

No political prisoners in jail: home minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Refuting BNP's claim that thousands of its workers are languishing in jail as political prisoners, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said police have arrested those who have violated laws.

"We have no political prisoners. Those who were involved in attacking the chief justice's residence, policemen, and Ansar members are in jail. Lawful actions have been taken after identifying them through analysing video footage," said the minister after attending the Police Memorial Day 2024 as chief guest at the Police Staff College at Mirpur.

He said, "There were no political arrests, and no one was arrested unfairly."

Addressing the BNP's role in the 2024 elections, the minister said the party is attempting to disrupt the progress of the country.

"There is no basis for their (BNP) propaganda. They are trying to attract the attention of foreigners by spreading fabricated information after the election," he said.

The minister said, "Even the foreign journalists, who came to observe the election, said the polls in Bangladesh was fair."

Asaduzzaman further said that the Election Commission conducted the election and the security forces performed their duties with utmost neutrality.

"They (law enforcers) cooperated with the Election Commission. In the last election, many ministers and big leaders were defeated. So, we can say with certainty that there was no rigging in this election," he said.

Addressing the EU statement, which suggested that the crackdown silenced opposition voices, the home boss said the reality is different as the law enforcer came under attack by BNP men, not the other way around.

"We reject such statements... We think these are far from the truth. They [BNP] are purposefully trying to create a new ground to launch another conspiracy," Asaduzzaman said.

He said that BNP is continuously spreading or giving false information.

"It is not up to us to see how they [EU and some countries] got confused. However, we can clearly say that what they are saying did not happen. All countries except one or two are applauding the polls. They think that the new government has been formed through a fair electoral process," he added.



People queue up to cast their vote at polling centres in Mymensingh and Cumilla where city corporation elections were held yesterday. The voter turnout was 56.30 percent in Mymensingh and 38.82 percent in Cumilla.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN, PRABIR DAS

Gaza war has 'ruptured any sense of a shared humanity'

Says ICRC; aid boat awaits opening of maritime corridor as fighting rages before Ramadan

AFP, Geneva/Palestinian Territories

The war in Gaza has "ruptured any sense of a shared humanity," the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross said yesterday.

ICRC head Mirjana Spoljaric called for an urgent ceasefire in Gaza, saying Israel and Hamas must respect international law and protect civilians caught up in their conflict.

She said getting a steady, substantial flow of desperately needed aid into the besieged Palestinian territory — where the United Nations says more than 90 percent of the population is on the brink of famine — was "only part of the solution".

"Alleviating the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza starts with a clear will

and measures that safeguard civilian life and human dignity, meaning both sides must conduct their military operations in a way that spares the civilians who are caught in the middle," Spoljaric said.

"The only way to achieve this is that the parties strictly adhere to international humanitarian law, which means preserving the life, dignity and humanity of all people affected by armed conflict, regardless of which side they are on.

"It is the line between humanity and barbarity," she insisted.

"Preserving civilian life and health is the rule, not the exception."

"As an occupying power, Israel must provide for the basic needs of the population or facilitate the safe and

unimpeded delivery of humanitarian relief," Spoljaric said.

The war had "ruptured any sense of a shared humanity," she said.

"The situation in the Gaza Strip degenerates by the hour. There is nowhere safe for people to go. The civilian death toll and the ongoing captivity of hostages are shocking and unacceptable," Spoljaric said.

"In the face of such deep suffering," the ICRC called urgently for a ceasefire to allow "a steady, robust flow of humanitarian aid" to reach people in Gaza.

After a week of talks with mediators in Cairo failed to produce a breakthrough, Hamas's armed wing said it would not agree to a hostage-prisoner exchange without the withdrawal of Israeli forces.

No good news for consumers in Ramadan

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"I came here to purchase Ramadan items for the first week of the month. Last year, I spent Tk 1,000 on these items. This time, I had to spend Tk 1,500.

"Our income hasn't increased, but our expenses have. Despite our financial constraints, we are compelled to spend more for Ramadan to ensure a decent meal."

