

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



1,888
New cases in 24hrs



4,75,889
Total cases



6,807
Deaths



3,93,408
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,528,037
Deaths



66,429,093
Total cases

ATTACKS AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Cross-border media cooperation launched

IPI, five South Asian media organisations join hands



DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The International Press Institute (IPI) and five South Asian media organisations on Thursday launched a cross-border cooperation to highlight attacks on journalists and create public awareness and influence policymakers to end impunity for crimes against journalists in the region.

News organisations partnering with IPI under the project -- "Covering and investigating attacks against journalists in South Asia: a Cross-Border cooperation" -- are The Daily Star in Bangladesh, The Week -- Malayala Manorama in India, Dawn in Pakistan, and Nagarik (Nepali) and myRepublica (English) in Nepal.

"We are excited at the prospect of working with some of South Asia's most respected news organisations to give visibility to the attacks that journalists face in the region as well as their consequences on people's right and ability to be informed," IPI Executive Director Barbara Trionfi said.

The project is partially supported by UNESCO's Global Media Defence Fund, a multi-partner trust fund. The media partners will gather information about attacks on journalists and the impunity for crimes against journalists in their respective countries.

Also, throughout the year, the participating newspapers will cover the issue of journalist safety through different journalistic formats, in line with their editorial policies.

Special attention will be given to attacks against women journalists. The partners will also publish in-depth reports on the topic. All the stories and

reports will be shared for publication by participating news organisations.

IPI will engage with like-minded organisations in South Asia and around the world to raise awareness about the challenges journalists face.

Speaking on the collaboration, The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam said, "South Asia has witnessed a rapid decline in press freedom and safety of journalists. At least seven journalists have been killed in the four countries this year and investigations in earlier killings remain pending.

"The collaboration between publications in the region will shed light on this grave situation and allow us to highlight the challenges that we journalists face."

The Week Editor-in-Charge VS Jayachandran said The Week has been proud of standing by courageous journalists who risk their lives for truth and freedom, both of which are vital to the magazine's own existence as an honest and unbiased publication, as well as to the growth of good journalism in India, a country that has seen a number of attempts at silencing journalists in modern times.

Dawn Editor Zaffar Abbas said the cross-border collaboration is an excellent initiative as safety of journalists is a common cause for all.

"I am quite confident that together we will be able to highlight the issue of threat to journalists and journalism not just in our own countries but in the whole of South Asia."

Nagarik Editor-in-Chief Guna Raj Luintel said it's an important and timely effort to highlight the issue of safety of journalists in South Asia.

US sets record of Covid cases

225,201 new infections recorded in a day; UK eyes major fall in deaths by early 2021

AGENCIES

For the second day in a row, the United States on Friday notched a record number of coronavirus cases in 24 hours, reaching 225,201 new infections, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

The novel coronavirus has killed at least 1,519,213 people since the outbreak emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT yesterday.

At least 65,865,820 cases of coronavirus have been registered. Of these, at least 41,777,200 are now considered recovered.

On Friday, 12,177 new deaths and 677,808 new cases were recorded worldwide. Based on the latest reports, the countries with the most new deaths were the United States with 2,506 new deaths, followed by Italy with 814 and Brazil with 694.

The United States is also the worst-affected country with 279,008 deaths from 14,372,570 cases. At least 5,470,389 people have been declared recovered.

After the US, the hardest-hit countries are Brazil with 175,964 deaths from 6,533,968 cases, India with 139,700 deaths from 9,608,211 cases, Mexico with 108,863 deaths from 1,156,770

cases, and Britain with 60,617 deaths from 1,690,432 cases.

After a brief reprieve from the first wave, the United States has seen a dramatic resurgence in its epidemic in recent weeks. It had surpassed 200,000 new daily cases three times in the past month.

US health officials warned of a surge after millions of Americans traveled to celebrate last week's Thanksgiving holiday despite pleas from authorities to stay home.

For two weeks, the US has regularly topped 2,000 deaths per day.

The number of people hospitalized with Covid-19 is also steadily increasing, especially in the most populous states of California, Florida, New York and Texas, according to the Covid Tracking Project.

Meanwhile, British medical chiefs said the arrival of a vaccine should see deaths reduce "significantly" by early next year but warned social mixing over Christmas could cause another spike before then.

"We think it likely that by spring the effects of vaccination will begin to be felt in reducing Covid admissions, attendances and deaths significantly but there are many weeks before we get to that stage," the chief medical officers of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland said.

Elated and eager to get to work

FROM PAGE 1

served for breakfast, chicken, lentil and rice for lunch, and vegetables for dinner."

Six people are cooking for them and they will continue to do so until December 9.

The NGO Alliance will provide food and non food items among Rohingyas for at least a year.

"Besides, we have preparations for providing medical support, sanitation services, and education to one lakh Rohingyas for a year," he told The Daily Star.

