

EU RIGHTS PRIZE

Amini family blocked from leaving Iran

AFP, Paris

The family of Mahsa Amini have been banned from travelling to France to collect a top rights prize awarded posthumously, their lawyer said yesterday.

Amini died aged 22 on September 16, 2022, while being held by Iran's religious police for allegedly breaching the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women.

Yesterday her family's lawyer in France, Chirinne Ardakani, told AFP that Amini's parents and brother had been "prohibited from boarding the flight that was to take them to France for the presentation of the Sakharov Prize".

She said the family had been banned from leaving Iran despite having a valid visa, and their passports had been confiscated.



Palestinian firefighters work to extinguish a fire in a house after an Israeli strike in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

EU strikes deal on landmark AI law

AFP, Brussels

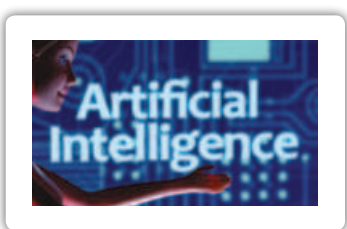
EU member states and lawmakers clinched a deal on Friday on how to draft "historic" rules regulating artificial intelligence models such as ChatGPT -- after 36 hours of negotiations.

Meeting in Brussels, negotiators nailed down curbs on how AI can be used in Europe, which they said would not hurt innovation in the sector nor the prospects for future European AI champions.

"Historic! With the political deal on the AI Act sealed today, the EU becomes the first continent to set clear rules for the use of AI," declared the EU's internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton.

"The AI Act is much more than a rulebook -- it's a launchpad for EU startups and researchers to lead the global race for trustworthy AI," he added.

The "AI Act" has been rushed through the European Union's legislative process this year after the chatbot ChatGPT, a mass-market gateway to generative AI, exploded onto the scene late 2022.



REUTERS, Dubai

Some countries are resisting a proposed pledge to phase out fossil fuels in a COP28 climate deal, jeopardising attempts for UN climate talks to deliver a hard commitment for the first time in 30 years on ending the use of oil and gas.

Observers in the negotiations said Saudi Arabia and Russia were among countries insisting that the summit in Dubai focus only on reducing climate pollution - with no mention of the fossil fuels causing it.

Earlier this week, the oil producer group OPEC sent a letter urging its members and allies to reject any mention of fossil fuels in the final

FOSSIL FUEL PHASE-OUT

COP28 clashes after OPEC pushback

summit deal. The letter warned that "undue and disproportionate pressure against fossil fuels may reach a tipping point" in the talks.

In a statement to Reuters, OPEC Secretary General Haitham Al Ghais declined to comment on the letter, but said OPEC wanted to keep the summit's focus on reducing climate warming emissions, and away from their main sources like oil and gas.

"The world requires major investments in all energies, including hydrocarbons," he said. "Energy transitions must be just, fair and inclusive."

It was the first time OPEC's Secretariat has intervened in the UN climate talks with such a letter.

"It indicates a whiff of panic," said Alden Meyer of think-tank E3G.

On the other side, at least 80 countries including the United States, European Union and many poor, climate-vulnerable nations are demanding that a COP28 deal call clearly for an eventual end to fossil fuel use.

Other countries including India and China have not explicitly endorsed a fossil fuel phase-out at COP28, but have backed a popular call for boosting renewable energy.

Ireland's former president, Mary Robinson, who heads a group of former world leaders known as the Elders, said the letter showed OPEC was "worried" about the trajectory of the COP28 talks.

Plagued by uncertainty

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charges of vandalising factories and vehicles. The Daily Star has learnt from speaking with locals.

Some were not even garment workers.

"They just returned home at 9:00 pm and got arrested at 2:00am," said a local on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.

And the garment workers who were picked up did not even join in the protests.

"The workers never vandalised the factories -- we know that the factory equipment is the source of our livelihoods. There is CCTV footage of these incidents," said a garment worker living in the area.

Besides general workers, at least five worker leaders have been arrested over inciting riots, vandalising establishments, blocking roads and setting fire to vehicles during the protests.

Police, however, denied the claims of random arrests.

"We have not received any allegation of randomly arresting workers -- the miscreants were arrested based on facts and evidence," said Mohammad Sarwar Alam, superintendent of police at Industrial Police 2, Gazipur.

Regardless, a probe committee has been formed to investigate whether laws were violated or excessive force was used by police while engaging with the workers, he added.

Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), echoed the same.

"Police have been arresting those who were involved in vandalism and arson, which are legitimate reasons to arrest a citizen," he added.

The correspondent visited the slums of Bauniabadi, Bhashantek and Baksnagar areas and found that many garment workers who led or attended the protests in Mirpur have fled their homes in fear of arrests or retaliation from local ruling party leaders.

Other than the police, the ruling party leaders and activists also joined in to suppress the workers' movement, according to Ashulia, Konabari and Mirpur residents.

The Daily Star could not verify the role of the ruling party men in foiling the protests, while police present during the clash denied their involvement.

