

DEMOCRACY INDEX  
Bangladesh  
ranks 75th

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has ranked 75th on the latest democracy index of the Economist Intelligence Unit, one notch up from last year.

The country is still classified under the “hybrid regime” category, meaning substantial irregularities often prevent elections from being free and fair here, according to the “Democracy Index-2021” published by the UK-based Economist Group.

“Government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common. Serious weaknesses are more prevalent than in flawed democracies -- in political culture, functioning of government, and political participation,” the report, released on Thursday, said while defining a “hybrid regime”.

Moreover, in a hybrid regime, corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law is weak. Civil society is weak. Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on journalists, and the judiciary is not independent, it said.

Bangladesh scored 5.99 out of 10 this year to be ranked 75th among 165 countries and two territories. Last year, it secured the 76th spot with the same score.

Among seven South Asian countries covered in the report, India and Sri Lanka are ahead of Bangladesh while Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan are behind.

This year, the results reflect the continuing negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on democracy and freedom around the world for a second successive year, says the report.

According to the index, less than half (45.7 percent) of the world's population now live in a democracy of some sort.

Norway, New Zealand, Finland, Sweden, and Iceland are the top five democracies. Afghanistan, Myanmar, North Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Central African Republic are at the bottom.



Workers stage a rally near Khalishpur Jute Mills Limited in Khulna city yesterday demanding reopening of state-run jute mills, payment of arrears, and withdrawal of cases filed against them. The protest was organised under the banner of Khalishpur-Daulatpur Jute Mill Factory Committee.

PHOTO: STAR

RAJBARI SADAR POLICE STATION

# Husband ‘tortured’, she got ‘rape threat’

University student files complaint with Police Headquarters

STAR REPORT

A university student has alleged that she got rape threats from cops after she went to Rajbari Sadar Police Station looking for her husband, who was detained there for questioning over a murder.

She also said law enforcers tortured him into confessing his involvement in the killing.

“I saw my husband, Mehedi, blindfolded and being beaten up indiscriminately with sticks at the police station. They were pressuring him into making a confessional statement over the murder of former Banibaha Union Parishad chairman Abdul Latif,” the student, Tapashi Rabeya Sohani, told The Daily Star yesterday.

“The cops also threatened to kill him in crossfire,” she said.

Tapashi said she was confined to a room at the station. There, policemen hurled abuse at her, and one of them threatened to rape her, she said.

On February 9, she filed a written complaint with the IGP’s cell at the Police Headquarters in Dhaka over the matter.

Tapashi and Mehedi are students of two private universities in the capital. They got married around two years back.

On November 17, a week after Latif’s murder, a police team, led by Rajbari Sadar Police Station OC Shahadat Hossain, went to Tapashi’s home in Banibaha union, Tapashi told The Daily Star over phone.

One of the law enforcers, Sub-Inspector Hiran Kumar Biswas, said he would talk to Mehedi for five minutes. They then took him to the police station, she claimed.

In a frantic search for Mehedi, Tapashi went to the police station, the office of the SP and the Detective Branch of police in the district, but could not find him anywhere.

Tapashi then again went to the police station, around 1:30pm on November 17, and saw policemen beating Mehedi with sticks. They were pressuring him into confessing that he killed Latif, she said.

Assailants opened fire on Latif, also president of the Awami League in Banibaha union, around 12:30am on November 11 last year when he was on his way home after dropping Mehedi off in his father-in-law’s home in a motorcycle.

Latif died on his way to a hospital in Dhaka. Before his death, he named some people who might have been behind the attack. Mehedi was not one of them, Tapashi said.

Two days later, Latif’s wife filed a murder case against eight people with the police station.

“That night after my husband was taken to the police station, cops told me to go home. They assured me that he would be released the next morning. They told me to come back to the police station to take him back, if he did not return home by then,” Tapashi said.

As she went back to the station the next morning, she saw Mehedi locked in a room, blindfolded. He was hanging upside down. Policemen kept beating him up with sticks. They also put a piece of gamcha in his mouth and tortured him this way till 4:00pm, she said.

“During that time, they kept me locked in another room. They even threatened that they would rape me if Mehedi does not confess killing Latif,” she said.

“At one point, Mehedi was taken

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

JUSTICE FOR SAGAR-RUNI  
Culture of impunity  
behind delay  
Say five UN experts  
in statement

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Five UN human rights experts have expressed deep concern at the failure of the Bangladeshi authorities to complete an investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice 10 years after the murder of journalists Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi.

“A decade after the killing of the two journalists, there is still no justice as a result of an appalling and pervasive culture of impunity in Bangladesh,” said the experts in a statement yesterday.

