

Six killed as violence flares again in Manipur

REUTERS, Guwahati

Six people, including one civilian, were killed as fresh violence broke out between two warring ethnic communities in the northeast Indian state of Manipur yesterday, authorities said.

The majority Meitei community and the tribal Kukis have clashed sporadically since last year after a court ordered the state government to consider extending special economic benefits and quotas in government jobs and education enjoyed by the Kukis to the Meiteis as well.

More than 225 people have been killed and some 60,000 have been displaced in the violence so far.

Yesterday's gunfire incident represents the most number of casualties for a single day in the latest spurt of violence that began a week ago. The attacks earlier this week have also seen the use of drones to drop explosive devices in what authorities have called a significant escalation.

Police say they suspect that the drones were used by Kuki militants - a claim denied by Kuki groups.

"Fighting has been going on between armed groups of both the communities since the morning," said Krishna Kumar, deputy commissioner of the state's Jiribam district where the clash occurred.

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PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Traders have filled up a part of the Bhairab river with sand at Ghat-5 in Khulna city to make room for customers to sit and enjoy their afternoon snacks. Dumping of waste in the river also goes on unabated, causing pollution. The photo was taken recently.

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Opening

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"It will take time to open the terminal for passengers as the necessary manpower will have to be recruited and they need to get training," the CAAB chairman said.

Subsequently, the terminal will not be operational for another year and a half, according to CAAB officials.

The state-of-the-art terminal was partially opened by former prime minister Sheikh Hasina on October 7 last year.

The CAAB and the civil aviation ministry on various occasions announced that passengers will be able to use the third terminal from October this year.

But CAAB suffered its first setback when Aviation Dhaka Consortium (ADC), the contractor for the terminal, could not finish its necessary works before the April 6 deadline.

Subsequently, CAAB extended the deadline for handover by five months.

ADC, a consortium of Mitsubishi Corporation, Fujita Corporation and Samsung C&T Corporation, began the construction of the third terminal on December 28, 2019.

The government contributed Tk 5,000 crore towards the cost of the third terminal, with the rest of the amount coming from the Japan International Cooperation Agency in the form of loans.

The third terminal will boast a floor space of 230,000 square metres, housing 115 check-in counters, 66 departure immigration desks, 59 arrival immigration and 3 VIP immigration desks.

Upon full-fledged operation of the third terminal, HSLA's annual passenger and cargo handling capacity is expected to double.

The annual passenger handling capacity of the HSLA would be 24 million (including the old terminals). At present, the Dhaka airport can handle eight million passengers and 500,000 tonnes of cargo each year.

12 workers

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The blast occurred around 11:30am at the shipbreaking yard of SN Corporation, situated in the upazila's Shitalpur area, according to Md Solaiman, superintendent of Chattogram Industrial Police.

He said the police team that visited the spot after the incident primarily suspected that the explosion occurred when workers were trying to break open the fuel tank of the scrapped ship.

Following the incident, the injured were taken to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Ten of the victims are in critical condition, said Prof Dr Rafique Uddin Ahmed, head of the Burn and Plastic Surgery Unit at CMCH.

"As critical patients require full-time ICU facilities, we had to send seven patients to Dhaka due to a shortage of ICU beds at CMCH," said Brig Gen Taslim Uddin, director of the hospital.

Abul Kashem, executive member of the Bangladesh Ship Breakers and Recyclers Association (BSBRA), told The Daily Star that the dismantling of the ship, around 8,500 tonnes, had nearly been completed.

"The incident happened when the workers went to inspect the fuel tank in the ship's engine room before cutting it open," he added.

He went on to say that BSBRA would form an inquiry committee to identify the cause of the incident.

SN Corporation has a green compliance certificate for its shipbreaking yard.

Contacted, Md Barkat Ullah, chief executive officer of SN Corporation, said, "This is a certified green shipbreaking yard. Every ship undergoes inspection before being dismantled. Similarly, this ship too was inspected. So, we are also shocked by this incident. We will conduct an internal probe to find out why and how the explosion happened."

SN Corporation owner Showkat Ali Chowdhury could not be reached on the phone despite several attempts.

Yunus navigating thru high hopes

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direct investment, ensuring long-term stability.

In the decades since the end of HM Ershad's military rule in 1990, Bangladesh experienced an "economic miracle" that lifted tens of millions out of poverty, driven largely by a booming garment sector. However, since emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, the country has suffered from high inflation, particularly in food prices, and shortages of foreign currency.

These issues are largely attributed to corruption and government mismanagement. For political reasons, Hasina's administration was reluctant to pursue serious economic reforms. The recent unrest has only exacerbated the country's economic problems, with garment buyers cancelling orders, which require serious and urgent attention.

