around 20 years ago. Abdur Rahim was one who had come earlier. He fled to Bangladesh

in 2006, but his mother and other relatives came in 2017.

"I was good there [at the camp], but the situation has deteriorated recently. We fight among ourselves in broad daylight. There was no security and no future. We didn't have any work," he explained when asked why he chose to live on the island.

The vessels reached Bhasan Char in three and a half hours. After the Rohingyas arrived, they were taken to an empty warehouse. There, they offered special prayers expressing gratitude to the almighty. They also thanked the government for giving them shelter.

From there, all were taken to their houses.

Abdul Hamid, along with his wife and four children, was the first to enter their home. "I hope my new life will start from here. At least we can do something on our own. I am very happy," he said, adding that he wanted to farm.

A total of 768 rooms were allotted to the 1,642 Rohingyas.

Another Rohingya man, however, complained that his room was congested.

Mamunur Rashid told this paper that he was allotted two rooms for his family of eight and that the rooms were not spacious enough. "It would have been better had there been any interconnection between the two rooms," he said.

Commodore AA Mamun Chowdhury, director of the Ashrayan-3 Project (the official name of the Bhasan Char project), said a festive mood was prevailing on the island following the arrival of the Rohingyas.

"Now, there will be no host community here. I think with the help of the ministries and departments concerned, the Rohingyas will get a better life here."

Asked when the remaining Rohingyas would be shifted there, he said they were yet to get any such instruction regarding that.

UN and rights groups have been questioning the relocation plan, saying the island was flood-prone and could get submerged during high tides.

Anti-sculpture protesters clash with cops in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A clash broke out between police and a group of protesters seeking demolition of sculptures yesterday after the demonstrators broke a police barricade in front of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque and tried to bring out a procession.

The incident happened after the Dhaka Metropolitan Police had banned all kinds of processions and rallies in the city without their permission.

Around 400 people took position near the northern gate of the mosque in Paltan area and tried to march forward around 1:45pm after the Juma prayers. But they failed to do so as additional police personnel were deployed nearby. At one point, they started chanting slogans denouncing establishment of sculptures, and atheists.

A group of 200-300 protesters then came out of the gate, broke a police barricade and marched towards Paltan intersection chanting "nara-e-takbeer".

At this, police chased, baton-charged and disperse them, said Abu Bakar Siddique, officer-in-charge of Paltan Police Station, adding that the protesters threw brick chips at the law enforcers.

Earlier in the day, additional members of police were deployed in Paltan, Press Club, Bijoy Nagar, Kakrail and Shahbagh areas to avert any untoward situation.

After the Juma prayers on the last few Fridays, members of Islamist organisations, including Hefajat-e Islam, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish and Islami Andolon Bangladesh, took out processions from the mosque. Yesterday's demonstration was unannounced and was not brought out under any banner.

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Let's fight Covid-19

FROM PAGE 1

locally, and providing them with financial assistance to face challenges in the wake of the pandemic.

In her first proposal, Hasina said the world needs to ensure universal, equitable, timely and affordable access to quality vaccines.

She pointed out that the 2030 development agenda recognised the fundamental role of Universal Health Coverage for achieving the SDGs guided by the principle of equity.

"In the same spirit, when it comes to access to vaccines, no one should be left behind... this would help us defeat the pandemic, save lives and accelerate our economic recovery."

The PM in her second proposal said the world must treat the novel coronavirus vaccine as a "global public good". The World Health Organisation initiative of Access to Covid-19 Tools (ACT) and COVAX facility can play a vital role in this regard, she added.

Hasina said the developed countries should commit to transferring technology for the local manufacturing of vaccines in developing countries using IP rights waiver under the TRIPS Agreement.

"Bangladesh has the capacity and is ready to produce vaccines if opportunity is given," she noted.

In her third proposal, the premier said the challenges faced by the developing countries in the context of the pandemic should be specifically recognised.

"The UN, international financial institutions, civil society alongside the national governments must do their share and actively cooperate with each other to combat Covid-19."

Hasina urged the international community to take a renewed pledge to accomplish the 2030 Agenda for a sustainable world.

She said the Covid-19 can never be brought under control in one place unless it is brought under control everywhere.

Mentioning that globally over 1.4 million people have already died and hundreds more are dying every day, she said the pandemic has made many people poorer, while many others are sliding back to poverty.

"Malnutrition, discrimination and increasing inequalities are gripping the nations, and the education system got disrupted. It caused sharp decline in trade, commerce and tourism impacting people's livelihoods."

The PM said the pandemic has devastated the health systems and economies across the world. "However, the pandemic offers us an opportunity for a united response to safeguard people's lives and livelihoods, and learn from the crisis to build back better."

She said the world's fight against Covid-19 has not ended yet as many countries are facing a second or third wave.

Noting that Bangladesh is also badly affected by the pandemic, Hasina said, "The Covid-19 has heavily impacted our economy, our lives and livelihoods, our migrant communities and jeopardised our hard-earned development gains."

She spelled out steps taken by her government to offset the novel coronavirus shock on various sectors of Bangladesh and minimise the sufferings of the people hit hard by the nationwide Covid-19 shutdown.

Hasina thanked the NAM chair and the UN secretary-general for convening the special UNGA session.

She hoped that the session would serve to galvanise collective actions, global solidarity and multilateral cooperation to deal with the pandemic.