City

MAYHEM IN BRAHMANBARIA

Hefajat men did it divided in 7 groups

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Hefajat men unleashed mayhem in Brahmanbaria during their hartal on Sunday after being divided into seven groups, according to locals and police

Five of the groups damaged and carried out arson attacks on establishments, including the land office, police lines, a music academy, municipality office and public library. They also attacked a Hindu temple and the local press club.

All these establishments are situated on the northern side of the Town Khal (canal).

The other two groups carried out attacks on establishments on the other side of the canal. They ransacked the district council building, torched vehicles and houses of some Awami League and

Chhatra League leaders.
One of the groups blocked rail tracks in Dakshin Poirotola area of the town around 10:00am on Sunday, forcing Sonar Bangla Express to stop.

Later, the Hefajat men attacked the

train, leaving at least 10 passengers injured, said locals and railway sources.

The Hefajat supporters damaged the locomotive, broke 117 windows, and vandalised 15 carriages of the train, said Brahmanbaria Station Master Md Shoyeb Ahmed.

Police have collected CCTV footage. After analysing the footage, they believe Hefajat men carried out the attacks in a planned way after being divided into

A police officer in Brahmanbaria also showed this correspondent some of the Trail of devastation by Hefajat activists

could be seen everywhere in the town. The burnt smell was still in the air. The music academy, founded in

memory of the subcontinent's top most music maestro Sur-Samrat Alauddin told reporters that BNP-Jamaa Khan, and its instruments were were also involved in the attacks.

In its annual report on the global state

of human rights, the US Department

of State documented in-depth the

documentation of the state of human

rights across the world and it acts as

Sinha Rashed Khan was highlighted as an

exemplary case of the state of "unlawful"

The extra-judicial killing of Major

"Suspicious deaths occurred during

some raids, arrests, and other law

frequently accounted for such deaths

by claiming -- when they took a suspect

in custody to a crime scene to recover

weapons or identify coconspirators --

accomplices fired on police and killed

torture is still very much a reality in the

case of Bangladesh, pointing out the

case of Teknaf-based journalist Faridul

Mostafa as an example. Mostafa was kept

in custody by former officer-in-charge of

2019 and according to his wife, tortured

in custody. When Mostafa appeared in

court three days after his arrest, his wife

said his hands and legs were broken,

and the nails of his fingers and toes were

pulled out. His eyesight had been badly

affected by red chili powder rubbed

in his eyes and he was forced to drink

sewage water, causing severe diarrhea,"

killings and torture, a culture of arbitrary

an example of how arbitrary arrests can

be used to disenfranchise people.

Hand-in-hand with extrajudicial

"Mostafa was arrested on September

the police station for 11 months.

The report pointed that custodial

ntorcement operations. Security forces

violations happening in Bangladesh. The report is an ann

resource for its foreign policy.

or "arbitrary" killings in 2020.

the suspect," said the report.

The establishments that suffered the brunt of the Hefajat mayhem also include the bungalows of the district judge, the deputy commissioner, and the superintendent of police, railway station and rail police outpost, civil surgeon's office, fisheries office, circuit house, Sadar upazila land office, Water Development Board office, Zilla parishad and municipal office, Ansar and VDP office, Khatihata Highway police station, Ashuganj's Syed Nazrul Islam Bridge toll plaza and it's police outpost, Muktijodhha Sangsad building, fire service office and Directorate of Education Engineering office, said the district police in an email to journalists.

Besides, police issued a statement on Tuesday afternoon, saying 23 vehicles, including microbus and motorcycles, were burned in the SP office's garage and police outpost-2.

In the fire, a machine of the NID server office was also badly damaged.

On Sunday, Brahmanbaria turned into a battle ground. A train and a temple where Dol Purnima puja was being held couldn't escape Hefajat's wrath.

activists attacked and Brahmanbaria's temple Sree Sree Anandamayee Kalibari Mandir. They trashed and broke the idols of Krishna and the Goddess Kali. The donation box for the temple was looted, while the artifacts used for ceremonies were ransacked and strewn about.

