

BANGLADESH UPDATE



2,252

New cases in 24hrs

4,73,991
Total cases6,772
Deaths3,90,951
Recoveries1,519,382
Deaths65,962,478
Total cases

Attacks against lawmakers rising worldwide

Says the International Parliamentary Union

APP, 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 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

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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.

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.

It aimed at setting up antigen testing

Govt moves to resume probe

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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 7, 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 autorickshaw 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 Kurni 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 Shakunt 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

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, Kakrak 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 Majlis 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

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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.

New homes, new hope for Rohingyas

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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.

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 concern in recent times.