The living quarters are divided in 120 clusters. They are now living in four. Many of them were still unpacking their belongings yesterday. Men brought the belongings from the vessels while women at home sorted those out.

The children were seen playing outside their houses.

Muhammad Anwar was selling beetle leaves on a small table near a building. "There were some rowdy people in Kutupalong [camp] who would always create unrest. There will be no such

unrest here. That's a relief," he said.

Aktar Hossain chimed in: "The government was saying we would get jobs here. I am a carpenter. The sooner I get work the better. We want work immediately."

On the island, the choices include cattle rearing, farming and fishing. Around 10,000 buffaloes and 1,000 sheep were grazing on a green field.

Commodore AA Mamun Chowdhury, director of the housing project called Ashrayan-3, said the island was also suitable for farming vegetables, fruits, fish, ducks, swans and chickens.

The Rohingyas were taken there amid concerns from the United Nations and other development partners who demanded an independent assessment of the project before the relocation took place.

There were allegations that the refugees were taken to Bhasan Char by force. But none of the Rohingyas said they went there against their will. The project director said the happy refugees will be able to bring more Rohingyas there.



Modunaghat Water Treatment Plant's daily withdrawal of 36 crore litres of water from the Halda river will pose a serious threat to the unique water body, experts, environmentalists say. Halda is the lone natural spawning ground of carp fish in South Asia.

PHOTO: FILE

Fresh threat haunts Halda

FROM PAGE 1

of Water Modelling (IWM) drew the ire of environmentalists for being vague, ill-motivated, and intentionally evading the risk factors facing the water body.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the feasibility study and found gaps between the final version and a summary presented in a review meeting organised by the Department of Environment on October 13 this year.

Following the criticism and a letter from the water resources ministry last month, IWM is now set to review the study.

QUESTIONS OVER FEASIBILITY STUDY

Chattogram Wasa wants to take around 336 million litres per day (MLD) water, according to the study. This will be added to the existing 225 MLD withdrawn for irrigation and other purposes.

That means a total of 561 MLD water will be extracted from Halda river every day.

Taking an average of water flow (1,875 MLD) during the dry season, particularly in February-March, total withdrawal would then be nearly one third of Halda river's water flow.

These two months are the pre-spawning period as brood fish usually lay eggs in April.

Noted Halda researcher and professor at the zoology department of Chittagong University Dr Manzoorul Kibria told The Daily Star, "The feasibility study assessed the water flow as 1,600 MLD to 2,150 MLD in the February-March period, which is crucial for Halda because spawning occurs in April.

"The total withdrawal of water will be 29.92 percent of the total water Halda holds at that time. This will reduce water flow drastically, allowing salinity far deeper into the Halda."

But this figure was presented as different in the review meeting, where IWM showed the water flow during February-March as 27,402 MLD -- raising doubts about the

authenticity and thoroughness of the study, Kibria said.

Referring to a study he conducted last year, he said, salinity is a major concern for Halda as it is on the rise after the construction of sluice gates, rubber dams, and irrigation projects. Due to salinity, a venomous sea snake -- Belcher's sea snake -- is now present in the Halda river, he added.

A three-year study since 2016 by Chattogram Wasa revealed 700mg of salinity per litre of water of Halda, while the ideal according to international standards is 600mg per litre.

The feasibility study also did not focus on specific details of how much water, plankton, and micro benthic organisms are needed for brood fish to be able to lay eggs as it regularly takes place in Halda.

It is also not made clear in the report how the withdrawal of water will affect the brood fish, dolphins, and overall biodiversity of the water body.

Kibria also said the study was based on old data -- for example, the study intentionally omitted the fact that high yields of fish eggs have been collected in the Halda every year since 2016, and the highest haul of eggs in the decade this year.

The IWM team did not meet local stakeholders such as egg collectors and local fisheries and administration officials when they prepared the feasibility study, Kibria said. Egg collectors, who work and live close to the Halda, confirmed this to The Daily Star.

Kibria proposed an alternative solution, suggesting a water reservoir be built with streams in the Mirsarai hilly area, rain water harvesting, and withdrawing water from the Muhuri river, Mohamaya lake, and Feni river -- all of which are also close to the economic zone.

A 2016 study on the ecological impact of water withdrawal from Halda led by Prof Ainun Nishat, a prominent water resources management and climate change specialist, had warned more removal

of water from Halda will have drastic impact on brood fish and overall aquatic life in the river.

Chairman of National River Conservation Commission Muzibur Rahman Hawladar, in a webinar held on November 20, said, "Chattogram Wasa assured us of not taking this project when I visited the spot after the first project [2018 project withdrawing 18 crore litres water daily] was implemented by them."

As per a High Court directive, there has to be a "no objection certificate" from the river commission for projects involving rivers but the Chattogram Wasa has not yet obtained it, he said.