Nine cases have so far been filed over the violence in the district. A total of 16,500 people have been accused in the cases.

Meanwhile, an AL delegation led by party's Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif visited the affected houses of AL leaders and BCL President Al Nahian Khan Joy visited the damaged houses of the leaders of the student organisation.

After visiting the press club, Hanif told reporters that BNP-Jamaat men

least 251 returning migrant workers from

Southeast Asia and the Middle East with

allegations of "tarnishing the image of

queries, the police said the migrant

workers' destination countries had

requested authorities to detain the

workers once they returned to the

characterised these requests as specious

and said while some of the returning

workers were jailed abroad, they had

all either completed their sentences or

had their sentences commuted due to

The report also paints a bleak picture

of the situation of worker rights. "The

law continued to ban trade unions and

severely restricted the right to organise

and bargain collectively for the nearly

500,000 workers in export processing

complaints were filed for unfair labour

practices; three were resolved according

to the law and standard operating

procedures, six remained open, and

no employers were penalised," said the

report. It documented meticulously

how labour unions fail to adequately

Pertaining to migrant workers, the report said, "The government does not

provide sufficient victim protective

services, nor does it consistently follow

victim identification procedures. There

are no government-owned shelters for

the state of indigenous rights by stating,

"No land disputes were resolved during

In addition, the report clamped on

The report also documented the state

of women's rights, LGBTI rights and

represent the rights of workers.

adult male victims.

"The government reported nine

Covid-19," said the report.

zones (EPZs).

"However, human rights groups

It said that in response to media

[Bangladesh]," said the report.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

US state department

paints bleak picture

A railway car for the metro rail being unloaded from the SPM Bangkok, which arrived with the first metro train, complete with six cars, in Mongla port yesterday morning. The vessel left for Mongla from Japan on March 4.

Enforce partial lockdown

strategic plan and actions based on the government directives should be devised immediately.

He also said the committee advised the government to replace the words "limited" and "discourage" mentioned in two directives with "specific number" and "stop" respectively.

Contacted, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said, "I also agree with the experts' views. I think if we cannot control the situation right now, the casualties will be high. Once the situation gets out of control, it would

"Now it is time to be strict to curb the transmission," he said, adding that the existing directives will be reviewed soon if they do not bring the desired outcome.

Prof Nazrul Islam, another member of the NTAC, said the directives were basically "directives in principal", but how those would be implemented is not clear.

"So, the meeting decided to formulate an implementation strategy soon and implement it

accordingly," he said.

BSMMU said immediate actions are needed before the situation gets out Mohammad

Husain, consultant at Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), said it was about time to go for a targeted approach.

"Effective and timely intervention is required in those areas where transmission rate is high. Enforcing shutdown is the last weapon. If we fail to contain the transmission with the existing directives, we will be left with no other option but the last

The former vice-chancellor of

US slates wide use of DSA

in managing Covid-19. On April 23, Health Minister Zahid Maleque banned all health officials from speaking to the

media," the report documented.

"On October 13, the Ministry of
Home Affairs issued a press release restricting "false, fabricated, misleading and provocative statements" regarding the government, public representatives, army officers, police, and law enforcement through social media in the country and abroad," said the report.

The report pointed out that the ministry said in the interest of maintaining stability and law and order in the country, legal action would be taken against individuals who did not comply.

Without mentioning names, the report came down heavily on the prosecution of writer Mushtaque Ahmed, cartoonist Ahmed Kishore, and the others implicated in a DSA case.

Media accounts of a police case, involving 11 accused, detailed Rab's search of mobile phones of two accused and finding "anti-government" chats with other accused. "According to the police, these "anti-government" chats sufficed as evidence to charge and detain the individuals under the DSA," said the state department report. The report continues on to say

that media outlets that criticised the government were pressured by the government.

