

A decade of war in Syria killed over 388,000: monitor

AFP, Beirut

The overall death toll for Syria's civil war has reached 388,652 since it began a decade ago this month, a war monitor said yesterday.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the figures includes almost 117,388 civilians, among them more than 22,000 children.

Attacks by the Syrian regime and allied militia forces accounted for the majority of civilian deaths, said the Britain-based monitor which relies on sources inside Syria for its reports.

The Observatory's previous tally was issued in December and stood at more than 387,000.

Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said 2020 saw the lowest annual death toll since the war began with just over 10,000 deaths.

Battles slowed this year as a ceasefire held in northwestern Syria and attention turned to containing the coronavirus pandemic.

The Observatory also documented at least 16,000 deaths in government prisons and detention centres since the conflict erupted in 2011 after the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

It said, however, that the real number was likely higher because its tally does not include 88,000 people believed to have died of torture in regime prisons.

Today the Damascus government controls more than 60 percent of Syria after a string of Russia-backed victories against jihadists and rebels since 2015.

Among the regions still beyond its reach are the last rebel enclave of Idlib in the northwest, Turkish-held areas along the northern border, and northeastern parts of the country held by US-backed Kurdish forces.

The war has forced more than half the country's pre-war population to flee their homes.

Some 200,000 people have gone missing, according to the war monitor.

No student

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Deputy Attorney General Abdullah-Al-Mahmud Bashar placed the reports before the HC bench in line with a suo moto (voluntary) order from Thursday.

Bashar told The Daily Star that necessary steps have been taken to ensure security of the victim and his family members, as well as his health treatment.

The bench on Thursday wanted to know what legal action was taken against Yahya for beating up the student.

The HC bench came up with the suo moto (voluntary) order after DAG Bashar placed some newspaper reports on the incident before the bench.

Video footage of the child being beaten by Yahya went viral on social media and shocked many.

Also yesterday, rights organisation Ain O Salsih Kendra (ASK) expressed concerns about the incidents of torture on children at madrasas.

ASK said establishing a neutral monitoring system at madrasas and other child education institutions was necessary. And ensuring punishments of perpetrators will stop such incidents.

It is also necessary to train the teachers and employees of such institutions on the Children Act, International Child Rights Charter and relevant issues, ASK said in a statement.

Russia deploys

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The floating observatory consists of strings with spherical glass and stainless steel modules attached to them.

On Saturday, scientists observed the modules being carefully lowered into the freezing waters through a rectangular hole in the ice.

"A neutrino telescope measuring half a cubic kilometre is situated right under our feet," Dmitry Naumov of the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research told AFP while standing on the lake's frozen surface.

In several years the telescope will be expanded to measure one cubic kilometre, Naumov said.

The Baikal telescope will rival Ice Cube, a giant neutrino observatory buried under the Antarctic ice at a US research station at the South Pole, he added.

Russian scientists say the telescope is the largest neutrino detector in the Northern Hemisphere and Lake Baikal -- the largest freshwater lake in the world -- is ideal for housing the floating observatory.

"Of course, Lake Baikal is the only lake where you can deploy a neutrino telescope because of its depth," Bair Shoibonov of the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research told AFP.

"Fresh water is also important, water clarity too. And the fact that there is ice cover for two-two and a half months is also very important."

The telescope is the result of a collaboration between scientists from the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Russia and Slovakia.



Palestinian women take part in a protest against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to the heritage site of ancient Susya as members of Israeli forces stand guard, in Susya village in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

President Yahya arrives

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senior military officials for an on-the-spot situation report. Siddiq Salik, then public relations officer in the Pakistan army at Dhaka, reports that the president was not presented with any in-depth study of the complex political situation. He also didn't ask for it.

At the end of the briefing, Yahya said, "Don't worry. I will line up Mujib tomorrow... will give him a bit of my mind... shall cold shoulder him and won't even invite him for lunch. Then I will meet him the day after and see how he reacts. If he doesn't behave, I'll know the answer."

