

BANGLADESH UPDATE

352
New cases in 24hrs

15,81,986
Total cases

28,052
Deaths

15,46,352
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

5,388,694
Deaths

276,757,427
Total cases

RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BANGLADESH

Slap sanctions against culprits

A federation of 192 outfits urge UN, EU

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

International Federation for Human Rights, a coalition of 192 human rights organisations, called for targeted sanctions against entities responsible for serious human rights violations in Bangladesh.

The coalition -- FIDH -- urged the European Union, its member states, and other member states of the United Nations yesterday.

In its report titled "Out of control - Human rights and rule of law crises in Bangladesh", FIDH said, "Consider imposing targeted sanctions -- such as travel bans and asset freeze -- on members of the government, the ruling party and affiliated entities, law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary, who have been responsible for serious human rights violations."

In addition to sanctions, the coalition asked the EU and the UN member states to intervene in cases of human rights violations.

FIDH, an organisation headquartered in Paris and that has member organisations in 117 countries, also appealed to the EU and the UN to "urge the government to carry out legal and institutional reforms to ensure the independence

of the judiciary". FIDH Vice President Guissou Jahangiri said, "While the government has claimed that it adopts a 'zero-tolerance' policy towards human rights violations, which is a major contributor to the deterioration of the rule of law in Bangladesh, accountability for these abuses is almost non-existent."

"The lack of political will to hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable and the denial of the recurrent commission of such violations indicates government complicity, or, at the very least, acquiescence, in these abuses."

The organisation recommended that the government of Bangladesh "end the misuse of law enforcement agencies for political and personal gain" and amend the Armed Police Battalion Act.

The law contains provisions that grant law enforcement agencies immunity from prosecution with regard to human rights violations, they said.

FIDH also demanded that the government ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and also enact domestic legislation that criminalises enforced disappearance.

Our gift to the nation

FROM PAGE 1

and the effort proved too difficult for India goalkeeper Anishka, who could only parry the ball back into her own net.

The goal came close to the end of an entertaining final, in front of a raucous 15,000-plus home support, which the hosts dominated completely and could consider themselves slightly unlucky for not leaving with a much healthier margin of victory.

The charges of Golam Rabbani Choton, who had won the inaugural edition of this event in Bhutan back in 2018 -- SAFF U-18 Women's Championship at that time -- had beaten India by the odd goal during the round robin stage of this championship as well.

However, there was a bit of controversy regarding that win as the goal which came from a spot-kick raised some questions, at least from the Indian dugout.

But the victory last night left no scope for debate as the Maria Mandala side completely dominated the one-sided affair.

The Bangladesh coach made one change from the group-phase match against the same opposition, replacing Marzia with Ripa, who had scored a hat-trick in their 12-0 thrashing of Sri Lanka in their previous match as the hosts came into the match with a 19-0 goal record.

The most dominating side showed their prowess right from the start and could have gotten a 14th-minute lead

when the India goalkeeper failed to gather Maria's shot from distance.

Striker Tohura Khatun was first to react as she raced on to the loose ball and poked it towards the target, only for defender Nirmala Devi clearing the ball, with major part of the ball having already crossed the goalline.

The linesman raised her flag, signalling the ball hadn't crossed the line entirely, much to the frustration of the Bangladesh players and the crowd.

The goalscorer Anai was unlucky as she saw a similar attempt from the right in the 25th minute come off the post.

Although Bangladesh dominated proceedings in the middle, they found it hard to get the ball into the box, so when another long-range attempt from Shamsunnahar Jr, 30 seconds after restart, rattled the crossbar, it seemed as if the game might be headed to a straight shootout even at that early stage.

Nothing was going in favour of the hosts as far as the goal was concerned as the linesman's flag denied them on 75 minutes, correctly so, when the ball was poked home from a goalmouth melee following a corner from Rituporna Chakma.

But then Anai, the girl from Khagrachari, stepped up with an opportunistic attempt which sealed a well-deserved victory for the girls in red and green, setting off a party-like atmosphere at the Kamalapur venue.