"Libel, slander, defamation, and blasphemy are treated as criminal offenses, most commonly employed against individuals speaking against the government, the prime minister, or other government officials," noted the report, adding that the law referring to defamation of individuals and organisations was used to prosecute

opposition figures and members of civil

It documented the prosecution of Prof Sirajum Munira by Begum Rokeya University authorities and Prof Kazi Zahidur Rahman by Rajshahi University, under DSA.

It detailed that Munira was arrested for a Facebook post that the university authorities claimed mocked the late Mohammad Nasim, a former senior government official in the health ministry. "Although Munira apologised and deleted the post, police used a screenshot of the deleted post as evidence to arrest her," it added.

The report furthermore included how journalists faced targeted physical assaults during the pandemic.
"According to the RSF [Reporters

Sans Frontières], 10 men beat journalist Shariful Alam Chowdhury with steel bars, machetes, and hammers. During the beating, Chowdhury's arms and legs were broken. Chowdhury's family told RSF they believed local village council authorities called for this attack," said

The enforced disappearance of photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol was also mentioned in the report as an exemplary incident of the violation of human rights.

"On March 10, photojournalist and news editor Shafiqul Islam Kajol disappeared after leaving his house for work. The previous day a member of parliament filed a case against Kajol and 31 others, claiming a media story covering a crime syndicate involving drugs, money, and prostitution defamed the member of parliament," said the report.

"On May 3, police in the border town Benapole confirmed to the

press that Kajol was 'rescued' near the border with Índia and detained him on trespassing charges. Kajol's family told the press they believe Kajol was forcibly disappeared and held in government detention from March through May. Kajol spent 237 days in prison on defamation charges and was released on bail on December 25," it narrated. Along with freedom of expression,

media and press, the report also documented the increased, and arbitrary surveillance faced by citizens and journalists. Éetween March and September,

the government became increasingly active in monitoring social media sites and other electronic communications in order to scan public discussions on Covid-19 and the government's handling of the virus. In March the information ministry announced the formation of a unit to monitor social media and television outlets for 'rumors' related to Covid-19," it said.

Intelligence and law enforcement may monitor communications with the permission of the Ministry of Home Affairs, but police rarely obtained such permission from the courts to monitor private correspondence," added the report.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken while launching the report said, "The pandemic impacted not only individuals' health, but their abilities to safely enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Some governments used the crisis as a pretext to restrict rights and consolidate authoritarian rule.

"Human rights are interdependent, and the deprivation of one right can cause the broader fabric of a society to

DU teacher Samia Rahman sues unknown people under DSA

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University teacher Samia Rahman yesterday sued some unknown people under the Digital Security Act for what she claimed was feeding a DU probe body false and fabricated information.

She filed the case against one Alex Martin of the University of Chicago Press Journal, who she said was made up person, and others with the Cyber Tribunal of Dhaka, said Shamim Al Mamun, bench assistant of the tribunal.

Judge Mohammad Ash Sams Joglul Hossain of the tribunal took the case into cognisance and recorded the complainant's statements, Mamun told The Daily Star.

The tribunal will pass an order today (April 1) in this regard, Mamun

In the case statements, the complainant said that an email -- said to be from the University of Chicago Press Journal -- based on which the DU probe body on September 15, 2017, recommended her demotion from associate professor to assistant professor, bringing allegations of over plagiarism, was fake and fabricated.

The complainant said the email was sent to the DU probe body by Alex Martin but it was learnt that no one by that name worked in the journal after she communicated with the journal authorities.

Some people creating a fake email ID circulated fake and fabricated information about the complainant, the case statements added.

Not named

of Bangladesh's independence, he

Hefajat leaders used thousands of nnocent madrasa students to attack government facilities.

"All the records of a land office were burnt ... People of the region will suffer for years."

The IGP said several policemen were critically injured in the attacks in Brahmanbaria and Hathazari of Chattogram.