The meeting dispersed, and no recommendations were made. This was the last military conference

Yahya Khan held in Dhaka, reports Siddiq Salik. [Siddiq Salik, Witness to Surrender, UPL 1997, pg.59]

WHAT WILL BANGABANDHU DEMAND?

Archer K Blood, then American consul general in Dhaka, writes in his memoir that just minutes before Yahya's arrival Alamgir Rahman came by to tell him that Bangabandhu was going to urge Yahya to agree to an immediate handover of power to the Awami League in East Pakistan. Now that Bhutto had made similar proposal in his March 14 speech and Bangabandhu held the de facto control of the East Pakistan government the demand seemed more tenable, comments Blood.

Bangabandhu would also demand that the strength of the military in East Pakistan be cut back to the level existing before March 1, 1971. Bangabandhu, according to Alamgir, would then agree to the convening of the National Assembly and would accept any time limit for constitution-making set by Yahya. He further informed that any attempt by Yahya to exert force would be met by an instant declaration of independence. [Archer K Blood, The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh, UPL, 2006, pg. 189]

PEACEFUL AGITATION CONTINUES

Third week into the non-cooperation movement, peaceful agitations continued and all offices and businesses remained shut except

those permitted in the Awami League directives.

Protesting the killing of two students by the army, Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury resigned as vice chancellor of Dhaka University.

Daylong meetings and rallies went on in the capital and black flags were hoisted on vehicles and buildings. Defying the marital law order no defence installation employees joined office.

Swadhin Bangla Sangram Parishad withdrew their earlier call to set up check posts at various points of the city to prevent flight of capital from Bangladesh to West Pakistan.

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Quader Mirza sued over violence, death

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Companiganj Police Station to submit a report within 15 working days stating whether any complaint or case was lodged with the police station earlier in this connection.

On March 9, a clash took place between two factions of the AL at Basurhat, leaving Alauddin dead. Besides, 30 people, including six policemen, were injured.

One faction is led by Mirza and the other by Companiganj upazila unit AL Organising Secretary Mizanur Rahman

Badal. After the clash, both groups blamed each-other for the killing.

Talking to The Daily Star, the victim's younger brother Emdad Hossain Raju said he tried to file a case with Companiganj Police Station on March 11 over his brother's death.

"But police did not record it as Quader Mirza was made the prime accused. Rather, they suggested that I drop Mirza's name from the list of accused," Raju claimed.

He then filed the case with the court yesterday.

Asked, Mir Jahidul Haque Roney, OC of Companiganj Police Station, said there were some errors in the complaint and police asked the deceased's brother to come with correction.

But he didn't come to the police station, the OC said.

Contacted, Mirza claimed he was a victim of conspiracy hatched by his rival group.

The mayor also said he was passing days amid insecurity as his rivals were conspiring to kill him.

Earlier on February 19, another deadly clash took place in the area between the two factions. A local journalist, Borhan Uddin Muzakir, 30, who was shot during the violence, died from wounds a day later.

Mirza has been making comments bringing allegations of corruption and misdeeds by AL men in Noakhali and Feni over the last two months. On multiple occasions, he came down heavily on government officials for their alleged involvement with corrupt politicians.

Increasing capacity a big challenge

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working in jails, against posts of 141 doctors and 173 pharmacists and nurses.

Jails are now equipped with sufficient medicine stocks and 15 ambulances were bought for 15 jails to ensure treatment facilities [for inmates]. The authorities will buy some more ambulances gradually.

TDS: How many foreign inmates are currently in jail and to which countries do they belong?

IG Prisons: There are around 534 foreign inmates now and they were mainly found arrested in cases over illegal entry in the country, narcotics, human trafficking, cheque forgery, and fraudulence.

These nationals are from India, Myanmar, Pakistan, Nigeria, Tanzania, Nepal, Peru, Algeria, Malaysia, Cameroon, Spain, Japan, the UK, China, Ukraine, Guinea, Mali, South Korea, Ghana, Kenya, Iran, Uganda, South Africa, and Namibia.

Of these inmates, around 112 have completed their sentences but they are still in jail as their home countries have not verified their identities

yet. Some of them are staying in jail since 2003 even after the end of their sentences.

