

Nearly 1,700 journos killed in 20yrs: RSF

AFP, Paris

Nearly 1,700 journalists have been killed worldwide over the past 20 years, an average of more than 80 a year, according to an analysis published by Reporters Without Borders.

The two decades between 2003 and 2022 were “especially deadly decades for those in the service of the right to inform”, said the Paris-based media rights campaigners.

“Behind the figures, there are the faces, personalities, talent and commitment of those who have paid with their lives for their information gathering, their search for the truth and their passion for journalism,” RSF secretary-general Christophe Deloire said.

Iraq and Syria were the most dangerous countries to work as a journalist, accounting for “a combined total of 578 journalists killed in the past 20 years, or more than a third of the worldwide total”, RSF said.

They are followed by Mexico (125 killed), the Philippines (107), Pakistan (93), Afghanistan (81) and Somalia (78).

The “darkest years” were 2012 and 2013, “due in large measure to the war in Syria”. There were 144 killings in 2012 and 142 the year after, the report said.

This peak was “followed by a gradual fall and then historically low figures from 2019 onwards”.

But deaths increased again in 2022, in part because of the war in Ukraine. So far this year, 58 journalists have been killed doing their jobs, up from 51 in 2021.

Eight journalists have been killed in Ukraine since Russia invaded in February. This compares to a total of 12 media deaths there over the preceding 19 years.

Ukraine is currently the most dangerous country in Europe for the media, after Russia itself, where 25 journalists have been killed over the past 20 years.

“Since (President) Vladimir Putin took over, Russia has seen systematic attacks on press freedom — including deadly ones — as RSF has repeatedly reported.

“They include Anna Politkovskaya’s high profile murder on 7 October 2006,” the rights group said.

Elsewhere in Europe, Turkey was ranked third most dangerous, followed by France “as a result of the massacre at the satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo in Paris in 2015”.

Reporters run the greatest risks worldwide in areas where armed conflict has occurred.

But, RSF stressed, “countries where no war is officially taking place, are not necessarily safe for reporters and some of them are near the top of the list of those where killings have occurred.



Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader addresses a rally organised by the party's Dhaka City North unit at the capital's Shyamoli Square yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Ukraine repels drone attack

Assault comes a day after a barrage of Russian missiles hit key cities, energy grid

AFP, KYIV

Ukraine yesterday said it repelled a night-time drone attack from Russia, a day after Moscow launched a new wave of missile strikes in the run-up to New Year celebrations.

The attacks came 10 months into President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, with Russian strikes targeting the energy grid, leaving millions in the cold in the middle of winter.

Ukraine's air force said that Russia's overnight assault was made with “Iranian-made kamikaze drones”.

A total of 16 drones were launched from the southeastern and northern directions and they were “all” destroyed by Ukraine's air defence, it said.

The presidency said Ukraine “withstood” the new drone attacks, which targeted infrastructure.

In the capital Kyiv, city authorities announced an air alert shortly after 2:00 am local time.

Mayor Vitali Klitschko later said seven drones had targeted the capital. Two were shot down “on approach” and five over the city.

There were no casualties, but falling debris damaged windows in two buildings in southwestern Kyiv, he added.

One of the drones hit a four-storey

administrative building, starting a fire that was later extinguished, said Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of the presidential office.

The drone attack came after a barrage of Russian missiles battered Ukraine on Thursday morning, with blasts reported across the vast country, from the northeastern city of Kharkiv to Lviv in the west near the Polish border.

Ukraine's army said Russia had launched several dozen cruise missiles, the majority of which had been shot down.

Russia's defence ministry yesterday said it had carried out a “massive strike” the day earlier on military command and energy facilities.

“All assigned targets were reached,” according to the ministry.

Tymoshenko said four civilians were killed and eight received injuries on Thursday.

Yesterday, three people were killed by Russian shelling, he said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said most regions were left without power following Thursday's attack.

Ukraine's energy operator yesterday said the damage had a “much smaller impact” on the power grid than “the enemy expected” and the power deficit was back to the levels before Thursday's attack.

But “the situation in the southern and

eastern regions is still difficult,” Ukrenergo added.

Russia has faced international condemnation and an onslaught of unprecedented sanctions over its war in Ukraine.

The growing international isolation has forced Putin to seek closer political and economic cooperation with nations in the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

A pariah in the West since the start of the assault on Ukraine, Putin yesterday spoke by video link with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, calling him a “dear friend” and hailing the two countries' efforts to counter Western “pressure”.

Putin also said he was keen to ramp up military cooperation.

Putin also hailed the efforts of Moscow and Beijing to counter “unprecedented Western pressure and provocations” and said he expected Xi to arrive in Moscow for a state visit next spring.

Putin has also relied on the backing of Belarus's long-serving president Alexander Lukashenko, who allowed Russian troops to use his country as a launchpad for the offensive.