POLITICAL RENEWAL

One priority for Yunus should be re-establishing the independence of the Election Commission to build confidence in the forthcoming polls with the top bosses gone. Under the former prime minister, parliament became a rubber stamp, the civil service and judiciary were highly politicised, and the media and civil society were closely controlled.

"While some of these institutions will quickly flourish in a more open environment, others will bear the scars of subordination for years to come," the Crisis Group said in a report.

It's a race against time for Yunus

who took over on August 8 with a fledgling team. He brought swift changes to the civil administration, police, the Rapid Action Battalion, the Detective Branch and the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence that Hasina exploited to create a culture of fear and intimidation. They enjoyed almost total impunity under Hasina's administration. It's a monumental task for Yunus to make sure people have confidence they will not be arrested, abducted or even killed extrajudicially for political reasons.

Yunus also faces significant challenges in navigating the evolving geopolitical landscape, especially considering the aspirations of the Bangladeshi people. The relationship with India, traditionally seen as Hasina's strongest supporter, has been strained due to Dhaka's push for her extradition. Although the interim government has stated that Hasina's stay in New Delhi won't affect bilateral relations, the changing public sentiment in Bangladesh requires careful management to maintain strategic cooperation with India and adopt a more balanced approach in foreign relations.

"In supporting her administration so staunchly despite its clear unpopularity, India has badly damaged itself in Bangladeshis' eyes. If it now seems to be standing in the way of reform, it will only amplify anti-India sentiment, which could linger to the detriment of neighbourly relations," the Crisis

Group said.

India should instead support the interim government, and revive links with other parties too as part of a political renewal in Bangladesh.

The interim government faces numerous challenges as citizens demand justice on multiple fronts. It must prioritise addressing the grievances of those affected by Hasina's regime, implement necessary reforms and manage a smooth political transition. The new administration, at least for now, seems focused on "managing expectations from all sides."

The domestic political landscape is fraught with challenges, as the uprising reflects deep dissatisfaction with the current system. The interim government, recognising the urgency of the situation, has initiated dialogues with established political parties, civil society members, development partners and journalists to pursue reforms to create a more stable political environment. One key option could be the revival of the caretaker government system, which was abolished by Hasina's administration in 2011. This system could help ensure fair and transparent elections, reducing the risk of another autocratic leader emerging.

Hasina's departure offers a unique opportunity to move beyond the hyper-partisan, winner-take-all electoral dynamics that have harmed Bangladeshi politics for the past three decades. It's an opportunity to undo the past wrongdoings.

ICT gets new chief prosecutor, 4 prosecutors

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Abdullah Al Noman, according to a gazette notification issued on September 5.

Tajul Islam will enjoy the status of the attorney general, it says.

The appointments coincide with the surge in cases filed with the ICT against Sheikh Hasina, her former cabinet and party colleagues, police, journalists, and other professionals after the fall of Hasina in a student-led mass uprising on August 5.

The cases were filed over alleged genocide and crimes against humanity during the July-August protests until Hasina fled to India.

Contacted, Tajul said the tasks of his office are very challenging as

many powerful politicians including former prime minister Sheikh Hasina are accused in some cases filed with the ICT.

"Information, documents and evidence against them will have to be collected from across the country and those will have to be compiled, examined and placed properly before the tribunal," he told The Daily Star last night.

Tajul was a defence lawyer in the war crimes trial against some leaders of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami. Until late last month, he was a joint convener of Amar Bangladesh Party (AB Party).

Mizanul Islam was a counsel for convicted Jamaat leader Delwar

Hossain Sayedee. Gazi Tamim was also a defence lawyer for Jamaat leaders during the war crimes trial, and filed the first complaint in the tribunal against Sheikh Hasina on behalf of the father of a victim who died during the quota movement.

Talking to this newspaper, Tajul Islam said the ICT and its investigation team will have to be reconstituted by appointing new judges and investigators as previous judges, prosecution team and investigation agency appointed by the Awami League government have stepped down after the formation of the interim government.

So it will take some time before the tribunal starts operations, he added.

Four districts count Tk 2,822cr in losses

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Around three lakh livestock have been affected by floods in Noakhali.

Abul Kalam Azad, Noakhali district livestock officer, reported an estimated loss of around Tk 44 lakh due to deaths of livestock.

Over 85,000 fish enclosures and ponds have been washed away in the district, leading to a loss of around Tk 576 crore, said Noakhali District Fisheries Officer Mohammad Iqbal.

"I have been farming fish for around 16 years. All my 10 enclosures and four ponds have been washed away," said Rahima Akhter Baby, 45, of Darbeshpur village in Noakhali Sadar upazila.