The prices of fruits have also increased. During Ramadan, most consumers prefer dates, apples, malta, oranges, watermelons, pineapples, pears, grapes, pomegranates, and yellow papayas.

Md Shahjahan, a fruit seller in

"Due to dollar rate and import tax, prices of imported fruits are higher. As the demand of local fruits got higher, so the price increased."

Kachukhet, said he was selling a kilo of apples at Tk 340, malta at Tk 320, oranges at Tk 340, pears at Tk 300, grapes at Tk 280, pomegranate at Tk 400, yellow papayas at Tk 200, and Indian jujube (kul boroi) at Tk 200.

He said prices of most fruits are 20-40 percent higher compared to the previous year.

"Due to dollar rate and import tax, prices of imported fruits are higher. As the demand of local fruits got higher, so the price increased."

Besides, the demand of aubergine, green chili, coriander, mint and tomato have increased ahead of Ramadan.

Sellers said that prices of these items have increased by Tk 20-40 per kg.

Ghulam Rahman, president of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, told The Daily Star that during high inflation, when demands for various items rise, sellers often take advantage of the situation to maximise their profits.

To address this issue, he emphasised the need to increase the supply of these items and promote healthy competition. "By doing so, attempts to exploit the situation for undue profit can be thwarted."

Distressed in Malaysia

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to venture out of the hotel to look for jobs. With no passport on him, he had no luck with the job hunt.

The 29-year-old from Magura has rented a room with the money his family has sent from Bangladesh by borrowing.

"I was supposed to pay back the loan I took to come here with my earnings, but I am plunging further into debt just to survive here. What could be more tragic?"

Compounding his worries is the death of his father months after he migrated to Malaysia, meaning his mother, wife and two-year son have to fend for themselves and also manage money for him.

Shakil along with six others filed a complaint with Malaysia's Labour Department and is awaiting a verdict.

"I will be undocumented if I cannot renew my work permit in the next two months," he said.

Like Shakil and Jahirul, more than 100,000 Bangladeshis are now jobless, unpaid, underpaid and indebted in Malaysia, according to the estimates of Andy Hall, a migrant rights activist and researcher.

Hall documented dozens of cases where Bangladeshi migrants were denied jobs even though they followed

all the procedures.

Another Kuala Lumpur-based migrant rights researcher said the number of such Bangladeshis would be around 200,000.

This raises the question of who is to blame for the Bangladeshi migrant workers' plight in Malaysia.

Researchers said numerous bogus companies applied for foreign workers taking advantage of the relaxed rules. The companies brought the foreign workers to the Malaysian shore only to make money out of the process.

Though the relaxed recruitment was for manufacturing and services sectors, many construction companies snuck in foreign workers too.

This relaxed policy led to an excess of foreign workers in the manufacturing and service sectors, according to the Malaysian home ministry.

On October 23 last year, Malaysian newspaper The Star reported that a total of 667,418 foreign workers had entered Malaysia compared to the forecast of 518,000 since the reopening of the labour market in 2022.

Officials at the Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia and the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) also admit that there was

Pro-BNP secretary candidate

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Around 1:20am today, the election sub-committee of the SCBA announced that AM Mahub Uddin Khokon, joint secretary general of the BNP, was elected president while Bangabandhu Awami Ainjibi Parishad leader and senior lawyer Shah Monjurul Hoque was elected secretary of the SCBA.

The pro-BNP Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Oikya Panel won four and the pro-AL panel won 10 executive posts of the SCBA.

The annual SCBA election was held on March 6 and 7. After Friday's fist fights, chaos and alleged interference from a group of outsiders, the sub-committee delayed vote counting until 3:00pm yesterday when a large number of law enforcers were on the SCBA premises.

Earlier in the day, senior lawyer Abul Khair, convener of the election sub-committee, issued a statement saying that he would like to withdraw his earlier announcement that Nahid Sultana Juthi, an independent, was the new secretary.

That announcement meant nothing because it was made under pressure from thugs, he said, adding that the votes had not even been

counted when that statement was made.

