

Army acted to save lives

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"We didn't protect any particular group or individuals. In Gopalganj, just like in previous operations, we responded to life-threatening situations. Life comes before political identity ... Be it Gopalganj or elsewhere, our response has been uniform. If anyone's life is in danger, we will not stand idle, regardless of which party they belong to."

About use of lethal force, Col Shafiqul Islam, colonel staff at the MOD, said, "It was an unexpected situation. It wasn't just brickbats being thrown – cocktails [improvised explosives] were also hurled. There was a threat to lives. In such a situation, law enforcement personnel were compelled to use force in self-defence. No lethal weapons were used there."

Regarding security being provided to leaders of the National Citizen Party, he said, "We did what we have always done – protect civilians under threat."

On July 16, day-long clashes broke out between Awami League activists and law enforcers, following an attack on the venue of a pre-scheduled NCP rally in Gopalganj Poura Park. Four people died from gunshot wounds during the incident.

Another person with bullet injuries later died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on July 18.

At least 15 cases were filed against 16,212 people in this regard. So far, 336 individuals have been arrested across the district.

CHT SITUATION

At the briefing, Col Shafiqul said that between July 3-31, at least 10 firearms, nine rounds of ammunition, gunpowder, walkie-talkies, and other items were recovered from different locations in the Chattogram Hill Tracts.

"Seven were arrested, including three UPDF members and two Yaba smugglers. A significant recovery operation on July 29 in Bagaihat uncovered SMGs, rifles, pistols, and walkie-talkies."

On July 30, an abandoned training camp of the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) in Bandarban's Ruma upazila was destroyed.

He added that armed clashes continue between the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) and the Parbatya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samiti (JSS) over territorial control, with grenade explosions reported.

In this regard, Brig Gen Nazim said criminal activities in the CHT have increased. "The regional political parties in the CHT, groups we refer to as UPDF, JSS, and similar outfits, have always sought to maintain their control through acts of extortion and kidnapping. They continuously strive to expand their sphere of influence, and in doing so, clashes and gunfights occur often."

"The army is working on this issue and is making every effort to keep the situation under control. It's important to note that the army is not the sole stakeholder in the Chattogram Hill Tracts; the civilian administration and the police are also integral parts of this effort."

He added, "If everyone works in a coordinated manner, I am confident that we can transform the situation to a more secure environment, which is absolutely necessary."

KNF NOT GAINING GROUND

Asked if KNF is receiving arms from the Arakan Army, Brig Gen Nazim said, "Yes, the Kuki Chin National Front is receiving weapons, possibly from the Arakan Army, but that is not surprising given the shared ethnic and ideological links. However, it isn't true that they are gaining dominance in the region."

"Since their emergence, KNF's operational capability has significantly declined. Though eight army personnel were killed in earlier confrontations, we haven't seen such casualties in recent months."

He added, "Instead, many KNF operatives have been killed, arrested,

and their weapons seized. Several of their bases and training camps have also been dismantled."

Nazim noted that army operations are ongoing and gaining success.

About operational procedures in the CHT, Shafiqul said, "We're effectively operating from our existing camps. We establish Temporary Operating Bases wherever needed. There's no operational deficiency."

COUNTRYWIDE OPERATIONS

Col Shafiqul Islam began the press briefing with a summary of the army's operations in recent weeks, including anti-crime, anti-drug, and anti-smuggling drives across the country.

From August 2024 till yesterday, the army recovered 9,729 of 12,190 missing firearms and 287,000 rounds of ammunition from across the country. In the past four weeks alone, 37 illegal firearms and 179 rounds of ammunition were seized, he said.

Meanwhile, 16,459 people were arrested since August last year, including 813 in the last four weeks. Arrestees include listed criminals, members of juvenile gangs, drug dealers, and extortionists.

"The army has arrested 5,576 individuals for drug-related crimes since last August, including 55 in the past month from areas like Rampura, Mohammadpur, and Uttara in Dhaka, and Faridpur," he said.

Responding to a query about law and order, he said, "All law enforcement agencies must work together to maintain law and order. And those who need to take the lead must become more effective."

"If you refer to us in particular, the army has been granted magistracy powers, but the clauses under which we are empowered allow us only to conduct searches and arrest suspects. Once we arrest someone and hand them over for judicial processing, we don't have any further role to play."