"Halda River is a super living being. It has the right to live. Our constitution, laws allow us to sue any project that wreaks harms on a river, its biodiversity," he added.

REASSESSMENT 'SOON'

On November 8, the water resources ministry sent a letter to IWM asking it to review the feasibility study and include all stakeholders' comments.

Contacted, Executive Director of IWM Abu Saleh Khan told The Daily Star that they were going to launch the reassessment of the study soon.

About the concerns raised by Halda experts and the river conservation commission, he said the study prepared had valid grounds.

"If 200 cubic metre per second water is released from Kaptai Dam, there will be no harm to Halda. As in the dry season, water flow recedes to a remarkable level, Chattogram Wasa and the Power Development Board [which runs Kaptai Dam] must come to an understanding about releasing water from upstream," he said.

AKM Fazlullah, managing director of Chattogram Wasa, claimed that he did not know about the High Court directive to obtain a "no objection certificate" from the river commission.

"If so, we will get it from them. No, we have started paperwork seeking clearance from DoE and other relevant authorities," he said.

"I don't know about the study as it is IWM's function," he added.

Still not there

FROM PAGE 1

ASHIM KUMAR UKIL

Election Commission has become strong. But a better system of democracy is yet to get a complete shape," he said.

A top leader in the "Sarbadalia Chhatra Oikya", a platform of all students organisations that led the mass uprising against military ruler Ershad, Ashim Kumar also said, "We are yet to be able to completely uproot militancy and fundamentalist groups, who were patronised by those who came to power after the fall of the Ershad's regime."

Ashim Kumar, one of the popular student leaders during the anti-Ershad movement, said, "Due to some silly mistakes, the foundation of democracy has not become as strong as desired."

Despite this limitation "we have achieved many goals that we had set during the mass movement", he said.

"We have stopped the culture of change in power through killings, coups, conspiracies and the back door. We have ensured change in power through ballots although 1/11 type government [military-backed caretaker government in 2007] comes as a threat to us," he also said.

He said, "We have no scope to become complacent with this achievement."

Ashim said, "We, the students organisations of the country, had formed "Sarbadalia Chhatra Oikya" in October 10, 1990, to achieve some goals, which included restoration of democracy by restoring people's voting rights and by ending the politics of killings, coups and conspiracies, and establish Bangladesh in light of the spirit of the great Liberation War.

"We vowed in front of the 'Aporajeo Bangla' in Dhaka University that we will not give up our movement until our goals were achieved."

All political alliances as well as the country's people rallied to achieve those goals, he said.

AMANULLAH AMAN

FROM PAGE 1

Khaleda Zia, said.

"During the formation of the Sarbadalia Chhatra Oikya, I administered the oath taking in front of Aporajeo Bangla that we will ensure people's voting rights through restoration of democracy. But what we see now -- people have no voting rights," he said.

Aman alleged that an undeclared one-party rule was going on in the country.

He said Shaheed Dr Milon, Nur Hossain, Selim, Delowar, Raufun Basunia, Zehad made the supreme sacrifice, but their aim was not achieved since a "neo-autocratic regime" was running the county.

Mentioning that the Language Movement in 1952, Mass Uprising in 1969, and Liberation War in 1971 did not fail, he said the ongoing movement to restore democracy and people's voting rights would also not fail.

"We need a strong movement against the neo-autocratic regime to get back people's basis rights," Aman said.

He said during the anti-Ershad movement, all political and professional organisations were united. "We also need a united movement of all political, student and professional bodies to oust the present autocratic ruler and restore democracy."

He said historically people's movement against any undemocratic regime never fails.

"Learning from the movement against Ershad regime, we will surely be able to achieve our goal through a strong movement with the participation of people of all walks of lives and that day is not far away."

RUHIN HOSSAIN PRINCE

FROM PAGE 1

people's voting rights and to restore democracy. But, we are yet to achieve those goals," Ruhin, also secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, said.

He said, "During the anti-Ershad movement, we had taken an oath that the country will run in light of the spirit of the Liberation War, communal forces will not be patronised. But we didn't keep those promises."

"After 30 years of the fall of the autocratic ruler, we see that politics without any ethics prevailing everywhere."

Ruhin said communal forces are becoming stronger day by day as the political parties who were in power compromised with them.

"Staying in power by any means has become the main target of the political parties."

The aims of the mass uprising in 1990 was to give democracy a permanent shape, ensure changes in power through fair elections and reestablishing of the spirit of the Liberation War. But those goals were yet to be achieved, said Ruhin.

"Political parties with values need to wake up and take the people with them to engage in another movement to fulfil the aspirations of those who sacrificed their lives to oust the autocratic government of Ershad," he said.

The left-leaning leader said the dreams of the martyrs of the movement against the autocratic ruler will be materialised "if we can ensure people's voting and their basic rights".

Ruhin said, "We need to unite the alternative political forces against the ongoing culture of unethical politics."