

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Civil society gripped by fear

Say rights activists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The civil society is gripped by fear stemming from cases of enforced disappearances, said human rights advocates at a conference in the capital yesterday.

"Because of enforced disappearances and killings, our civil society is now enveloped in fear," said Nur Khan Liton, adviser of Human Rights Support Society.

"Crossfire deaths and disappearances have increased and people [who have been or might be affected by it] have stopped talking.

"We want to know if the ministers or MPs are connected to these disappearances," he said, adding, "Citizens have the right to know."

The path to justice, according to Nur, is to establish a "neutral investigative committee who can tell us exactly what happened to the victims."

Eminent human rights activist Hameeda Hossain, said, "The law enforcers can't take the law into their own hands."

According to Odhikar, a human rights organisation, at least 667 individuals have become victims of enforced disappearances from 2009 to 2021.

Of them, 81 were found dead and 154 remain missing, according to the organisation.

Human Rights Watch's latest report finds that 86 victims of enforced disappearances are still missing.

These figures were revealed in the eighth human rights conference, organised by the Human Right Support Society, at the Bishwo Shahitto Kendro yesterday.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association, said that according to the constitution, all the power in the republic belongs to people, and if that were a reality, the DCs and public representatives would have listened to them.

"But the people actually have no power."

Sara Hossain, executive director of Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust, urged citizens, journalists, political leaders and human rights organisations to be more alert to the state of democracy.

She pointed out how children are being prosecuted under the Digital Security Act and held in detention for extended periods of time before conviction.

Izazul Islam, executive director of the Human Rights Support Society, delivered the welcome speech while Barrister Shazada Al Amin presided over the programme.



Sandbags being taken to the Kirtankhola to protect its banks from erosion. Labourers who are carrying these bags earn between Tk 500 and Tk 800 daily. The photo was taken in Barishal Sadar upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Cry of 'nuclear terrorism' as shells hit nuke plant

Zaporizhzhia operator warns of radiation risk

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine and Russia traded fresh accusations of shelling at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant yesterday, as its operator warned of a radioactive leak risk at the atomic facility.

The Zaporizhzhia plant in southern Ukraine has been occupied by Russian troops since early March.

Kyiv and Moscow have repeatedly accused each other of rocket attacks in the vicinity of the plant – Europe's largest – located in the city of Enerгодар.

Yesterday its Ukraine operator Energodatom said Russian troops "repeatedly shelled" it over the past day.

Russia's defence ministry issued a counter-claim that Ukraine's troops were responsible for a salvo of 17 shells landing on the site.

"As a result of periodic shelling, the infrastructure of the station has been damaged, there are risks of hydrogen leakage and sputtering of radioactive substances, and the fire hazard is high," Energodatom said on Telegram.

The agency said that as of midday Saturday (0900 GMT) the plant "operates with the risk of violating radiation and fire

safety standards".

Russia's defence ministry said Ukrainian forces "shelled the territory of the station three times" from the town of Marganets across the Dnipro River.

In a communique the ministry accused Kyiv of "nuclear terrorism" and said shells landed near areas storing fresh nuclear fuel and radioactive waste.

Radiation levels at the plant "remain normal" the ministry said.

On Tuesday residents in Khortytskyi district – 45 kilometres (29 miles) north-east from the power plant – were given iodine pills to reduce radiation risk in case of a leak.

Residents closer to the plant told AFP earlier this month that they received iodine pills at the very start of the war.

On Thursday, the Zaporizhzhia plant was cut off from Ukraine's national power grid for the first time in its four-decade history due to "actions of the invaders", Energodatom said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said the power cut was caused by Russian shelling of the last active power line linking the plant to the network.

It came back online on Friday afternoon but Zelenskiy warned "the worst case

scenario ... is constantly being provoked by Russian forces".

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is urging for a mission to the plant "as soon as possible to help stabilise the nuclear safety and security situation there".

Agency head Rafael Mariano Grossi has said he wants to visit the site within days, warning of potential disaster.

Ukraine energy minister adviser Lana Zerkal said an IAEA inspection "is planned for the next week".

But Zerkal told Ukraine's Radio NV late Thursday she was sceptical the mission would go ahead, despite Moscow's formal agreement, as "they are artificially creating all the conditions so that the mission will not reach the site".

Britain's defence ministry said satellite imagery showed an increased presence of Russian troops at the power plant with armoured personnel carriers deployed within 60 metres (200 feet) of one reactor.