JSD seeks law for formation of EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu) stressed the need for enacting a law on formation of the Election Commission as it took part in a dialogue with President Abdul Hamid yesterday.

During the talks at the Bangabhaban, JSD, a component in the ruling Awami League-led grand alliance, said the law is necessary to get rid of the controversy arising after every five years over the electoral system.

It also said the law is needed to give the process of formation of search committee a permanent shape.

The JSD requested President Hamid to ask the government to take necessary measures forenacting the law.

In the hour-long talks, the six-member delegation, led by JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu, called upon Hamid to take steps so that a bill on formation of the EC is placed in the winter session of parliament in January and the House passes it, Shirin Akhter, general secretary of JSD, told The Daily Star.

"Although our constitution has stressed the need for enacting a specific law on the formation of Election Commission, the law is yet to be enacted unfortunately. Under the circumstances, we think that the formation of the search committee is an acceptable process to search comparatively eligible and competent persons for the Election Commission," the JSD said while submitting its written proposal to President Hamid.

In case of formation of the search committee, the JSD recommended constituting it with judges of the

Supreme Court's Appellate Division, Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh Mohammad Muslim Chowdhury and Public Service Commission Chairman Sohorab Hossain, added Shirin, also a delegation member.

Inu told Hamid that it is necessary to include people having honesty, integrity and acceptance in the search committee for holding free and fair polls.

"If the election commissioners are honest, efficient and acceptable persons, the Election Commission will be able to hold fair polls," Inu told the president.

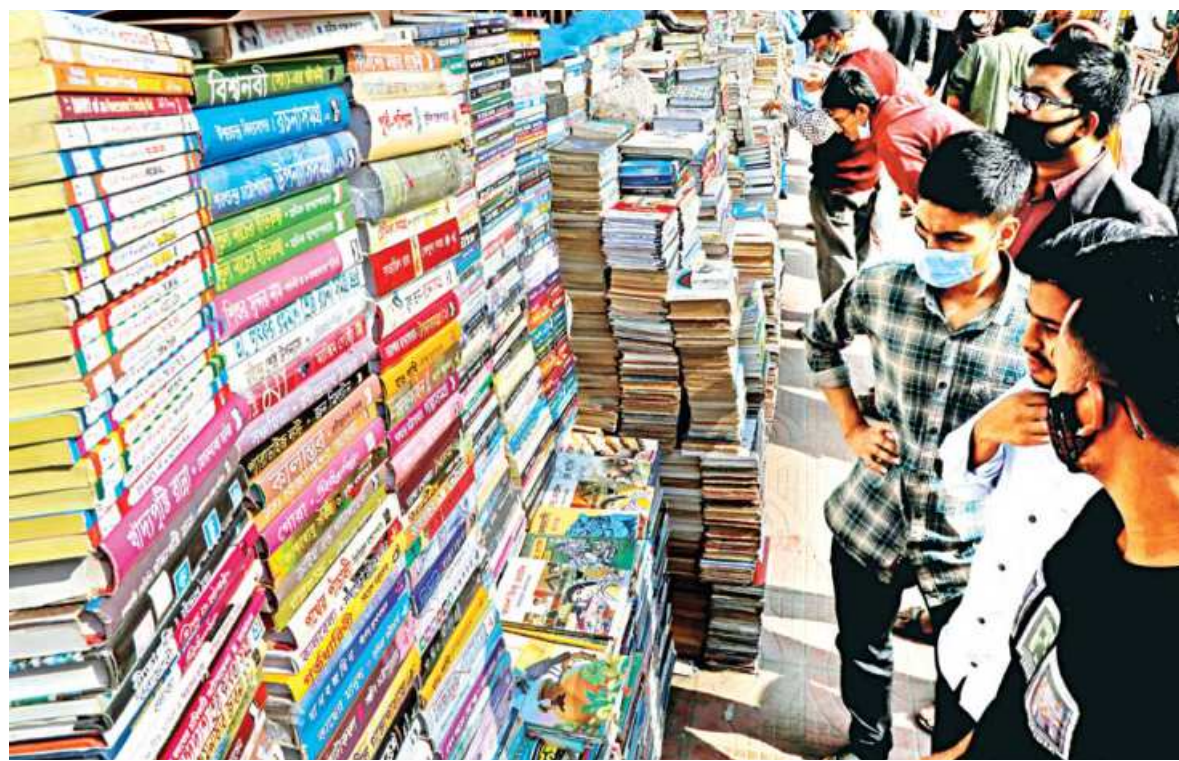
He also said formation of the EC is not enough to hold a free and fair election. It has to be ensured that the executive branch extends its full cooperation in the EC work.