Shaifour Rahman Siddique Saif, assistant attorney general and election sub-committee member, who was injured in Friday's violence, filed the case with Shahbagh Police Station.

Juthi, wife of Jubo League Chairman Sheikh Fazle Shams Parash, is a key accused in the case. Of the other accused lawyers, detectives arrested Kazi Bashir Ahmed, Tushar, Tariqul, Sumon, and Usman.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Ali Haider placed the five arrested lawyers on remand.

Harun-or-Rashid, additional commissioner (Detective Branch), said, "No one is above the law. Those who instigated them will also be investigated."

Around 10:30pm last night, Mahub Uddin Khokon said there were irregularities in vote counting and demanded a recount.

In a complaint submitted to the convener of the sub-committee, Khokon said votes cast for him were counted for his rival.

Khokon also talked to reporters regarding the matter.

surplus recruitment of workers and that many are unemployed.

They, however, say that the number would be a few thousand — which the independent researchers rejected.

As per the memorandum of understanding, the Malaysian government is responsible for ensuring that all workers have jobs and rights, said Ali Haider Chowdhury, secretary general of BAIRA.

"I hope the Malaysian authorities will probe the complaints and take necessary actions to put the workers in jobs."

An official at the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur said the mission takes up complaints of joblessness, nonpayment or underpayment with employers.

"In case of failures, the high commission engages the Malaysian authorities for addressing the complaints," he said on the condition of anonymity as he is not authorised to speak with media.

Jahirul though remains sceptical of the support provided by the Bangladesh mission.

The Bangladesh high commission officials visited their hotel three months back and pledged to solve the problems.

"Nothing happened since then."

Woman burned to death in house fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

An elderly woman was burned to death when a fire broke out at her house in Hatiya upazila of Noakhali early yesterday.

The deceased is Lalita Bala Das, 80, of Ward 3 Kalimandir area of Hatiya municipality, said police.

She lived alone in the house. Her two sons live in Oman with their families.

Hatiya Fire Service and Civil Defence firefighter Mehdi Hasan Bhuiyan said a fire engine went to the spot after receiving information at 5:25am and brought the fire under control within an hour.

During the operation, the burned body of an elderly woman was recovered from her home, he added.

The cause of the fire is still unknown.

Hatiya Police Inspector (Investigation) Sudipta Reza said police went to the spot and completed the inquest report of the deceased woman.

An unnatural death case has been registered in this incident.

A 'very unequal society'

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is the nature of society, which is actually very contrary to the vision of Bangabandhu."

He lamented that political debate has almost disappeared and that the policymakers rarely go deep into the issues of public interest.

"The ministers react to the headlines when journalists want reactions, instead of having details of any issue," he said.

Asked if he has any advice for the policymakers, the economist, who was involved in preparing the Awami League's manifesto for the 1970 general elections, said the political leaders and policymakers should get advice from as diverse sources as possible.

"In fact, my experience in Bangladesh is that the best advisors for any government would be its critics."

Prof Sobhan, now chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the advice that the policymakers get from within the government can often reinforce the mistakes and be

Zero border killing pledged yet again

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this year: two Bangladesh citizens, including a BGB member, were killed by BSF firings.

Last year, 31 people were killed in BSF shootings, up from 23 in 2022, according to data compiled by Ain O Salish Kendra. In 2021, 18 died from BSF firings.

BSF are using nonlethal weapons with the intent to minimise any death along the Bangladesh border, said its DG Nitin Agarwal.

"There has been a change in weapon policy for the Bangladesh border."

BSF border guards use pump action guns, which do not kill in normal range.

"But when criminals go close to them to attack with 'Da' (sharp weapon), BSF border guards open fire in self defence and several Bangladesh and Indian criminals were killed. We are trying our best to prevent deaths of both Bangladeshis as well as Indian citizens. It is not our intention to cause death to anyone."

Asked about the recent killing of BGB soldier Mohammad Roisuddin in a BSF firing on January 22, Agarwal did not give any direct answer.

"I will not explain what happened here in this incident and how he ended up dead. It has already been reported," he said, while deflecting the question to the BGB director general.