In Cumilla, crops on around 70,000 hectares have been spoiled, causing a loss of around Tk 850 crore, said the district agriculture officer.

"I farmed vegetables on around 3 bighas, but the crop has been damaged. I have incurred a loss of around Tk 70,000," said Rup Miah, a farmer from Kamarkhara village in the district's Burichang upazila.

Some 2,500 fish enclosures and ponds have been washed away, resulting in an estimated financial loss of Tk 400 crore, said District Fisheries Officer Belal Ahmed.

Dhaka seeks Yunus-Modi talks during UNGA

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In the interview with PTI last Sunday, Yunus criticised ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, now in India, for commenting on the developments in Bangladesh.

He also said India should move beyond the "narrative" that every political party other than Hasina's Awami League is "Islamist".

"If India wants to keep her until the

JOINT DRIVE

53 firearms recovered in last 3 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 53 firearms, including an AK-47, have been recovered in a joint drive for the last three days.

As many as 25 suspects were also arrested during the joint drive, the Police Headquarters (PHQ) said in a statement yesterday.

Members of the armed forces, Border Guard Bangladesh, Coast Guard, police, Rab, and Ansar took part in the drive.

The other firearms recovered during the drive include two revolvers, 18 pistols, two rifles, 11 shotguns, one pipe gun, six shooter guns, three LGs, three guns, one gas gun, one Chinese rifle, one airgun and three single-barrel breech loader firearms.

Enamul Haque Sagor, assistant inspector general (media) of the PHQ, told The Daily Star yesterday that the joint drives targeted three types of firearms: those stolen or lost from the police, SSF, and other security forces; firearms with suspended licences; and illegal firearms.

Around 2 lakh livestock have been affected by floods, causing a loss of around Tk 350 crore, said Chandan Kumer Poddar, Cumilla district livestock officer.

In Moulvibazar, crops on around 15,221 hectares have been damaged, leading to a financial loss of around Tk 205 crore, according to the local DAE office.

Over 41,000 farmers have been affected by floods, said Samsuddin Ahmed, deputy director of DAE in the district.

"I cultivated Aman paddy on around 23 decimals. But my entire crop has been damaged," said Saifur Rahman, a farmer from Patanushar village in Kamalganj upazila.

Floods in Brahmanbaria have damaged crops on around 8,326 hectares, causing a financial loss of around Tk 219 crore, according to the local DAE office.

At least 1,188 ponds in the district have been washed away, resulting in a monetary loss of around Tk 20 lakh, said Rounak Jahan, acting fisheries officer of Brahmanbaria.

Our correspondents from the respective districts contributed to this report.

time Bangladesh wants her back, the condition would be that she has to keep quiet," Yunus said.

"Sitting in India, she is speaking and giving instructions. No one likes it. It's not good for us or India," he added.

There has been no comment so far from India on Yunus's remarks.

The chief adviser is scheduled to leave Dhaka for New York on September 22 on a five day visit to the US.

Govt moves to rein in easy ride to secy post

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Some competent officials were indeed deprived of promotions during the AL's 15-year rule, they added.

However, after the interim government took power, many took advantage of the situation and managed promotions as additional secretaries. Now, they are lobbying for promotion to secretaries, ministry sources said.

Soon after the interim government took power, some officers got multiple promotions within days.

Babul Mia, a 15th batch BCS cadre, was promoted to deputy secretary on August 13, joint secretary on August 15, and additional secretary on August 18.

Former secretary and public administration researcher AKM Abdul Awal Majumder said, "Some officers deserved promotions because they were deprived for a long time while others did not. But, when a promotion to the post of secretary is concerned, experience is crucial."

The new decision to require one-year experience is good, he told The Daily Star.

A Cabinet Division official, requesting anonymity, said some of his senior colleagues were genuinely deprived of the post of a secretary.

He lauds the recent contractual appointment of several retired 1982 batch officers as secretaries to the

ministries of education, home, and health. Those officers have a good reputation.

In the same vein, other skilled officers who were deprived should be duly recognised.

If corrupt or incompetent individuals are appointed in top posts now, the government will suffer, he warned.

A secretary, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the non-partisan government which does not want to stay in power for long, can set an example by rewarding the right individuals.

In 2001 and 2009, several officials were promoted under the BNP and Awami League governments, bypassing the standard practice.

A government official, who was recently promoted from deputy secretary to additional secretary in just a week, said, "If the government implements the new decision, those of us who were genuinely overlooked will continue to remain so. I urge the government not to enforce this restriction when it comes to the truly deserving individuals. If needed, they can take examinations."

This correspondent called the public administration ministry's Senior Secretary Mokhlesur Rahman three times, but he did not answer the phone. Neither did he reply to the texts sent to him.