Asked about the controversy over the two election commissions formed through the search committee, Inu said, "The last few election commissions were formed through the search committee and there had been some controversies in some cases."

President Hamid said since there is no law to form the EC yet, opinions of political parties play an important role in the formation of the EC, said a press release of the Bangabhaban.

He also sought cooperation of political parties in this regard.

On September 20, the main opposition in parliament -- Jatiya Party -- placed a three-point proposal, including enactment of a law to form the EC in line with the constitution, while taking part in the talks with the president.



Shoppers browsing books at a roadside bookstore in the capital's Nilkhet yesterday. Such stores were closed for some time as educational institutions were shut for much of the past two years due to the pandemic. Reopening of the institutions late this year has seen a rise in demand for books.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Neglected, they see no closure

FROM PAGE 1

factional clash between two feuding groups of BNP-backed student body Jatiyatadabi Chhatra Dal in June 2002. The two groups exchanged gunfire on Buet campus and she was caught in the line of fire.

In its verdict in March 2006, the High Court awarded life imprisonment to three absconding convicts. Of them, Mokammel Hayat Khan Muki and Nurul Islam Sagor have still not been arrested. The verdict could not be executed, said Sony's father Habibur Rahman.

Mushfiq Uddin Tagor and four other convicts in the case are in jail now, he said.

Imran Habib Rumon, a former Buet student, said they held a protest in front of the university's MA Rashid Hall demanding Muki's arrest after the killing. "Muki was still inside the dormitory at that time. But the university authorities called in the police to the campus. The law enforcers then charged truncheons on us, instead of arresting the killer."

Many students were suspended for taking part in the demonstrations and the university was closed down for 63 days to quell the protests, he said.

Sony's family also had to fight the case in court on their own.

Dwip was murdered in 2013. The mechanical engineering student and a Chhatra League leader was stabbed in front of his dorm on April 9 that year. He died around three months later at

a city hospital.

His family members said they have been denied justice mainly because of police negligence.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the case's verdict delivered on January 18, 2018. The document shows the lone accused and convict -- Mezbah Uddin -- is absconding.

A day after Dwip was attacked, his brother Riaz Morshed filed an attempt to murder case with Chawkbazar Police Station. A week later, police arrested Mezbah, also a Buet student, for his involvement in the attack. After Dwip died, the case was turned into a murder case.

The Speedy Trial Tribunal-4 of Dhaka sentenced Mezbah to five years in prison and slapped a fine of Tk 20,000 on him.

The judge wrote in the verdict that the victim was severely injured by the accused, and it was proved that the victim died due to those severe injuries.

The verdict said the inquest and autopsy of the victim's body should have been conducted for proving the murder charges. But those were not conducted then.

The investigation officer investigated the case carelessly and pressed the charges in the same way with negligence, the judge also wrote

in the verdict.

The Daily Star tried to contact Inspector Jasim Uddin Dewan of Detective Branch of police, who investigated the case, several times, but found his phone switched off.

Dwip's father Ali Azam said they would file an appeal against the verdict. However, neither the Buet authorities nor the Chhatra League came to their aid, he said, adding, "They did not even ask us about case updates."

"We want to file an appeal. But we can't do that without government support," he said.

Azam claimed that one militant group was behind the attack on Dwip and that they were passing days in fear fearing about the safety of his other son, who filed the case.

Replying to a query, he said he was not aware of the significance of an autopsy or postmortem report after his son was killed. "Nobody told us that at that time."

He also said some key witnesses -- all Buet students -- did not show up at court during the case's hearings for their safety.

