

Take coordinated action against Myanmar's junta

UN special rapporteur urges int'l community

REUTERS, Geneva

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar on Monday called on the international community to coordinate sanctions to counter the abuses perpetrated by the southeast Asian country's military.

Since a junta seized power in February 2021, Myanmar has been plunged into chaos, with a resistance movement fighting the military on multiple fronts following a bloody crackdown on opponents.

Thomas Andrews, the special rapporteur, told reporters in Geneva that the junta's violence had galvanised and strengthened the opposition, and that coordinated, targeted sanctions could further weaken the military leadership.

"They have less control of the country than they did at the beginning of this coup," Andrews said of Myanmar's junta. "We could make a very significant difference if we increased our support and we coordinated that support...I think it

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Speeding main cause of Madaripur crash

Says probe body member

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Shariatpur

The probe body formed to investigate Sunday's Madaripur bus crash, which claimed the lives of 19 people, has identified speeding as the primary cause of the accident.

"The bus was at high speeds when the accident occurred. However, we could not confirm whether its tyre burst or not. Besides, it is also possible that the driver fell asleep over the steering," said a member of the probe body, seeking anonymity.

There might be two reasons behind the bus skidding off the road -- firstly, its tyre could burst and secondly, the driver could have lost control over the steering due to drowsiness or carelessness, he told The Daily Star last evening.

"But none of the two possibilities could be confirmed yet. Further investigation by technical experts of Buet is required to find the actual cause," he added.

Earlier on Sunday morning, the Emad Paribahan bus that was heading towards Dhaka from Khulna went off the Dhaka-Bhanga expressway at Madaripur's Shishchar upazila and crashed, killing 19 people.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina poses for a photograph with the players of the Purba Panchapukur Government Primary School from Nilphamari, who won the Bangabandhu Gold Cup final beating Binodpur Collegepara Government Primary School from Rajbari, at the Army Stadium in Banani yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

London police racist, misogynist: review

AFP, London

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and bereaved families yesterday led calls for "top to bottom" reform of London's Metropolitan Police, after a review found the UK's largest crime-fighting force to be institutionally racist, sexist, and homophobic.

The report, written by government official Louise Casey, was commissioned after the kidnap, rape and murder two years ago of a London woman, Sarah Everard, by serving Metropolitan Police officer Wayne Couzens.

Since then another officer, David Carrick, has also been jailed for life for dozens of rapes and sexual assaults stretching back two decades, and several other Met scandals have emerged.

Casey found those shocking crimes were perpetrated in a pervasive culture of "deep-seated homophobia" and predatory behaviour, in which female officers and staff "routinely face sexism and misogyny".

She also warned the force could still be employing rapists and murderers.

Officers from minorities suffer widespread bullying, while violence against women and girls has not been treated seriously enough by the majority white and male force, she said.

A Muslim officer reported finding

bacon left in boots inside a locker, a Sikh said his beard was cut because a colleague "thought it was funny", and sex toys were placed in coffee mugs as pranks.

"I make a finding of institutional racism, sexism and homophobia in the Met," Casey stated in the foreword to her damning 363-page report, adding that the force "has to change itself".

"Upsetting" - Casey's conclusions come nearly 25 years after the Macpherson Report - which probed Met failures after the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993 - also found the force institutionally racist and recommended dozens of reforms.

Yet she discovered that internal discrimination is "tolerated", with complaints "likely to be turned against Black, Asian and ethnic minority officers".

Lawrence's mother Doreen said the report showed the force was "rotten to the core".

"It is not, and has never been, a case of a few 'bad apples'," she said.

"It is rotten to the core. Discrimination is institutionalised within the Metropolitan Police and it needs changing from top to bottom." Prime Minister Sunak said what had been happening inside the Met was "simply shocking and unacceptable" and that "there needs to be a change in culture and leadership".

Sri Lanka bailout conditional on tackling corruption

Says IMF after signing off on a \$3b loan for the island nation

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka must not allow entrenched corruption to undermine a bailout for its bankrupt economy, the IMF said yesterday after signing off on a \$3 billion loan for the crisis-hit nation.

The International Monetary Fund approved its long-delayed rescue programme on Monday after China, the South Asian island's biggest bilateral lender, offered debt relief assurances.

But it said the rescue was conditional on tackling the deep-rooted culture of graft and government mismanagement blamed for tipping Sri Lanka into an unprecedented economic crisis last year.

Peter Breuer, the IMF mission chief in Sri Lanka, said the government had agreed to enact tougher anti-corruption laws within months during the bailout negotiations.

"We emphasise the importance of anti-corruption and governance reforms as a central pillar of the programme," he told reporters.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe said the latest rescue would allow him to ease a range of import bans imposed since March 2020 to shore up foreign exchange reserves.

Launching not before 2025

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This means, the commissioning can be expected to start well into 2025.

Meanwhile, at yesterday's meeting, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed her dissatisfaction over the cost escalation of 288 percent for a project to purchase armoured vehicles through a Japanese grant to scale up Bangladesh Police's efficiency.

