



"We are breaking the bodies and minds of the children of Gaza... We are complicit."

Michael Ryan  
executive director  
of the WHO Emergencies  
Programmes

YOUR RIGHT  
TO KNOW

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WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

## 266 journalists face criminal cases so far

The cases have been filed since August 5 last year

ZYMA ISLAM

The repression of journalists has taken a new form since August 5, 2024.

Fears for physical safety and instances of judicial harassment are still profoundly visible -- only the actors have changed.

The ghosts of the Digital Security Act hounding journalists have been replaced by more sinister murder and assault charges. Many are bearing the brunt of retaliation for the Awami League government's brutal response to the student-led July uprising.

Over the past few months, as journalists have been booked left and right in cases related to the deadly violence during the uprising, police sub-inspectors and regular criminal courts must deliberate on a question that even media experts struggle to answer: to what extent can journalism incite murder?

"At the former prime minister's press conference on July 26, some top journalists encouraged her to repress the student movement even harder. It is clear that they were not acting as journalists, but rather as political activists," said Kamal Ahmed, a journalist who had headed the Media Reform Commission. By July 26, scores of citizens, including children, had been killed indiscriminately by the law enforcers.

But the answer to whether journalism can be linked to murder becomes more tangled the further one descends the hierarchical ladder, the deeper one goes into the districts and upazilas where local correspondents work under duress.

To get a clear picture, The Daily Star compiled figures from Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and information from the newspaper's own network of local correspondents.

This newspaper has found that at least 266 journalists have been implicated in various cases related to the events of July and August last year.

The highest number of those cases has been filed in Dhaka -- 88. Sylhet and Chattogram come second and third, respectively, with 39 and 36 journalists prosecuted.

Savar, Narayanganj, Kushtia, Brahmanbaria and Bogura saw between 10 and 20 journalists prosecuted in each of these districts.

The other districts where journalists faced murder charges or cases filed over July-August violence include Cox's Bazar, Khulna, Lakshmpur, Barguna, Narail, Patuakhali, Thakurgaon, Barishal, Munshiganj, Bagerhat, Jashore, Pirojpur and Netrakona.

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### NUMBER OF CASES

Dhaka	<b>88</b>
Sylhet	<b>39</b>
Chattogram	<b>36</b>
Bogura	<b>18</b>
Brahmanbaria	<b>16</b>
Kushtia	<b>15</b>
Narayanganj	<b>11</b>
Netrakona	<b>8</b>
Pirojpur	<b>6</b>
Patuakhali	<b>6</b>
Jashore	<b>4</b>
Bagerhat	<b>4</b>
Munshiganj	<b>3</b>
Barishal	<b>3</b>
Thakurgaon	<b>2</b>
Narail	<b>2</b>
Barguna	<b>2</b>
Lakshmpur	<b>1</b>
Khulna	<b>1</b>
Cox's Bazar	<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>266</b>

SOURCE: REPORTERS  
WITHOUT BORDERS AND DS  
CORRESPONDENTS

Patenga Sea Beach in Chattogram, a popular tourist destination known for its natural beauty, is slowly losing its appeal. Thanks to administrative neglect, several hundred shops and eateries have sprung up along the beach, spoiling its scenic ambience. Moreover, there haven't been any visible steps to improve the tourist spot despite assurances from relevant authorities in December last year. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

PRESS FREEDOM INDEX  
Bangladesh up 16 notches  
Ranks ahead of India, Pakistan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's press freedom improved, climbing from 165 to 149 in the World Press Freedom Index, the latest release from Reporters Without Borders (RSF) assessed.

Despite this rise, the press freedom situation in Bangladesh is still classified as "very serious".

The report said today's news media are caught between preserving their editorial independence and ensuring their economic survival.

"At a time when press freedom is experiencing a worrying decline in many parts of the world, a major -- yet often underestimated -- factor is seriously weakening the media: economic pressure," said the report.

"Much of this is due to ownership concentration, pressure from advertisers and financial backers, and public aid that is restricted,

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## No election before trial of AL: NCP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the National Citizen Party (NCP) yesterday declared that elections would not take place in the country before the Awami League is tried as a party for committing mass killings during the July uprising. They also demanded a ban on the party's political activities until that trial concludes.

Criticising the remark of the chief adviser on AL contesting the next polls, they said the people of the country and the participants of the July uprising will decide whether the party should be banned or be allowed to contest the national election.

**There is no room for debate over its [AL's] political legitimacy anymore. That is why we demand that its registration be cancelled and all organisational activities be suspended until the trial is concluded.**

Nahid Islam, NCP convener

The NCP leaders made the announcement at a party rally held at the south gate of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque in the capital's Gulistan area after Juma prayers.

Presiding over the event, Nahid Islam, party convener, said the AL is no longer a political party but has become a fascist and terrorist organisation.

"There is no room for debate over its [AL's] political legitimacy anymore. That is why we demand that its registration be cancelled and all organisational activities be suspended until the trial is concluded. But it's saddening that no visible progress has been made in holding trials even after nine months have passed."

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**'Efforts on to criminalise call for polls' Says Tarique, demands roadmap for election**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday said that attempts are underway to create an atmosphere where demanding a national election seems like a crime.

Urging the interim government to clearly announce a roadmap for the polls, he said that doubts are growing among the public over why the government is taking so much time on reforms.

The BNP leader said that those who believe in democracy now want to know what steps the government has taken to make the fugitive autocrat's politics irrelevant in the future.

Tarique added that if local government elections are held first, it could create a scope for autocrats and their allies to rehabilitate.

"Political parties will naturally demand elections. It is a normal democratic practice, but we have noticed in recent days an attempt to create an atmosphere in the country where demanding an election seems like a crime," said Tarique.

He made the remarks while virtually addressing a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club, marking the 5th founding anniversary of Amar Bangladesh (AB) Party.

Derogatory comments about the national election only please the fugitive dictator and insult democracy-loving



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Khaleda to return home from London on Monday



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia is set to return home on Monday after four months of medical treatment in London. She will be accompanied by her daughters-in-law, Zubaida Rahman, and Syeda Sharmina Rahman.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir confirmed the development yesterday, saying, "Madam will return

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Farmers in Jhalakathi salvage ripe paddy that was fully submerged during the recent seasonal nor'wester. After three days of sun-drying, the paddy will now sell for only Tk 600 per maund (37.3242 kg) -- far less than the Tk 1,000 it would have fetched had it remained dry. The photo was taken in Nalchity upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

**PAKISTAN-CONTROLLED KASHMIR Residents ordered to stockpile food amid tensions Gunfire exchanges continue along the LoC**

- US VP Vance calls on Pakistan to co-op with India in hunting down terrorists
- Pakistan opens Wagah border gate, takes back its stranded citizens
- PM Shehbaz thanks China for 'endorsing' Pakistan's proposal of neutral probe

AGENCIES

Pakistan-administered Kashmir yesterday called on residents near the de facto border with the Indian side of the region to stockpile food as tensions flare between the arch-rivals following a deadly attack last month.

India blames Pakistan for the attack by gunmen on civilians at the tourist site of Pahalgam in Indian-administered Kashmir on April 22 that killed 26 men. Islamabad has rejected the charge.

The two nuclear-armed countries have exchanged

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