

PEACEKEEPING

UN to look at call for banning Rab

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN will look into the 12 human rights bodies' call for banning Rab from its peacekeeping missions, UN secretary-general's Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said yesterday.

"The UN, I mean, we just received the news of this. We will obviously be taking a look at it. I would remind you that we do have a pretty stringent human rights screening policy that applies to individual units from every country.

"But, we, obviously, have been taking very seriously what is being done," he said in a briefing.

Stéphane said this in response to a question from a journalist that if the UN is concerned and considering any action following a letter from 12 human rights

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organisations to the under-secretary-general for peacekeeping operations, urging that the Rapid Action Battalion be banned from UN peacekeeping.

On December 10, the US announced sanctions on Rab and seven of its current and former members over human rights violations.

The rights bodies that wrote to the UN on November 8 last year include Human Rights Watch, Asian Human Rights Commission and Robert F Kennedy for Human Rights, Amnesty International, International Federation for Human Rights, Civicus, World Organisation Against Torture, Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Asian Network for Free Elections, Capital Punishment Justice Project, and The Advocates for Human Rights.



People from low-income families gather around a fire to keep themselves warm as the mercury drops at night. Sufferings of underprivileged people increase with the fall in temperature. The photo was taken in the capital's Manik Mia Avenue area around 11:30pm on Thursday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

World worse now due to Covid, climate, conflict

Says Guterres as he starts his second term as UN chief

AP, United Nations

As he starts his second term as UN secretary-general, Antonio Guterres said Thursday the world is worse in many ways than it was five years ago because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and geopolitical tensions that have sparked conflicts everywhere — but unlike US President Joe Biden he thinks Russia will not invade Ukraine.

Guterres said in an interview with The Associated Press that the appeal for peace he issued on his first day in the UN's top job on Jan 1, 2017 and his priorities in his first term of trying to prevent conflicts and tackle global inequalities, the Covid-19 crisis and a warming planet haven't changed.

"The secretary-general of the UN has no power," Guterres said. "We can have influence. I can persuade. I can mediate, but I have no power."

Before he became UN chief, Guterres said he envisioned the post as being "a convener, a mediator, a bridge-builder and an honest broker to help find solutions that benefit everyone involved." He said Thursday these are things "I need to do every day."

As an example, the secretary-general said this week he spoke to the African Union's envoy Olusegun Obasanjo, twice with Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta, and once with Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in his attempt to get a cessation of hostilities in Ethiopia between the government and forces in the embattled Tigray region.

"I hope that we are in a situation in which it might become soon possible to have a cessation of hostilities and that is where I'm concentrating most of my efforts," Guterres said.

In another example, Guterres said he has also been on the phone to try to get Mali's military leaders who recently delayed elections scheduled for next month to 2026 to reduce the timetable.

Guterres said the UN Security Council is divided, especially its five veto-wielding permanent members.

On the issue on every country's front



burner now — whether Russia, which has massed 100,000 troops on Ukraine's border, will invade the former Soviet republic — Guterres said, "I do not think Russia will invade Ukraine, and I hope that my belief is correct."

He also stressed that the Afghan people can't be collectively punished for "wrong things that are done by the Taliban," so it is absolutely essential to massively increase humanitarian aid "because the Afghans are in a desperate situation with the risks of deaths by hunger" and disease in a frigid winter with Covid-19.

"More than half the population is in desperate need of humanitarian aid," he said, and money needs to be injected into the economy to ensure Afghan banks operate and doctors, teachers, other workers are paid to prevent the economic collapse.

The issue of recognition of the Taliban government is up to member states, Guterres said, but the UN has been pressing the Taliban to ensure human rights.

Schools closed as Covid curbs back again

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to contain the transmission as they allow everything other than educational institutions to operate.

They also raise concern over the implementation of the directives.

"The government ordered shutting down educational institutions, but the government kept tourism, trade fairs and markets open. Such stray measures will not bear any fruit," Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director of disease control at the DGHS, told The Daily Star.

He said the government has already declared some areas of the country as red zones, but kept tourism open.

"What is the point of declaring red zones while keeping tourism and everything open?" Be-Nazir asked.

Dhaka and Rangamati were identified as Covid "red zones" earlier this month.

The DGHS reported 11,434 new coronavirus cases for 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, taking the overall tally of infections to 16,64,616.

Twelve infected people died in that period.

The positivity rate also shot up to 28.49 percent, nearly double the 14.66 percent recorded a week ago on January 14.

In the same 24-hour period, 752 people recovered, taking total recoveries to 15,55,597.

The health minister said at the press briefing that around 33 percent of hospital beds in Dhaka have already been occupied by Covid patients.

"It is alarming," he said, adding that if the transmission is not contained right away, the health system will be under severe pressure and may even collapse.

FIVE POINT DIRECTIVE

Apart from shutting down schools and colleges for two weeks, the government prohibited gathering of over 100 people in any political, social or religious programmes.

People attending these programmes will also have to show Covid-19 vaccine certificates or negative results of RT-PCR tests conducted within 24-hours before their

attendance, according to the notification.

Officials and staffers of all government and non-government offices and factories have to have Covid-19 vaccine certificates. Respective authorities will bear the responsibilities, the gazette notification said.