The Tk 80 crore project for the purchase of 12 armoured vehicles, 20 escort vehicles and five floodlight vehicles was taken up in July 2019 under a Japanese grant. The procurement was supposed to be done by June 2021.

That did not happen.

Subsequently, the implementing agency has sought a time extension of two years to June 2023 and another Tk 246.48 crore, a fourfold cost escalation.

The reason behind the proposed cost revision is the imposition of an

826 percent value-added tax against the value of armoured and escort vehicles that the project authority was not aware of while preparing the development project proposal.

"It's true that the PM has expressed her dissatisfaction," Satyajit Karmaker, secretary of the planning division, told reporters after the meeting.

The PM said that those vehicles were purchased with a grant. Were the officials careful, the complexities that have arisen due to the tax issues could have been avoided, Karmaker said quoting Hasina.

"The prime minister said that buildings are constructed one after another in the name of projects. It is not right. What we are seeing is beautiful buildings are there but there are no people, there are computers but no trainers. This is really terrible," Mannan told reporters, quoting Hasina.

She also directed the government officials to use locally-assembled

Pragoti vehicles.

Hasina also expressed her utter dismay over the road transport and highway division's draft policy that proposed the maximum speed of motorcycles below 126cc to 30kmph. The Daily Star has learnt from officials informed of the contents of the meeting.

"A lot of people now travel on bikes. Bikes take small space compared to cars. The rider might drive a bit fast like at a speed of 40 or 50kmph when the traffic is light to reach the destination fast. If the speed limit is imposed, it will only discourage the use of bikes," said one of the officials quoting the PM.

Subsequently, the PM has directed the home minister to look into the issue.

At the meeting, Ecne approved five of the nine proposals for increasing their deadlines by two to five years and cost revision of up to 40 percent.

74pc SMEs victims of corruption

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The researchers found that three-quarters of the SMEs were unwilling to pay these bribes but most of them did.

The SMEs said that they have to pay bribes to get their trade licences, get loans from banks, and pass inspections, the report said, adding that partly because of these reasons, most SMEs choose to operate informally, bypassing regulations and evading taxes.

Of those who had bribed, licence renewal was the most cited reason. A total of 73.2 percent of medium enterprises and 67.5 percent of small enterprises had to pay to get their licences renewed.

Approximately a third of all the respondents said the registration and licensing offices were the most corrupt government office while 18 percent pointed to law enforcement agencies.

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas said if Bangladesh can assure citizens and investors that

corruption is less prevalent here than in other markets, it will attract more investments.

Bangladesh has many advantages that potential investors would find attractive, he said. "But as American business leaders tell me: multi-national firms have options on where they invest."

They will choose whichever country has the lowest levels of corruption, the fewest bureaucratic obstacles, the greatest respect for rule of law, and the best logistics infrastructure for their business, he added.

"Because of the corruption involved in getting access to loans, most of the stimulus packages that were announced for SMEs during the pandemic remained undistributed," said Ali Riaz, a distinguished professor at the Department of Politics and Government at Illinois State University.

He was the principal investigator of this research.

Md Helal Uddin, president of Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity,

said the small enterprises have not received any stimulus loans from banks and medium enterprises got higher priority.

Ali Imam Majumder, former cabinet secretary, said a special tribunal is needed to deal with corruption cases, which would encourage people to report corruption.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the government's anti-corruption mechanism has to be more citizen-friendly so that it enables citizens to file complaints and get remedies.

The speakers stated that the government needs to reduce the number of points of contact for obtaining and renewing business licences by using technology, which should diminish the scope for bribery. Muhammad Abdul Mazid, former chairman of the National Board of Revenue, also spoke at the event chaired by chairperson of CGS Manjur A Chowdhury and moderated by its executive director Zillur Rahman.

'ACC couldn't bring them to justice'

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About the reasons behind this failure, the ACC commissioner said, "Repatriating the laundered money and bringing back the launderers to the country for trial are complicated work."

"Sometimes laws of the respective countries and mutual treaties create barriers for repatriation of the money. We're trying to overcome this."

In reply to a query, ACC Chairman Mohammad Moinuddin Abdullah said upon their requests, authorities of the respective countries freeze moveable and immovable properties of the launderers and inform them about it. "But we don't have any mechanism to monitor whether it is unfreezed later."

Asked about allegations of using illegal money in national polls by candidates, he said the ACC will keep an eye on the election.

"We cannot initiate a probe

without information. If we get information, we'll launch enquiry following the relevant act."

He said the ACC is working on reducing the time it spends on enquiries. "If we can do it, transparency and dynamism will be ensured."

Replying to a question on the progress of the BASIC Bank loan scam probe, the ACC chief said, "The case is pending. We've expedited our work and there are directives of the High Court."

On November 28, 2022, the HC expressed disappointment at the ACC's failure to press charges in any of the 56 cases filed over the bank's loan scam in the last seven years.