Meanwhile, locals of Ekshlasnagar union in Chandpur's Matlab upazila told The Daily Star that Mezbah's family no longer lives in their village and they hardly visited the place after

Committee

FROM PAGE 1

chancellor, registrar and proctor of the university and also to the provosts of Shamsunnahar, Kuwait-Maitree and Sufia Kamal halls, saying that appropriate legal action will be taken against them if they don't scrap the restriction in three working days.

In the notice, the lawyer said married and pregnant students will keep being deprived from obtaining higher education and enjoying the facilities of residential halls if the restriction remains in force.

The students are being seriously impacted due to the discriminatory provision, Shishir said.

The debate over the restriction ensued earlier this month when the authority of Shamsun Nahar Hall, one of the five female dormitories of the university, cancelled the seat of a married student. Days later, another such incident occurred at the Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree Hall, after which students began protesting.

A group of female students placed a memorandum on December 13 to the vice chancellor to change the rule, terming it discriminatory.

the incident.

Matlab (Uttar) Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Sahjahan Kamal told The Daily Star that they were yet to get any warrant for anyone named Mezbah Uddin.

The Buet authorities provides Abrar's family with Tk 75,000 every month as financial support and have already spent nearly Tk 55 lakh on the legal battle over the murder case, Buet VC Vice-Chancellor Prof Satya Prashad Majumder said at a press conference on December 8.

Replying to a question on that day, he told this daily that the university would help the families of Sony and Dwip with their legal battle if they ask.

"We have a legal office, I told them to look into all other cases and see whether we can do anything," he said.

Talking to these correspondents, several formal students said Abrar's case proves that if the authorities stand by the victim's family, it is possible to ensure justice. But they hardly did so in the past.

The Daily Star looked through newspaper reports and books on student movements and found that at least 151 killings have taken place at universities since the country's independence.

The floodgates to the murders opened in 1974 when Dhaka University saw its first student killing after Chhatra League men fired on and killed seven.

Most of the perpetrators were not brought to book.

Chance of a law slim

FROM PAGE 1

committee that would recommend names for the chief election commissioner and election commissioners as the chance of framing a law before appointing the next EC is slim.

During their meetings with the president, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and main opposition in parliament Jatiya Party have proposed enacting a law, as prescribed in the constitution. The two parties separately held talks with the president yesterday and Monday.

The JP also proposed that the president promulgate ordinances regarding the issue if it is not possible for the Jatiya Sangsad to enact such laws before the expiry of the term of the current EC, led by CEC KM Nurul Huda, on February 14 next year.

Hamid is scheduled to hold meetings with Bangladesh National Awami Party and Socialist Party of Bangladesh on December 26, Bangladesh Tarikat Federation and Khelafat Majlish on December 27, Workers Party on December 28, and Bangladesh Nationalist Front and Islami Oikya Jote on December 29.

BNP, a major opposition party, is yet to clarify its position on whether it will join the talks as the party's main demand is restoration of the caretaker government system before the EC reconstitution.

Although the party is yet to get any formal invitation from the Bangabhaban for talks, it will discuss the president's dialogue issue at its standing committee meeting on Saturday.

Even if invited, the BNP may stay away from the dialogue, party sources said.

"The ongoing talks are meaningless. Once a caretaker government is formed, that government will hold talks on Election Commission," said BNP standing committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury.

Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvandary, chairman of Bangladesh Tarikat Federation, said there is no law on the appointments of a CEC and ECs. "A law is needed to give Election Commission an institutional shape. We will talk in favour of framing a law."

He said incumbent CEC KM Nurul

Huda, ECs Rafiqul Islam and Brigadier General (ret'd) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury were appointed as per recommendations made by their party.

Anisur Rahman Mallik, a Politburo member of Workers Party of Bangladesh, said their party would stress the need for framing the law during its dialogue with the president.

SM Abul Kalam Azad, president of Bangladesh Nationalist Front National Standing Committee, said: "We will emphasise the importance of framing a law and request President Abdul Hamid to exercise his constitutional power to make enactment of such a law possible."