A proposal has been sent to the home ministry seeking steps to send these inmates back to their countries. Of these "released" inmates, the largest number, 99, is from India -- but they are still passing their days in jail here.

TDS: What initiatives are being taken for militants' de-radicalisation in jail?

IG Prisons: There are 631 militant inmates and they are kept in separate wards and cells under tougher vigilance so that they do not get the scope to meet others.

We are providing counselling regularly to these inmates. The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit and Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) of the police have communicated with us regarding de-radicalisation initiatives. We are hopeful of starting the formal process with psychologists and experts soon with the cooperation of these two specialised units.

TDS: What is being done to stop the illegal use of cellphones in jail?

IG Prisons: Every inmate is checked very carefully so that no one can enter the premises with a cellphone.

We are also installing a jammer [instrument used to prevent cellphones receiving signals] in every jail and increasing its strength. We are also installing some other modern equipment so that no one can use cellphones.

But cellphones are still being used as some of the jail guards are taking their inside although they are not authorised to do so.

We are increasing monitoring, checking CCTV regularly, and keeping our efforts on to stop the practice.

TDS: How do you deal with narcotics case inmates in jail?

IG Prisons: The narcotics case inmates are provided counselling, treatment, and motivation regularly. The jails have around 24,101 narcotics case inmates now.

We check these inmates at the jail gates when they return from court after hearings as they try to bring narcotics with them. Besides, two body scanners were installed at Dhaka and Kashimpur jails as part of

ensuring proper checks.

TDS: What are the main challenges in converting jails into correction centres?

IG Prisons: A major challenge in jails is to increase capacity and we have taken on different projects for this.

Manpower shortage is another challenge for us as we are not able to oversee all inmate activities properly for this. We are working with the ministry [of home] to address the manpower shortage.

Besides, we are now providing training in different trades in only 28 out of 68 jails in the country.

Once we are able to introduce training facilities in all jails then the inmates will be able to rehabilitate themselves after completing their time, using the training. We are now getting trainers from the social welfare department.

If we get support from the narcotics department, ATU, CTTC, and other agencies like the social welfare department, then we hope that we will be able to turn jails into correction centres.

Protesters in Argentina attack bus carrying president

AFP, Buenos Aires

Dozens of protesters kicked and threw rocks at a minibus carrying Argentine President Alberto Fernandez on Saturday as he visited an area devastated by forest fires, TV footage showed.

As he left a community center in the town of Lago Puelo in the southern Patagonia region, Fernandez had to take refuge behind a wall of people as a crowd of demonstrators pushed toward him and his delegation.

The protesters later stopped the bus carrying the president, punching and kicking it and throwing stones that broke windows in the vehicle, according to footage broadcast by the TN network and the newspaper Clarin.

Fernandez sought to downplay the violence, saying it was the work of a small number of people.

"I am sure that this violence was not taken part in by the people of Chubut nor by those who inhabit our beloved Argentina," he wrote, referring to the province the surrounds the town.

With few police on hand, the crowd managed to halt the president's bus and other vehicles in his entourage for several minutes, with some protesters throwing themselves against the hood of Fernandez's vehicle.

Once it was freed, several other vehicles snaked their way through the crowd and sped away with the presidential bus.

Clarín reported that the demonstrators were angry over mining projects in Chubut province, which is part of Patagonia, and with the provincial governor.

The fires that have blazed through Patagonia for days have claimed one life, while 11 other people are reported missing, officials said Friday.

Leftist leader

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petition will be fixed after filing of a new application, Ruku added.

The lawyer said the charges brought against Ruhul include spreading propaganda to tarnish the image of the country and spoil the government's reputation, trying to destabilise law and order by spreading confusion and animosity among people using social media.

Meanwhile, leaders and activists of Sramik-Krishak, Chhatra-Janata Oikya Parishad in Khulna will form a human chain in front of Khulna Press Club this afternoon demanding the immediate release of Ruhul and abolishment of the "draconian" DSA.