The notification asked all to wear masks and maintain health guidelines at public places like markets, shopping malls, mosques, bus stands, launch terminals, railway stations, etc.

The local administration and law enforcement agencies were instructed to monitor and ensure compliance.

Educational institutions were shut for about 18 months from March 17, 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The government opened these last September for in-person classes.

At yesterday's briefing, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said as people are not maintaining health rules even after the issuance of an 11-point directive by the government on January

10, infections are rising.

"Recently, we've observed a surge in infections in schools. Many students are getting infected. It is alarming. That is why the decision has been taken upon the directives of the prime minister to keep all schools, colleges and universities shut for two weeks to curb infection rates and keep students safe," he added.

Maleque said people will have to show Covid-19 vaccine cards and RT-PCR test certificates while commuting on public transport.

Mentioning that the 11-point directives are not being followed properly, the health minister asked the district administration and police to monitor whether the government directives are being followed.

Curbing infection depends on people. If people follow health guidelines properly, the situation will come under control, he said.

About the trade fair, sports events and the Ekushey book fair, the minister said it would be

hard to keep gatherings to less than 100 people but the directive on having Covid-19 vaccine certificates and RT-PCR test results will remain applicable for everyone.

Dr Mushtuq Husain, consultant at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, pointed out that the implementation of the directives will be a challenge.

The local government representatives can play a role in monitoring public gatherings, he said, suggesting that local councillors and volunteers will have to act more vigorously to create awareness.

Sust hunger

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Ahmed Liza, misbehaved with a student who called her to report bad food at the dorm.

The protest gained momentum after police fired rubber bullets and threw sound grenades in a clash that left over 30 students injured on Sunday evening.

Iran in talks with Russia to build nuclear power units

AFP, Tehran

Iran is in talks with Russia over the construction of two new units at its sole nuclear power plant, the Islamic republic's atomic energy agency said yesterday.

"Negotiations are underway between Tehran and Moscow to construct the second and third units of the Bushehr power plant," said Behrouz Kamalvandi, spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

The move was "in accordance with the Islamic republic's plans to produce at least 10,000 megawatts of electricity using nuclear energy," he said, quoted on the government's website.

The announcement coincides with ongoing talks in Vienna seeking to revive a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, including Russia.

The parties to the accord that gave Iran relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear programme saw it as the best way to stop Tehran from building

a nuclear bomb — a goal it has always denied.

The United States unilaterally withdrew from the deal and began imposing sanctions on Iran in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump, prompting Tehran to begin walking back on its commitments under the agreement.

Moscow built the Bushehr plant, equipped with a 1,000 MW reactor, delivering it in September 2013 after years of delay.

Kamalvandi said the project was being implemented "without delay", despite payments being behind schedule.

The announcement immediately follows a two-day visit by ultraconservative Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Moscow, during which he said Tehran has "no limits for expanding ties with Russia".

Iran has substantial reserves of oil and natural gas, but it hopes to build 20 nuclear power plants on the long term in a bid to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels.

Myanmar sentences lawmaker from Suu Kyi's party to death: statement

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta sentenced a member of Aung San Suu Kyi's ousted party to death for terror offences yesterday, a statement said.

Phyo Zeyar Thaw, a member of the National League for Democracy arrested in November, was "sentenced to the death penalty today [Friday] under anti-terrorism act", the junta said.

Prominent democracy activist Kyaw Min Yu — better known as "Jimmy" — received the same sentence from the military tribunal, the junta statement said.

The junta has sentenced dozens of anti-coup activists to death as part of its crackdown on dissent but Myanmar has not carried out an execution for decades.

Phyo Zeyar Thaw — whose real name

is Maung Kyaw — was arrested at an apartment in the commercial hub Yangon following a "tip-off and cooperation from dutiful citizens," the junta's information team said.

He had been accused of orchestrating several attacks on regime forces, including the brazen shooting on a commuter train in Yangon in August that killed five policemen.

He was elected to parliament from Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party in the 2015 elections that ushered in a transition to civilian rule.

The Southeast Asian country has been in turmoil since the coup sparked massive protests and a bloody military crackdown on dissent, which has killed more than 1,400 people according to a local monitoring group.

Crash ravages little girl's world

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and Hospital in Mohakhali, said Shahida's son Mohammad Tanvir, adding that the tragedy struck when the victims were on the way to his home.

Police said they were trying to detain the bus driver.

Meanwhile, an auto-

rickshaw driver named Rajib Hawlader, 38, was killed as the vehicle overturned after being hit by a truck in Rampura early yesterday.

Rampura Police Station OC Rafiqul Islam said after the vehicle overturned, it was hit by a covered van.

Badly injured, Rajib was

first taken to the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation. Later, he was shifted to the DMCH, where he died in the morning.

The OC said that the truck was seized and the driver, Mainuddin, was arrested immediately after the incident.

Nizam Uddin, elder brother of the deceased, said their home is in Bakerganj upazila of Barishal. Rajib lived in Khilgaon's Sepahibagh area with his son, two daughters and his wife Lucky Begum.

Data shows a rising trend in road crashes in the last few years despite government

agencies promising a change and initiating various steps after a major road safety movement in July-August 2018.

According to a police report, a total of 5,088 people were killed in 5,472 road crashes in 2021, which is 30 percent higher than the previous year.