A team of officers from Police Headquarters led by the IGP will visit Brahmanbaria today.

Hefajat-e-Islam activists were demonstrating at Baitul Mukarram in the capital on Friday against the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi when a clash occurred between them and police and ruling party men.

As soon as the news spread, the students of Hathazari madrasa in Chattogram began a demonstration during which four students were shot dead by what Hefajat said was police shooting

Around the same time, another activist got killed in a clash with law enforcers in Brahmanbaria.

The Islamist organisation then called for demonstrations on Saturday and hartal on Sunday protesting the deaths.

activists Hefajat vandalised vehicles, blocked roads and attacked government facilities in different districts in the following days. But only a handful of people from the Islamist organisation were accused in

cases filed over the violence. The reported death toll reached 13 in three days. Hefajat claims at least 17 of its members got killed, and over 500 injured.

arrests further muddy the rights situation, the year." It mentioned the state's pledge Banglamotor, Topkhana implied the report. to solve land disputes and demilitarise Road, Asadgate, Farmgate and even in The report mentioned the arrest of the the Chattogram Hill Tracts, and how that Middle-east migrant worker returnees as commitment is yet to be kept.

different parts of the capital, including Kazipara,

asking passengers to wear masks and maintain other health guidelines.

But in many buses, passengers were seen sitting side by side, posing risk of coronavirus infection. Some of the buses were also seen plying with over 50 percent passengers.

Paribahan operating on Dhaka Zoo to Motijheel route, said they tried to follow the government directives to carry half passengers of their capacities.

between 9:00am and 11:00am," he told The Daily Star. "Many passengers, who boarded bus first, asked me not to allow anymore

passengers as they paid the increased fare. On the other hand, passengers who could not avail the bus forced us to allow them in," he explained. Munshi Sabbir Hossain, officer-incharge of Khilkhet Police Station, said

undreds of commuters gathered at Khilkhet bus stop yesterday like any other days. But as no buses were taking passengers from there as they have

capacities from Uttara areas, commuters demonstrated there. In this situation, police had to intervene to control the situation, he

Later, some buses took passengers over 50 percent of their capacities and the situation returned to normalcy around 11:00am, locals said.

Commuters suffer for transport curbs

services at Farmgate bus stop, one of the busiest stops in the city, for half an hour from 3:00pm and found most of the buses were carrying passengers over the 50 percent capacity.

When this correspondent was taking video of a crowded bus of Ayat Paribahan, at least seven passengers were forced to leave the bus

stoppage, many passengers gathered before the bus door, even before the passengers left buses. While some bus staffers were seen asking people not to get into buses, some others were taking passengers beyond their 50 percent capacity.

A middle-aged woman was seen waiting for a bus for more than 20 minutes. When this correspondent approached her, she said after admitting her mother to Combined Military Hospital, she could have reached Farmgate by a Trust bus to go to her

"I am trying to catch a bus of Labbayek Paribahan. I approached three buses, but failed to get into," she said, wishing not be named. Later, she boarded another company bus that

government and private offices, establishments and factories should be managed by 50 percent of their manpower, except for emergency service providers. Pregnant and ill officials or those above 55 should stay at home and steps have to be taken so that they can according to the BRTA order. work from there.

But many of the offices, including government ones, did not implement the directives yet, so their employees have to go to office using public transport. But cutting 50 percent capacity of buses and minibuses causes huge problem in the seating capacity of the public transport.

Many people reached their destinations on foot, while many others take bike and CNG-run auto-rickshaw rides, spending extra money.

Meanwhile, Farhad Hossain, state minister for public administration, said the directives would be implemented fully within a day or two.

Besides, the number of buses was less in the morning, a transport leader told this correspondent. He said many operators did not run their vehicles on the street, fearing

that they may face punishment for not following health safety guidelines properly, he said, asking not to be named. Contacted, Abdur Razzak, deputy

director (enforcement) of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, said their mobile courts were on the roads to execute the directives, but on the first day, they mostly motivate people to follow the guidelines.