"Crores of taka has been embezzled. But no work is being done though the Anti-Corruption Commission and so many judges and lawyers are there. Why are they [ACC] silent? This is

just like a drama. We are watching the drama. This is not acceptable," an HC bench observed while hearing bail petitions filed by Mohammad Ali, former general manager of BASIC Bank's Shantinagar branch.

According to the ACC's annual report 2022, there were 3,326 cases pending with the court. The ACC got 19,338 complaints and selected 901 for enquiries.

The graft watchdog filed 406 cases, submitted charge sheets in 224 cases and won 211 out of 346 cases last year. The courts imposed a fine of Tk 2,632 crore and confiscated Tk 13.96 crore in the 211 cases.

"Imposing fines and confiscation of wealth are more fruitful than sending the corrupt to jail. It will reduce the tendency of people being involved in corruption," the ACC chief added.

Struggle for safe drinking water getting tougher

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for rainwater harvesting.

"As the salinity in the water of tube-wells is increasing, we have to focus on surface water," he added.

The situation in Koyra, another coastal upazila of Khulna, is not much different.

There are around 7,000 tube-wells in Koyra and water from 3,784 of them is not drinkable.

There are 13 government ponds in the upazila, but most of them are in poor state, said DPHE officials.

Baharuddin Mridha, superintendent engineer of DPHE

(Khulna Circle), said people in many upazilas of Khulna and Satkhira are facing an acute drinking water crisis due to salinity and arsenic contamination, with salinity affecting almost all water sources there.

Apart from Dakop and Koyra, Batiaghata, Dumuria, and Paikgacha upazilas in Khulna and Shymnagar, Ashshuni, Kaliganj, Tala and Debhata upazilas in Satkhira are the worst affected upazilas, he added.

Fisheries department officials said use of salt water in shrimp cultivation, currently being done on 1.45 lakh hectares in Khulna, Satkhira

and Bagerhat, also affects freshwater reservoirs.

Dilip Kumar Datta, former professor of environmental science at Khulna University, said salinity is increasing in rivers, ponds and other water bodies.

He said the government should declare the southwestern region a special zone and act accordingly because of the water crisis.

He observed that rainwater could be a solution to the water crisis. "Open ponds and rain water can mitigate the basic water crisis in coastal areas."

Arav not yet held in UAE

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"We have no information about his [Arav] arrest," Manzur Rahman, assistant inspector general (media and public relations) of police, told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

When this correspondent called Arav's wife Mahua in Dubai at 6:43pm yesterday, she said her husband was home. When asked for him, she said he was in the restroom and requested the

correspondent to call back later.

This correspondent called her twice, at 7:00pm and at 7:38pm, but she did not pick up.

At 7:46pm, Arav in a Facebook post sought blessings from all.

The National Central Bureau (NCB), the Bangladesh chapter of Interpol, earlier requested the international police organisation to issue a red notice

for Arav.

On Monday, Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun at a programme in Chattogram said Interpol accepted Bangladesh police's request for the red notice.

Arav's criminal record came under the spotlight after he invited cricketer Shakib Al Hasan to open his jewellery store in Dubai on March 15.

Man killed in cylinder blast at gas station

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man was killed and another injured as the gas cylinder of a truck exploded at a filling station in the capital's Mugda area yesterday.

The dead is Mohammad Saddam, helper of the truck, said Mohammad Jamal Uddin Mir, officer-in-charge of Mugda Police Station.

The incident took place around 5:00am at Best Eastern CNG Filling Station, he added.

Mubaidul Islam, sub-inspector of the police station, said Saddam was standing nearby when the truck's gas cylinder was being refilled at the station.

Suddenly, the gas cylinder exploded with a big bang, leaving Saddam dead on the spot, he added.

A day labourer who was travelling by the truck was also injured, he said.

One killed, two hurt in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A man was killed and two others were injured in a road accident in Narayanganj's Rugganj yesterday morning.

The dead is Kamal Mia, 52, of Brahmanbaria's Nabinagar, said police.

Kamal was heading towards Rugganj's Gawsia area from the capital by a car. A speedy truck hit the car from behind around 6:00am. As a result, the car turned turtle, said Omar Faruk, inspector of Bhulta highway police.

Police detained Shakil Mia, 20, driver of the truck, he said, adding that the driver had a licence for lighter vehicles but did not have permit to drive a freight truck.

Homemaker set ablaze for exposing drug addict brother-in-law

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

A homemaker was set ablaze by her drug addict brother-in-law in Brahmanbaria's Nabinagar as she exposed him in front of her family.

Latifa Begum, 42, suffered 54 percent burns and was admitted to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in the capital.

She was put on life support on Monday night as her condition was critical, said doctors of the medical facility.

Accused Jalal, 34, started beating her on Sunday afternoon and then set her ablaze after pouring petrol on her, said victim's UAE expatriate husband Zakaria.

Police are trying to arrest him, said Sirajul Islam, additional superintendent of Police (Nabinagar circle).

Victim's brother Takir Hossain filed a written complaint with Nabinagar Police Station.