Kyiv suspects Moscow intends to divert power from the Zaporizhzhia plant to the Crimean peninsula, annexed by Russia in 2014. Washington has warned against any such move.

Import demand

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All in all, the demand for diesel has shot up.

On the other hand, the demand for furnace oil has gone up as the private power plant owners stopped importing by themselves for the depreciation of the taka and higher costs of import, according to officials of BPDB and the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation.

"It's all the result of not paying the dues on time," said Imran Karim, president of the Bangladesh Independent Power Producers Association.

The power plant owners just got the payment for March and they are expecting April's dues soon.

The delayed payment has led to a cash flow crunch for the power producers, limiting their capacity to import furnace oil at the level needed.

"In that time, the dollar fluctuation affected the owners. It's huge. In every litre, we are making a loss of Tk 15-20. And for a 100 MW power plant, it is Tk 120 crore in a month," Karim added.

Subsequently, the private power plant owners have asked the BPDB to get BPC to import furnace oil for them.

Importing the extra furnace oil will create a burden on BPC, said its Chairman ABM Azad.

"It will be a problem but we are trying to import," he said.

About the "abnormal" hike in demand for diesel, he said: "I don't think that will be a big problem and the demand may not rise that much."

Since it is an expensive fuel, diesel should have been dropped from the production list by default when its price went up, said M Tamim, an energy expert.

"But why are they still burning so much diesel? I have no logic."

Admittedly, diesel use in households and industries may have risen because of load shedding.

"But that demand was not supposed to be claimed by the BPDB. The BPDB should explain why their demand is high," he added.

The purpose defeated

FROM PAGE 1

When the CAG sought an explanation from the departments for the anomalies, the response would always be the same: the nomination process was completed as per the instructions of the development project proposal (DPP) and the decision of the ministry.

What's worse is the officials do not submit a training report upon return to Bangladesh or proof of application of knowledge acquired as per conditions of going for foreign training.

So there is no proof of whether the training session was beneficial at all or contributed to the objective of the projects.

In all the instances, the CAG did not find the replies satisfactory and felt the government money was

wasted as the goals and objectives of the projects are not being met fully.

There are other ways through which corruption takes place such as using funds not earmarked for foreign training and going straight for a request for quotation (RFQ) method without following the due process for procurement of foreign training services.

The government suffers from revenue loss due to the non deduction of value-added tax and income tax at the prescribed rates from various bills of foreign educational tours under the projects, the CAG found.

"The OCG report is an example that gaining undue personal benefits from foreign trips in the name of training and capacity building has

become a part of administrative and project implementation culture in the country," said Itekharruzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh.

Unfortunately, the instances identified in the OCG report are not isolated events.

These go on unabated because there is no accountability for such irregularities, he said.

What is needed is to hold to account all three groups of officials involved: those who participated, those who approved the selections and those who approved the visits.

"Failure to ensure such accountability will render the OCG report as a paper tiger and the illicit practice will continue."

Afghanistan thrash Sri Lanka

FROM PAGE 1

Farooqi, a left-arm quick, stood out for Afghanistan after he struck with successive deliveries in the first over of the innings to send Kusal Mendis and Charith Asalanka trudging back to the pavilion for two and nought.

Naveen-ul-Haq then sent back Pathum Nissanka caught behind after the batsman reviewed the on-field call and the third-umpire upheld the decision despite no visible spike on the ultra-edge, leaving the batsman and dressing room stunned.

At that point Sri Lanka were struggling with just five runs on the board and three wickets down in the opening two overs.

Danushka Gunathilaka (17) and Bhanuka Rajapaksa (38) attempted to hit back with a flurry of boundaries in a 20-run sixth over before spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman broke the 44-run stand.

Wickets kept tumbling with the 13th over providing two run outs, including the end of Rajapaksa while attempting a second run.

Chamika Karunaratne made 31 to

take the team total past 100 before being bowled by Farooqi.

Afghanistan openers came out all guns blazing as Gurbaz smashed three fours and four sixes in his 18-ball blitz before falling to leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga.

Zazai kept up the attack with Ibrahim Zadran, who made 15 before being run out, to bring alive the Afghan supporters and silence the Sri Lankan crowd.

India meet Pakistan in a hotly-anticipated Group A clash on Sunday at the same venue.

Russia can't stop war, even if Ukraine drops Nato hopes: Putin ally

REUTERS

A top ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday that Moscow would not stop its military campaign in Ukraine even if Kyiv formally renounced its aspirations to join Nato.

Former President Dmitry

Medvedev, now deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, also said in a French television interview that Russia was prepared to hold talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy subject to certain conditions.