Ruhul, coordinator of Sramik-Krishak, Chhatra-Janata Oikya Parishad in Khulna, was picked up by police from a home in Khulna city on February 27 after he uploaded a post on social media calling for a symbolic "coffin rally" towards Dhaka protesting the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed in custody.

The following day, Ruhul was shown arrested under the DS.

Writer Mushtaq died in custody recently after languishing in jail for over nine months in another case under the same act.

A Khulna court placed Ruhul on two days' remand on February 27.

District admin

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"Soudia Agro Solar PV Power Plant" for grabbing the land, he said.

Nafis, along with his men on March 12, went to the spot and forcibly removed the landless people who were living beside flood protection embankment in Bera municipality's Paina area.

They also damaged the croplands in the area only for grabbing the land, Manu alleged.

Locals, however, submitted a written complaint to the deputy commissioner of the district yesterday, protesting the land grabbing by the son of the lawmaker.

Kabir Mahamud, the deputy commissioner of Pabna, told The Daily Star that they received the written complaint and took initiatives to investigate the allegations.

"I have already ordered the Bera upazila nirbahi officer to investigate the matter." The DC said.

Refuting the allegation against him, Nafis, however, told the journalists that he had plans to establish a university primarily named Lutfunnesa University of Agriculture and Information Technology, a college named Bir Muktizuddha Samsul Haque Tuku Technical College, and Soudia Agro Solar Power Plant in the area.

He also alleged that Manu's men were demanding extortion from him and creating obstacles to disrupt the development work.

Refuting the allegation, Manu said he was never involved in the sand lifting business or extortion.

"When the son of the lawmaker and his men are grabbing government properties in the area, I protested them," Manu said.

Vising the spot a few days ago, journalists found the men of the lawmaker's son hanged signboard and started construction beside the river.

14 more killed in Myanmar

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advocacy group.

Security forces opened fire on protesters in Hlaing Tharyar, one of the largest townships in Yangon, and some protesters wielding sticks and knives fought back while others fled -- carrying away the injured and bundling them into cars.

At least 14 protesters were killed, the Myanmar Now news service said yesterday, while some other domestic media gave even higher death tolls.

Myanmar Now said the information came from a rescue worker and a hospital near to the industrial district.

A doctor at a private hospital treating the injured confirmed the use of both live rounds and rubber bullets.

Chinese state-owned broadcaster

CGTN said two Chinese-funded clothes factories in the Hlaing Tharyar district were set ablaze by people who arrived on motorcycles, armed with iron rods, axes and gasoline.

China urged Myanmar to stop violence and protect Chinese companies and personnel after the attacks, reports Reuters.

Throughout the day, gunshots were heard continuously by residents hiding in their homes, while military trucks were sighted driving through Hlaing Tharyar's streets.

A police officer posted a TikTok video hours before the crackdown, saying in a voiceover that they will be bringing heavy weaponry.

"I will not have mercy on Hlaing Tharyar and they will fight back seriously too because there are all kinds of characters there," said

the officer under the account @ aungthuraophyo40.

The video, which was seen and verified by AFP factcheckers, was removed hours later.

State television MRTV said one Myanmar police officer was killed and three were wounded during protests yesterday.

MRTV said the police were wounded in Bago, central Myanmar. It accused protesters of throwing rocks and using catapults and said it was also trying to verify whether they used guns. It said Lieutenant Kyaw Naing Oo died of a chest wound.

'I WILL FIGHT UNTIL THE END'

In the northern jade-producing city of Hpakant, a small protest was broken up before noon when security forces arrived and a man was shot dead, according to a doctor and a local news

outlet.

In Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city, protesters retrieved the injured from the street, running to safety after police opened fire on them, according to AFP reporters on the ground.

"A 24-year old woman... died from a gunshot to her face and she arrived dead," a doctor told AFP, adding that at least seven more were injured from gunshot wounds.

Despite the daily bloodshed, those in the anti-coup movement remain defiant, and have hardened in recent weeks.

"I've seen the fallen heroes give their lives," said 21-year-old Ma Khine Lay, admitting she was afraid ever as she helped with rebuilding barricades out of bricks and bamboo poles in a Yangon township.

"I will fight until the end."