In his reply, BGB DG Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui said: "This was not a targeted killing. This has happened in the midst of the darkness of confusion on both sides."

SONARGAON UP BY POLLS

Clash kills 1, injures 20, including cops

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A man was shot dead and another sustained bullet injuries during a clash between supporters of two candidates centring the Pirojpur Union Parishad by election under Sonargaon upazila in Narayanganj last evening, said police.

At least 20 others, including 11 policemen, were injured in the clash.

The deceased was identified as Hridoy Bhuiyan, 24, of Dudhghata village.

The clash broke out around 5:30pm in front of Dudhghata Government Primary School centre, said Md Mohsin, inspector (investigation) of Sonargaon Police Station.

Mosharaf Hossain, resident medical officer, of Sonargaon Upazila Health Complex, said Hridoy was declared dead on arrival. His body bore several bullet wounds. Another man with a bullet wound, Omar Faruk Bhuiyan, 35, of the same village and Hridoy's cousin, was referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. At least 11 police personnel were given primary treatment at the health complex.

A by-election for a member post of Ward No 3 of Pirojpur UP was held yesterday.

A clash broke out between supporters of two candidates — Kaiser Ahmed Razu and Azizur Rahman — when the result was announced in the evening. Azizur was declared the winner.

One killed, 9 hurt in Padma boat collision

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Shariatpur

At least one person was killed and nine others, including three executive magistrates, were injured in a head-on collision between two speedboats on the Padma River last night.

The incident took place at around 8:30pm when they were returning home after performing election duties of Kachikata Union Parishad under Bhederganj upazila in Shariatpur, said Shariatpur Deputy Commissioner Md Nizamuddin Ahmed.

The deceased is Mokhtar, 25, of Bhederganj upazila. The three executive magistrates injured in the incident are Basit Sattar, Abdullah Al Mamun, and Enamul Hafiz Nadeem.

The injured were rescued and admitted to Shariatpur Specialised Hospital. Two of the injured were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The DC said that elections to Boro Kandi Union Parishad in Jazira upazila and Kachikata Union Parishad in Bhederganj upazila were held yesterday. After election duties, district administration employees, including the executive magistrates, were travelling south from the northern side of Kachikata.

"At this time, a speedboat from the opposite direction collided with the speedboat carrying our officers and employees," said the DC.

misleading.

"Provided that you have constructive and serious critics... you will learn a lot and it will help improve policy."

However, he said, "The problem of critiquing your critics or disagreeing with your enemies is, I think, one of the biggest tragedies in Bangladesh."

Prof Sobhan said that in the days before the independence and after the independence, Bangabandhu and many other Awami League MPs would regularly get briefings from him and other experts.

"Bangabandhu was politically a very conscious leader. He was a leader of the masses and knew their pulses. He would take political decision but would not forget to consult the experts," he said.

In today's Bangladesh, he said, there is a deficiency both in terms of demand and supply when it comes to consulting the experts or academics on any field.

Economist Aktar Mahmood moderated the conversation.

In future, there will be all kinds of efforts from both sides to avoid any kind of killing.

"From now on our maximum efforts should be no loss of life," he added.

The joint statement, however, said the BSF DG expressed his sincere condolences for the sorrowful demise of Sepoy Roisuddin.

During the five-day conference that began on March 5, both the BGB and BSF decided to curb the smuggling of various types of drugs and narcotics, firearms, ammunition, explosives, gold and other contraband items and human trafficking.

Both the DGs also reiterate their existing 'zero tolerance' stance on trans-border insurgent groups and agreed to take all necessary steps to prevent trans-border movements with real-time information sharing.

Shakib's sister

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relation to betting. In 2019, the all-rounder was banned from all forms of cricket for two years, with one year suspended, by the ICC for not disclosing communications with bookmakers.

The Mahadev app case is a high-profile scandal involving an online betting platform that enabled illegal gambling on various games such as poker, card games, badminton, tennis, football and cricket and the operation reportedly generated an astounding Rs 200 crore daily, according to ED.