The local party leaders have tagged workers as members of the opposition and attacked them indiscriminately during the protests, said workers, who continue to be under duress to

not stage any more demonstrations.

"We have received numerous reports of workers getting harassed and threatened after they were branded as opposition activists," said Kalpona Akter, executive director of the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity (BCWS).

The BCWS, however, could not determine the exact number of arrested, sacked and fled workers as they and their families are too afraid to talk.

"The political leaders have tried to tarnish a legitimate labour movement by giving it a political colour. It is the government that has pushed the agitation this far," Kalpona said.

And for those workers who have begrudgingly returned to their workstations, a rough welcome awaited them.

Their managers are making them stay in their work stations long past their hours and imposing additional workload -- by dangling the threat of arrests under the blanket cases.

"Many of our colleagues didn't return to the factory after the protests in fear of arrests, but our factory didn't employ new workers," said a garment worker in Mirpur on the condition of anonymity to speak candidly about his ordeal.

Instead, the floor managers are forcing those who call in to work to do the job of two or three people.

Before the protests, the worker used to stitch 160 to 180 shirts a day. Now, it is upwards of 300 shirts.

"We reach our factory at 8:00am sharp but we can't leave before 9:00pm. If we complain, they verbally abuse us and threaten to call the police to arrest us in those cases. They are doing this to punish us for the protests and to maximise profits, as they have to pay the increased salary now," the worker added.

The factory managers have also barred workers from talking to journalists, non-governmental organisations or union leaders.

"If we don't obey these instructions, they threaten to lay us off. It feels like we are working in a jail," said another garment worker who works in a factory in Konabari.

The BGMEA president, however, denied the accounts of harassment and disproportionate work pressure and the threats or retaliatory measures against workers who participated in the protests.

"When the increased wage was declared, the workers voluntarily returned to their factories. We did not

force them to join. We are running our factories just as we did before," Hassan said.

The workers though feel boxed into a corner.

"The factory owners and government bodies, the supposed guardians of the workers, are fully responsible for these protests. There is no way for workers to channel their grievances and get their demands fulfilled," Kalpona said.

Barrister Mainul

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The eldest son of renowned journalist Tofazzal Hossain (Manik Mia), Mainul was born in Pirojpur in January 1940. After completing his graduation in 1961 from Dhaka University, he went to London to study law.

He returned to Bangladesh in 1965 and joined the Dhaka Bar Council, commencing his career in the legal field, according to his biography sent by Wahiduzzaman.

He took on the responsibility of The Daily Ittefaq as its editor in 1969, after the sudden demise of his father. Four years later, he returned to his legal profession but continued as the chairman of the board of editors.

Barrister Mainul Hossain was elected member of the parliament in 1973 from Awami League, representing his village constituency in Bhandaria of Pirojpur.

In May 1975, he and General MAG Osmani resigned from parliament after the introduction of a one-party system of government known as Baksal (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League).

He was the president of the Supreme Court Bar Association from 2000 to 2001.

Mainul served as the law, justice and parliamentary affairs adviser during his tenure in the 2007-2008 caretaker government.

In October 2018, he was arrested in a case filed by journalist Masuda Bhatti for defaming her. He spent three months in jail before he was granted bail.

Barrister Mainul's first namaz-e-janaza will be held at Baridhara Mosque at 10:00am today, and the second janaza will be held at Supreme Court premises after Jhor prayers. He will be buried next to the graves of his parents at the Azimpur graveyard in the capital.

Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan expressed deep sorrow at Mainul's death. He prayed for the salvation of the departed soul and conveyed sympathy to the bereaved family members.

EC starts appeals disposal today

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EC documents show Barishal-5 aspirant Serniabat Sadiq Abdullah, former AL mayor of Barishal city, appealed against the AL nominee Zahid, also water resources state minister. Sadiq alleged Zahid concealed case information in the affidavits.

On the other hand, a man named KBS Ahmed, who seconded the nomination paper of Zahid Faruk, filed an appeal against Sadiq, saying the latter concealed information in his affidavits.

AL nominee for Barishal-4 Shammi Ahmed, whose candidature was cancelled over dual citizenship, challenged the candidacy of Pangkaj Nath, the incumbent AL MP and independent candidate, citing unreported wealth information.

In Noakhali-4, senior vice-president of district AL and independent candidate Shihab Uddin Shahin, appealed against the candidacy of AL nominee Ekramul Karim Chowdhury.

In Cumilla-5, local AL leader and independent candidate Sajjad

Hossain challenged the RO's decision accepting the candidacy of AL pick Abul Hashem Khan.

Member of AL central sub-committee on liberation war affairs and independent candidate Moniruzzaman Monir appealed against the AL-nominated aspirant Shahjahan Omar over concealed case information. Omar, also a former BNP leader, got the AL ticket soon after he came out of jail.

In Mymensingh-4, AL MP Anwarul Abedin Khan, who failed to get the party ticket, appealed against AL-pick Abdus Salam's candidacy.