In a first, Minsk on Thursday said its forces had downed a Ukrainian air defence missile in the western Brest region that borders Poland and Ukraine, raising fears of a spillover of the conflict.

800 sued over post-polls violence in Dinaipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

Over 800 people were sued in two separate cases in connection with the attacks on authorities following the elections for Birol municipality and Rajarampur union parishad in Dinaipur.

The incidents occurred at the Brahmapur Government Primary School and Kanaibari High School polling centres on Thursday.

An official vehicle was vandalised, and several people were injured in the attacks, including a presiding officer and members of the police and Ansar.

Police had to fire several rounds in the air to disperse the attackers.

Abdul Latif and Salehin Ahmed, presiding officers of the two polling centres, filed the cases with Birol Police Station on Thursday and yesterday.

According to police, after announcing the results in the evening, supporters of the defeated candidates tried to stop polling officials from leaving the two centres by blocking their path and throwing brickbats.

The vehicle of Executive Magistrate Mahmudul Hasan was vandalised at Brahmapur Government Primary School.

Meanwhile, police and Ansar members were attacked at Kanaibari High School.

Later, police fired several rounds into the air to calm things down.

Birol Police Station Office in Charge (OC) Rezaul Hasan said police have yet to arrest anyone in connection to these two cases.

No Covid death in 24hrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

No Covid-19 death was reported in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, said a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services.

The total number of deaths from Covid remains at 29,439 and the mortality rate at 1.45 percent.

Thirteen new cases were recorded from 2,254 samples that were tested during this time.

With this, the total number of cases rose to 20,37,102.

The current positivity rate is 0.58 percent while the total positivity rate is 13.43 percent.

At least 83 patients recovered during this time. The total number of recoveries now stands at 19,87,686 and the recovery rate at 97.57 percent.

Syria attack blamed on jihadists kills 12 oil workers

AFP, Beirut

An attack in eastern Syria killed 12 oil field workers, a war monitor said yesterday, a day after Syrian Kurdish-led forces announced an offensive against jihadists.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which draws on extensive sources inside Syria, gave the toll of a dozen dead in the assault near an oil field west of Deir Ezzor.

It blamed cells linked to the Islamic State group (IS). The jihadists have previously carried out attacks in the area, and a similar deadly assault took place last year.

Time to hit the reset button

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Had the government withdrawn the interest rate cap — which effectively broke down the market mechanism for money when it was implemented in April 2020 — as soon as the pandemic waned, would inflation have hit a decade high, or would the import control measures have failed?

Would there be a cost of living crisis now if the government started weaning off energy subsidies and ushered in automated fuel pricing a while back? People would not have gotten the shock of a record fuel price hike on August 5.

Had the government some fiscal space, it could have adequately cushioned the blow of inflation on the poor and the vulnerable.

Would the government need budget support from development partners, which is just creating future debt, if its subsidy burden and expenditure were not so enormous and tax revenue perennially so meagre?

Had the government spread out

its energy strategy and sincerely ran its gas exploration activities, the factories would not be starved of gas now.

Would the government have the albatross of capacity payment around its neck now if it were stricter in negotiating its contracts with the power producers and more strategic in achieving its electrification target?

Weeks after announcing 100 percent electrification, the country was back to experiencing hours of power outages, raising questions about the progress made on this front.

The government's soft touch with the banking sector, the tax administration and project implementation and selection have long been spoken of.

But no action was taken on that front. So, the banking sector continues to be saddled with bad loans, the tax-to-revenue GDP continues to be amongst the lowest in the world, and projects continue to see cost and time overruns.

If there were any resolve to this

end, there would have been no need for the austerity measures, which cost the country more in terms of optics than the savings it generated.

In a nutshell, there was a lot of economic mismanagement. But, the government now has a golden opportunity to rectify things by way of the IMF programme.

In return for \$4.5 billion over a 42-month period, the Washington-based multilateral lender would be stipulating a host of necessary structural reforms.

It is imperative that the government sincerely commits to IMF's programme conditions — which are set to be finalised in January — as a lot depends on it.

Already, global rating agency Moody's has placed Bangladesh's long-held credit rating for downgrade as it fears the “unorthodox policies” to arrest the deteriorating external position and government's fiscal metrics and ease the energy crisis — would not work.

The rating review will focus

on understanding the scope and conditions under which IMF support will be provided as Moody's is doubtful of the government's willingness and ability to consistently meet the programme's requirements given the challenging social conditions.

Alongside placing Bangladesh's rating for downgrade, Moody's has put up seven banks' ratings for review.

Were Moody's to downgrade Bangladesh's rating, the other two major credit rating agencies — Fitch and Standard & Poor — will follow suit.

If that happens, the way Bangladesh conducts its foreign transactions and lending will fundamentally change for the worse.