Khalequzzaman, general secretary of Socialist Party of Bangladesh, said they would decide on joining the dialogue after discussions within the party and with the Left Democratic Alliance.

He said they would urge the president to take steps to enact the EC formation law if they join the talks.

"Enactment of a law is important as the constitution has a provision for it. There is nothing in the constitution about the search committee. So, a law is needed for giving it a legal basis," he said.

Islami Oikya Jote Secretary General Mufti Fayezullah said they would place the matter of framing the law before the president as there should be a permanent solution to the issue. "Forming a faithful, impartial and acceptable EC is needed," he added.

Ismail Hossain, general secretary of Bangladesh National Awami Party, said they would propose enacting a law to put an end to the debate on the constitution of the EC.

Khelafat Majlish Secretary General Ahmad Abdul Quader said enactment of a law would of course be in their agenda for their talks with the president. "Cropping up of a debate ahead of the reformation of the EC should end."

Leaders of Workers Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Tarikat Federation and Bangladesh Nationalist Front said their parties would also propose names of acceptable persons for search committee members.

Article 118 (1) of the constitution stipulates that there should be a specific law on appointing a CEC

and election commissioners, but successive governments chose not to enact one. Most of the South Asian countries, however, have similar laws in place.

With the next parliamentary election about two years away, framing of a specific law came to the fore against the backdrop of distrust of many opposition parties in the EC.

BNP, Jatiya Party as well as many eminent citizens for the last couple of months have been demanding enactment of the law.

Civil society platform Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) last month handed a draft law titled "Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners' Appointment Act-2021" to Law Minister Anisul Haq to help the government frame the law.

In the draft, Shujan said the president shall form a seven-member search committee to constitute the EC.

The seven members will consist of a retired judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, an MP nominated by the Leader of Parliament, a lawmaker nominated by the Leader of the Opposition, an MP nominated by the third largest political party in Jatiya Sangsad, comptroller and auditor general (CAG) of Bangladesh, a civil society member and a representative of the media.

The law minister on November 28 told parliament that a bill would be placed in the next or a later session of the current Jatiya Sangsad to enact a law on EC formation.

Earlier, Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad-led EC had prepared a draft law in 2011 and submitted it to the then Awami League government. But the law was not enacted.

The then presidents in 2012 and 2016 had formed search committees to appoint the CEC and other commissioners following discussions with registered political parties.

Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman in a statement on Monday said, "The EC was formed through a search committee following dialogue previously, but it has not yielded the desired positive results. Therefore, a law is immediately needed to appoint a non-partisan, honest and acceptable EC."

'TIMELY AND VITAL'

Thirty-seven eminent citizens yesterday expressed hope that the president would talk to political parties about the steps and political consensus needed to re-establish the practice of democracy, free and fair elections, accountability and equal application of law.

In a statement terming the president's ongoing dialogue with political parties "positive", they said the president should also hold discussions on efforts to make economic development inclusive.

The eminent citizens said the president's initiative to sit with registered political parties is timely and vital in the current context of the country.

They praised the economic progress Bangladesh achieved in some indicators but said there is another side of the coin.

"The country is gradually falling behind in many yardsticks including elections, transparency, equal application of law, freedom of speech, right to assembly, extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearance and repression," the statement said.

Inequality is increasing alarmingly, quality of education and healthcare is decreasing, it said.

"Another major reason for concern is the deterioration of tolerance in our politics," the statement added.

Bangladesh is also backtracking from pledges to make the country democratic and establishing the Liberation War spirit made by the tripartite alliance during the anti-Ershad movement.

They hoped that an acceptable draft of the future Bangladesh will be created through the dialogue. They also expected a consensus among the parties similar to the tripartite outline drafted in 1990.

The signatories to the statement include Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury, Barrister M Amirul Islam, rights activist Hamida Hossain, former CAG Hafizuddin Khan, retired justice Abdul Matin, former election commissioner Shakhawat Hossain, former Bangladesh Bank governor Saleh Uddin Ahmed, former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder, and Manusher Jonno Foundation Executive Director Shaheen Anam.