Even before the February invasion, Moscow made clear

Ukrainian membership of Nato was unacceptable to it.

"Renouncing its participation in the North Atlantic alliance is now vital, but it is already insufficient in order to establish peace," Medvedev told LCI television in quotes reported by Russian news agencies.

US imposed sanctions without proper info

Says home minister

UNB, Dhaka

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday said the US has imposed sanctions on some Bangladeshi law enforcement officials without having any proper information.

Speaking at a conference at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon in the capital, he said people say a lot of things but no one believes those without proper information and proof.

"But that seems to be the case with the US sanctions."

He added that Michelle Bachelet, the UN human rights chief, didn't raise any concerns about the country's human rights situation during her visit.

"We had a long discussion with Bachelet and provided with her with detailed answers to her questions regarding human rights issues, including those about enforced disappearances, through a video presentation..."

Asked, he said the BNP has been "spreading false propaganda about the human right's situation to throw the country into a state of anarchy".

"Bachelet understood that and thus, did not ask any further questions in this regard."

2 new Covid deaths recorded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people died from Covid-19 in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, a DGHS press release said.

With these, the total number of fatalities from the infection stands at 29,323, with the death rate at 1.46 percent.

At least 156 new Covid-19 cases were recorded during this period after testing 3,662 samples, taking the total number of cases in the country to 20,11,100 and the daily positivity rate to 4.26 percent.

Meanwhile, at least 180 Covid-19 patients have recovered within this time. The total number of recoveries now stands at 19,55,264, with the recovery rate at 97.22 percent.

Both the dead were male and aged between 61-80.

Airport trolley man held with 4 gold bars

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Armed Police Battalion (APBn-9) and an intelligence agency arrested a CAAB staffer for the illegal possession of four gold bars at Shah Amanat International Airport in Chattogram yesterday.

The arrestee is Md Ismail, 37, a trolley man at the airport, hailing from Hathazari upazila.

Rezaul Hossen Khan, APBn 9's in-charge inspector at the airport, said law enforcers were tipped off about his suspicious behaviour at the airport lounge.

When they went to search him around 10:30am, they found four gold bars in his pockets, he said.

"He was handed over to Patenga police. A case will be filed in this connection."

ATTACK ON HASINA MOTORCADE

Convict dies in Satkhira

UNB, Satkhira

A 45-year-old convict, who was jailed in a case filed over an attack on the then opposition leader and current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's motorcade in Satkhira 10 years ago, died in hospital early yesterday.

Zabid Raihan Lucky was a former president of Kalaroa municipality Jubo Dal in Satkhira.

Yesterday, he was produced before a court to record his statement in another case. From there, he was

taken to Satkhira Medical College Hospital, where he breathed his last around 1:15am, jail sources said.

He had been suffering from different ailments, including heart and kidney diseases.

His family members yesterday said he would be buried in the family graveyard in Tulshidanga village, following a namaz-e-janaza after Asr prayers.

Zabid was sentenced to 10 years and four years in jail after being found guilty of two separate charges in the case.

PM sets it at Tk 170 a day

FROM PAGE 1

Tea Workers' Union, said, "We respect the decision which came from our prime minister. All workers will join work tomorrow [Sunday]."

Rajdeo Kairi, convener of Cha Sramik Sangha's Moulvibazar chapter, said, "We accept the wage hike though it is inconsistent with the current prices of essentials. We demand the authorities ensure other facilities of tea workers immediately."

Speaking to this newspaper seeking anonymity, many workers yesterday said they would rejoin work though they were not satisfied with the wage hike.

They said it would be very difficult for them to run their families with a daily wage of Tk 170 as the prices of essentials have shot up.

Around 1,25,000 workers in the country's 241 tea estates have been protesting since August 9 demanding their daily wage be raised to Tk 300 from Tk 120.

They abstained from work from August 9-12 for two hours a day before going on a full-scale strike from August 13.

On August 21, some workers' leaders agreed to end the strike, accepting an offer to raise the pay to Tk 145. But most of the workers refused and continued abstaining from work.

In the last two weeks, workers held demonstrations, formed human chains, blockaded roads and rail tracks to press home their demand.

Assange case raises media freedom concerns: UN rights chief

AFP, Geneva

UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet yesterday said that the potential extradition and prosecution of Julian Assange raised concerns for media freedom and could have a "chilling effect" on investigative journalism.

Assange, who has been held in a high-security London prison since 2019, has filed an appeal against his extradition from Britain to the United States.