In another development, the BRTA yesterday banned operation of motorcycles under ride-sharing services to ensure health safety guidelines and social distancing. A circular was issued in this regard

and the directives were sent to the

Other vehicles operating under ride-sharing services were also asked to follow the government directives, it A total of 23,493 vehicles were

enlisted with the BRTA to operate under

the ride-sharing service, of which 80 percent are motorcycles, BRTA sources The authorities imposed the ban on motorcycle operation as it is not possible to maintain physical distancing

and health safety guidelines while using them, they said. The BRTA took similar steps last year, they added. LAUNCH FARE TO RISE The BIWTA yesterday proposed 60 percent hike in launch fare following

launch owners' demand as the authorities instructed them not to take over 50 percent passengers of their capacities. "We have sent the proposal to the shipping ministry and hope to get a directive in this regard within tomorrow

BIWTA Thursday]," Commodore Golam Sadeq told The Daily Star. As per the existing rate, launch fare for one kilometre is Tk 1.7 within 100km and Tk 1.4 after 100km. The

minimum fare is Tk18. Meanwhile, Bangladesh Railway has directed its officials not to sell tickets of

inter-city trains after April 11.

The authorities made the decision as the government's directives to halve train capacity are applicable for two weeks and further decision may be made after the stipulated time. This move was made so that future decision can be implemented properly, an official said.

3,000 accused

"Government authorities arrested at

said the report.

over attacks on policemen, vandalism at police stations, and other charges. "I cannot accurately say the exact number of the total accused but it is not

less than 1,500," he said. Meanwhile, members of the Assistant Commissioner (AC Land) office in Hathazari upazila also filed two cases over vandalism at their office and setting one of their vehicles on fire.

Rezaul Karim, officer-in-charge of Patiya Police Station, said they filed a case accusing at least 700 unidentified people under the Anti-Terrorism Act with the police station.

None of the above-mentioned police

officials, however, confirmed if any Hefajat leaders were named in the cases. Meanwhile, accusing 15 leaders of Hafajat and 600 unnamed persons, police filed another case in Sirajdikhan

upazila of Munshiganj district over

clashes and violence during the

countrywide strike. Mohammad Kamruzzaman, inspector (investigation) of Sirajdikhan police station, said eight persons were arrested in connection with the case.

"Among the 15 accused, president of Sirahdikhan unit of Hefajat-e-Islam Mohammad Obaidullah Kashemi, 40, and Abdullah, 35, were made accused,

However, Abdul Hamid, Navebe-ameer of the central committee of Hefajat-e-Islam, known as "Madhupur Pir", who was also injured during the strike on March 28, was not made accused in the case. He is also the superintendent of Madhupur Madrasa.

Mohammad Mahfuz additional superintendent of police (administration and crime), said, Police did not make Madhupur Pir an accused as he was not involved in the attack on police during the strike." Meanwhile, talking to The Daily Star,

(Motijheel zone) of police, said no fresh arrest was made in his area but they were trying to find the accused. Shah Iftekhar Ahmed, deputy commissioner (Wari zone) of police,

Syed Nurul Islam, deputy commissioner

four cases. "We did not arrest anyone new in connection with the cases," he added.

said 10 persons were already arrested in

Long queues were seen at bus stops in Sheorapara,

Many were seen walking to their destinations, as bus staffers were saying no seats were available. Using megaphones, transport workers were

Sabur Mia, conductor of Vision

"But many forcibly got into the bus We faced this problem severely

already taken passengers half their

This correspondent observed bus

Many BRTC buses were even running with standing passengers.

Whenever a bus reached the

Mugda house.

would take her near Mugda area. WHY THE PROBLEM? According to Monday's directives,

official told The Daily Star.

service-providing companies, a BRTA The ban will be effective until further

notice (at least two weeks for now),