The statement said at least 15 journalists have been killed in Bangladesh in the past decade. The incidents appear to be rarely investigated or prosecuted. In some cases, local authorities are thought to be directly implicated in the attacks.

The allegations brought to the attention of the Bangladesh government by the UN experts often have gone unanswered. No response was ever received from the government to a letter sent by the UN experts following the murder of Sagar and Runi in 2012.

They urged the government to conduct and complete, prompt, thorough, independent and effective investigations and bring perpetrators to justice for the murder of Sagar and Runi and other killings of journalists and human rights defenders in Bangladesh.

The special rapporteurs and independent experts, who are part of the UN Human Rights Council, include Irene Khan, Mary Lawlor, Clément N Voule, Nils Melzer and Morris Tidball-Binz.

Sagar and Runi were stabbed to death in their home on 12 February 2012.

The Rapid Action Battalion was tasked by the High Court to investigate the case in 2012.

On November 24, 2021, the Court demanded for the 84th time that Rab should submit its findings.

The experts expressed concern that the trial for the fatal shooting of journalist and human rights defender Abdul Hakim Shimul in February 2017, allegedly by the then-mayor of Shahzadpur, has been repeatedly delayed.

Currently, it has been placed on a stay order by the High Court, with all the accused on bail.

The experts also recalled the death in custody in February 2021 of the writer Mushtaq Ahmed, following nine months in pre-trial detention on charges under the Digital Security Act for publishing an article criticising the government’s pandemic response.



complete, prompt, thorough, independent and effective investigations and bring perpetrators to justice for the murder of Sagar and Runi and other killings of journalists and human rights defenders in Bangladesh.

The special rapporteurs and independent experts, who are part of the UN Human Rights Council, include Irene Khan, Mary Lawlor, Clément N Voule, Nils Melzer and Morris Tidball-Binz.

## 99 promised

FROM PAGE 1

and several upazila hospitals will get a generator, said Farid.

On January 3 this year, Director General Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam of the DGHS, said, “We distributed 40 generators to different medical college hospitals and district hospitals... some of those have already been set up.”

But two DGHS officials familiar with the matter said none of the generators has been set up and ready to use.

Farid said, “A few hospitals have received the necessary equipment and several other facilities will receive them soon. Some machinery is being imported.”

Nazmul Islam, director of communicable disease control at the DGHS, said, “Before choosing a hospital, we have to check whether the facility has room for the equipment. Then a specification [for public purchase] has to be prepared. As far as I know, the CMSD has completed the tender process and has issued a work order [to the contractor].”

Prof Nazrul Islam, member of the National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19, said the delay is caused by

inefficiency.

In March last year, the health ministry accepted a proposal to receive 29 oxygen generators procured by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

But the minister has yet to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UNOPS, a prerequisite for the UN body to launch the procedure.

A health ministry official, preferring anonymity, said signing of the MoU was delayed because officials were still working on a list of the facilities that would get the generators.

“Multiple government offices are involved in the process. Coordination has been the main challenge,” the official added.

In August, the Cabinet Committee approved a proposal to procure 30 oxygen generators with ADB funds.

On August 23, the CMSD published the technical specifications of the generators on its website. Officials said orders have been placed for the generators.

But the CMSD officials refused to give information about the contractors, the costs, and the manufacturers of the equipment.

## ‘No trust’ in search panel

FROM PAGE 1

search committee. They believe that submission of nominations would make no difference in EC formation as the president cannot pick the CEC and other commissioners without consulting the prime minister.

Bangladesher Biplabi Workers Party is one of them.

“We don’t have any confidence in the search committee as there are some controversial people in it. Moreover, the nominations will be finalised according to suggestions made by the prime minister,” said Saiful Haque, general secretary of the party.

Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) joined the president’s dialogue, but did not submit any nominations.

“We joined the talks with the president to clearly say that a free and fair election is not possible without a neutral polls-time interim government. So, submission of nominations to the search committee will not make any difference to the formation of the Election Commission,” said BJP Chairman Andaleev Rahman Partha.

Bangladesh National

Awami Party (Bangladesh-NAP) also joined the talks with the president, but did not recommend names.

“We wrote to the search committee mentioning that the electoral system has collapsed and people have a very little confidence in the search committee. So we are not giving any nominations,” said M Golam Mustafa Bhuiyan, secretary general of the party.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhruul Islam Alamgir yesterday said the current EC should be put on trial for destroying the country’s electoral system.

“We have no interest in the search committee as it has no significance. All these [formation and activities of the search committee] are meaningless,” he said while exchanging views with local journalists in Thakurgaon.

Bangladesh Muslim League, a component of the BNP-led 20-party alliance, also did not put names forward.