Once a country is downgraded, it takes years — and even a full decade — to move back up. In other words, the rating downgrade would set the country back by decades — and that must be avoided at all costs.

It is time to reset, refocus, readjust and restart — and let this new resolve begin from the new year.

No New Year's greetings for US, France, Germany: Kremlin

AFP, Moscow

US President Joe Biden, France's Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will not be receiving New Year's greetings from Russian leader Vladimir Putin, the Kremlin said yesterday.

As the world gears up to ring in the New Year this weekend, Putin sent congratulatory messages to the leaders of Kremlin-friendly countries including Turkey, Syria, Venezuela and China.

But Putin will not wish a happy New Year to the leaders of the United States, France and Germany, countries that have piled unprecedented sanctions on Moscow over Putin's assault on Ukraine.

US winter storm death toll now 61

AFP, Washington

The death toll from a fierce winter storm that gripped much of the United States over Christmas rose to at least 61 on Thursday, officials said.

Erie County executive Mark Poloncarz said two more deaths had been reported in the western New York region that bore the brunt of the historic storm, bringing the total to 39.

Erie County includes the snow-battered city of Buffalo, where most of the deaths occurred.

Poloncarz said 17 of the 39 victims were found outside, 11 were in homes, four were in cars, four died while shoveling or snowblowing and three were the result of an inability of emergency responders to reach them in time.

Nine deaths were reported in storm-related car crashes in the midwestern state of Ohio with scattered fatalities in at least half-a-dozen other states.

With temperatures rising and snow melting, officials in New York had expressed concerns about flooding but the county executive said “it does not appear like it will be bad.”

“Thankfully, it appears that flooding will be minimal,” Poloncarz said.

He said that electricity had been restored to all county residents.

As Buffalo dug itself out of the once-in-a-generation storm, there has been mounting criticism of the response of the authorities with Poloncarz calling the city's handling “embarrassing.”

A travel ban, for example, was not issued in Buffalo until 9:30 am on Friday morning when many people were already on their way to work.

The storm also brought unseasonably cold temperatures to states such as Texas and Florida and caused chaos at airports, with thousands of flights delayed or canceled.

AL holds rallies

FROM PAGE 1

said, “The way a snake sheds its skin continuously; the alliance of the BNP sheds its skin. Sometimes, there are 20 parties and 12 parties; now they say there are 33 parties [in the combine] ... Except for a few parties, the rest are in name only.”

He added that their rallies were not for countering the BNP's programme.

The AL leader said they were watchful so that the BNP could not create any instability, adding that they would remain on the streets until the next election.

Speaking there, AL Presidium Member Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya asked the party men to remain on the streets to save the lives and properties of the people

from “BNP's anarchy”.

The Dhaka city (south) unit AL held a “peace rally” at Jatrabari intersection where several thousand leaders and activists were present.

There AL Presidium Member AHM Khairuzzaman Liton said the BNP and their supporters could not accept the people's enthusiasm over the metro rail. That is why the party is spreading propaganda against the government's development, he said.

“Even after forging a combine with 130 parties, the BNP will not be able to do any harm to the Awami League,” he added.

Meanwhile, Chhatra League, pro-AL student organisation, held a brief rally near Shahbagh intersection, protesting the “BNP-Jamaat's violence”.

Like-minded parties join BNP's showdown

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The head of the procession reached Kakrail intersection around 3:30pm. Hundreds upon hundreds of activists kept marching and the tail end of the procession could not be seen in Kakrail until 6:00pm.

Many of the activists were holding the national flag and their party flag. Others were holding pictures of arrested leaders and activists.

A huge number of law enforcers were deployed in Fakirapool and Moghbazar areas. Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs), water cannons and prison buses were seen in large numbers.

The ruling Awami League leaders and activists took positions

at different points of the capital including Shahbagh. The AL said their programme was to protest against the arson attacks and violence by BNP-Jamaat men.

JAMAAT POLICE CLASHES

The clashes took place as police intercepted Jamaat processions after Juma prayers in Mouchak and Paltanareas.

Witnesses said a procession was coming towards Mouchak intersection from Malibagh level crossing when police stopped the activists and snatched away their banners.

“A group of people under the Jamaat Shibir banner attacked police just after Juma prayers,” said Shah Mahmud, additional deputy

commissioner of New Market Division, adding police then drove them away.

In Paltan, witnesses said a group of people were chanting slogans in an alley across the Baitul Mukarram mosque after Juma prayers when police fired bullets to disperse the crowd and detained a few men.

Salahuddin Mia, officer-in-charge of Paltan Police Station, said, “We dispersed the crowd and detained three men.”

Besides, Ganatantra Mancha activists marched on Topkhana road near Jatiya Press Club while activists of Jatiyatabadi Samamona Dal, a 12-party alliance and the LDP also organised processions in the capital.