In Tangail-2, AL independent Younus Islam Talukder appealed against his party nominee Choto Monir.

Incumbent AL MP from Jossore-4 Ranajit Kumar Roy challenged the bid of AL pick Enamul Haque Babul, saying he is a loan defaulter. Bangladesh Nationalist Movement aspirant from Jossore-4 Sukriti Kumar Mandol filed the same appeal.

In Chattogram-9, Jatiya Party nominee Sanjid Rashid Chowdhury appealed against the candidacy

of Deputy Minister of Education Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury.

JSD leader and aspirant from Netrokona-4 Mushfiqur Rahman challenged the candidacy of AL nominee and former senior secretary Sajjadul Hasan, saying Sajjad did not complete his three-year tenure after his retirement.

Businessman AK Azad, an independent candidate from Faridpur-3, challenged the candidacy of AL nominee Shamim Haq over dual citizenship.

Shamim also filed an appeal challenging the candidature of Azad.

AL nominee for Kishoreganj-3 Nasirul Islam Khan challenged the candidacy of Jatiya Party leader Mujibul Haque Chunnun over defaulted loan.

Nasirul's candidacy was cancelled over concealment of case information, and he filed a separate appeal against that decision.

Nazrul Islam, an aspirant from Patuakhali-1, challenged the candidacy of Jatiya Party leader Ruhul Amin Hawlader over delayed submission of his tax return.

Police foil Mayer Daak demos in Dhaka

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of businessman Ismail Hossain Baten, who has been missing since June 2019, was speaking about growing up without a father, when the police grabbed the mic from her.

The cops then jostled with them and eventually sent them away. But the protesters regrouped in front of the National Press Club.

There, Insha continued, sobbing uncontrollably, "You've taken away my father and now you're taking away my right to speak."

"I'm not at all afraid of the police, I didn't feel afraid when they took away my mic -- I just felt angry. For the past five years, I have a new identity -- I'm the daughter of an enforced disappearance victim. Today, I'll not leave my ground."

Adiba Islam Hridi, 13-year-old daughter of Chhatra Dal leader Parvez Hossain, who remains missing since 2013, took to the mic and said, "Why are the police not letting me demand my father's return? ... I am so tired of asking for it over and over again."

Other children present in the

crowd harassed by riot police included Arowa, the daughter of forcibly disappeared BNP leader Sajedul Islam Sumon; Lamiya Akter Mim, the daughter of Kawsar Hossain who was picked up by law enforcers from his house in West Nakhla para in December 2013; and Safa, the daughter of Md Sohel, a Bangshal thana Chhatra Dal leaders, who has been missing for a decade.

Ayesha Ali, the mother of Abdul Quader Bhuiyan Masum, a final year student of the capital's Government Titumir College, described how she was not even allowed to hold a banner asking for her son's return.

"When I held up my banner, the police forced me to roll it back."

"My son was going to be an intelligence officer just like them. He had even passed his written exams but then he was picked up."

Salma Islam Maya's husband, Shamsul Islam Soleman, joint secretary of Laxmipur district Jubo Dal, was picked up in 2014 and found dead four days after.

"My children didn't want me to come here but how could I not?

BEHEADING OF TEACHER

French court convicts 6 teens

AFP, Paris

A French court on Friday convicted six teenagers for their role in the 2020 beheading of a teacher by a radicalised Islamist near Paris, in a case that horrified the country. The prison sentences range from 14 months to two years, but all are suspended or commuted and no defendant will serve jail time, according to a youth court judgement read at a public hearing after behind-closed-door proceedings. Samuel Paty, a 47-year-old history and geography teacher, was stabbed and then beheaded near his secondary school in the Paris suburb of Conflans-Sainte-Honorine on October 16, 2020.

APOCALYPTIC conditions grip Gaza

AFP, Paris

Aid charities have sounded the alarm about an "apocalyptic" situation in Gaza after more than two months of war between Israel and Hamas, warning of starvation and an outbreak of disease. In a video conference with journalists this week, international organisations depicted a bleak picture of what Save the Children called the "horrors" unfolding in the Gaza Strip. "The situation in Gaza



is not just a catastrophe, it's apocalyptic... with potential irreversible consequences on Palestinian people," said Bushra Khalidi of Oxfam, another UK-based charity. "Israel safe zones within Gaza are mirage," she added. "Those who survived the bombardment now face imminent risk of dying of starvation and disease," said Alexandra Saieh of Save the Children. "Our teams are telling us of maggots being picked from wounds and children undergoing amputations without anaesthetic," lining up by the "hundreds" for a "single toilet" or roaming the streets in search of food, she added. "There are simply no safe spaces in Gaza, and we've seen this since the (Israeli) directive... calling on people to flee northern Gaza to the south," said Shaina Low of the Norwegian Refugee Council. "Gaza's hospital are becoming morgues. That's unacceptable," said Sandrine Simon of the Medecins du Monde (Doctors of the World).