However, the ruling Awami League and its alliance partners, including Jatiya Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Workers Party of Bangladesh, have recommended names.

Speaking to The Daily

Star, Cabinet Division Joint Secretary Shafiul Azim yesterday said, “A total of 24 registered political parties and six professional bodies have submitted their nominations.”

He, however, refused to elaborate on which parties did not send names.

An AL delegation, led by its Information and Research Secretary Selim Mahmud, submitted a list of 10 names to the Cabinet Division yesterday.

The names were finalised at a meeting of the AL presidium members on Wednesday. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the party chief, chaired the meeting.

Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal, a member of the AL-led 14-party alliance, said they submitted six names.

Before the formation of the search committee, President Abdul Hamid had invited 32 political parties to the dialogue. But 25 of them joined talks.

The search committee was formed on February 5 under the Appointments of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act 2022.

The following day, the six-

member search committee after its first meeting asked individuals to submit their CVs to the Cabinet Division either by email or in person for the five EC posts.

Around 200 people have so far sent their nominations, according to Cabinet Division sources.

“We cannot say the exact number of individual applications right now as some people also proposed names of others also. But we have received about 200 emails,” said Shafiul Azim.

The previous search committees in 2012 and 2017 didn’t seek applications from individuals.

The Cabinet Division is giving secretarial support to the search committee which has to propose 10 names to the president by February 24. The president will finally pick the five, according to the law.

The search committee will hold talks with civil society members, election experts and media personalities at the Supreme Court Judges Lounge today and tomorrow to get suggestions and proposals on EC formation.

The tenure of the incumbent EC expires on Monday.

## NY DA prosecutes highest number of anti-Asian hate crimes

AFP, NEW YORK

A New York prosecutor said Thursday that his team was prosecuting its highest number of anti-Asian hate crimes since a unit was established more than a decade ago.

Anti-Asian violence surged in the United States following the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. Activists believe the hate crimes were fuelled by talk of the “Chinese virus” by former president Donald Trump and others during the early days of the pandemic.

New York officials have also cited a history of mental illness, exacerbated by a disruption to social services during the pandemic, among many of the perpetrators.

“Tragically, our office is currently prosecuting 33 hate crime cases driven by anti-Asian bias – unfortunately, the most we have had since our hate crimes unit was established in 2010,” said Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg.

## Blood-soaked road

FROM PAGE 12

to join the procession at the university next day. As Nadera Begum had an arrest warrant issued in her name, she couldn’t come.

Whether it was for the letter or spontaneously, a few students from the university’s female hostel and about 30-40 students from Kamrunnesa, Banglabazar and Muslim Girls School gathered at Amtala on February 21.

At the Amtala meeting, however, it was decided that section 144 would not be violated. We, the female students, were against this decision. That’s why we, four female students, came out on the street chanting Rashtr Bhasha Bangla Chai (we want Bangla as the state language). Police didn’t stop us. Two small processions followed us. Police arrested the third and

fourth procession of girls.

We could not go far. Tear shells kept coming towards us. I rushed towards the emergency section of the Medical College Hospital. By that time police opened fire on students. I can still hear the screams of the injured persons who were brought to the emergency section. After taking some first aid, we went towards the hostel. There were no dead bodies there; the black-pitched road was soaked in blood.

Halima Khatun was one of the female forerunners to break the Section 144 on Dhaka University campus on February 21, 1952

Source: *Bhasha Andolon Shachtallish theke Baanna* (Ed. Mostofa Kamal, Bangladesh Co-operative Book Society Ltd, 1987)

Translated by Shamsuddoza Sajen

## Two foreign journos on assignment for UN detained in Kabul

AFP, Kabul

Two international journalists who were on an assignment for the UN refugee agency have been detained in the Afghan capital, the UNHCR said yesterday.

“Two journalists on assignment with UNHCR and Afghan nationals working with them have been detained in Kabul. We are doing our utmost to resolve the situation, in coordination with others,” the UNHCR tweeted.

## US, Cameroon ‘violated’ rights of asylum seekers: HRW

AFP, Yaoundé

Cameroon committed “serious human rights violations” against dozens of its citizens after the US deported them back to the Central African country in breach of international refugee law, Human Rights Watch said Thursday.

Almost all of those involved were from the English-speaking minority in western Cameroon, where anglophone separatists and government forces have been engaged in a deadly conflict for five years, with the UN and NGOs regularly accusing both sides of atrocities against civilians.

After the United States deported the estimated 80-90 Cameroonians on two flights in October and November 2020, they “faced arbitrary arrest and detention; enforced disappearances; torture, rape, and other violence; extortion; unfair prosecutions,” HRW said in a 174-page report.