Govt moves to revise essential drug list

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The current list of 285 essential medicines was last updated in 2016. Of these, the government directly sets the prices of 117 widely used medicines. Prices for the remaining medicines are approved by the authorities based on proposals submitted by manufacturers.

Although the National Drug Policy 2016, citing WHO guidelines and expert opinions, recommended that the essential drug list be revised every two years, it has only been updated twice since its inception in 1982: once in 2008 and again in 2016.

According to WHO, essential medicines are those that effectively and safely meet the priority healthcare needs of a population. Selection criteria include public health relevance, evidence of benefit and harm, cost-effectiveness, and affordability.

Prof Sayedur Rahman, special assistant to the chief adviser for the health ministry, explained that the taskforce has been assigned three responsibilities: updating the list of essential drugs, setting prices for those medicines, and developing a pricing mechanism for all other drugs.

"Prices of all medicines will be fixed. One mechanism will apply to essential drugs and another for the rest. This is our current expectation, but it may change based on the taskforce's recommendations," he told The Daily Star on July 28.

Prof Sayedur, a pharmacologist, added that the taskforce was formed with the most qualified individuals in the sector, and the ministry will act on their recommendations.

Prof Syed Abdul Hamid of Dhaka University's Institute of Health Economics, who is also a taskforce member, said that when the first essential drug list was formulated in

1982, the market was unregulated and saturated with non-essential products like tonics.

"The list was created to tackle prevalent diseases and regulate drug prices," he said.

He added that in 1993, the government decided to regulate the prices of 117 commonly used essential medicines. Later, in 2016, a long list of 285 essential drugs was compiled, which included some less critical items.

"But what was the point of preparing a list of 285 essential medicines if the government continued to fix the prices of only 117 of them?" he said.

According to the taskforce's terms of reference, the primary objective of updating the essential drug list now appears to be price regulation, he noted.

The taskforce includes academics and representatives from Bangladesh Medical University; Dhaka University; Dhaka Medical College; Anwer Khan Modern Medical College; National Institute of Mental Health; National Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital; icddr;b; WHO; UNICEF; Directorate General of Health Services; Directorate General of Drug Administration; Directorate General of Family Planning; Health Economics Unit; and Health Services Division.

WHAT INDUSTRY LEADERS SAY

Abdul Muktadir, president of Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (BAPI), criticised the exclusion of industry voices from the taskforce.

"The taskforce is expected to formulate a pricing policy without any input from those who actually manufacture the medicines. This is not only counterproductive – it's potentially harmful," said Muktadir, also chairman and managing director

of Incepta Pharmaceuticals Ltd.

He acknowledged that price adjustments are indeed necessary but insisted that all stakeholders must be consulted. "Existing laws provide a framework; what's missing is inclusive, evidence-based decision-making. The government must listen – because without industry voices, pricing policy will fail both producers and patients," he added.

Muktadir pointed out that the pharmaceutical industry still operates under outdated pricing data, some of which dates back to the 1990s. Despite significant inflation and a 43 percent increase in raw material costs, the prices of only 35 essential medicines have been adjusted over the past 35 years.

Consequently, more than 100 essential drugs, including nitroglycerin spray and paracetamol syrup, are being sold below production costs, prompting some companies to halt production altogether.

The consequences are already apparent, with a report by IQVIA, a US-based health IT and clinical research firm, revealing that 70 percent of pharmaceutical companies, primarily small and medium-sized enterprises, experienced negative growth in the last quarter.

"This is a red flag for an industry that is supposed to be one of the country's most promising sectors," Muktadir said.

Md Zakir Hossain, managing director of Delta Pharma Ltd and secretary general of BAPI, also criticised the formation of the taskforce without representation from manufacturers, distributors, or marketers.

"They may know which drugs are needed, but not how they are produced or priced. Pricing isn't just about raw materials; we invest heavily in quality, research and development, and modernisation," he added.

Rights abuses still persist

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protecting Bangladeshis' rights," she added.

Detailed recommendations submitted by the 11 reform commissions alongside inputs from the UN human rights office and various rights activists are still pending, HRW said.

Meanwhile, the government is facing enormous challenges including an alarming surge in mob violence, political violence and harassment of journalists by political parties and other non-state groups such as religious hardliners hostile to women's rights and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

On July 26-27, mobs vandalised at least 14 homes belonging to members of the Hindu community in Rangpur.

Rights violations also continue in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, HRW said.

It referred to recent Gopalganj violence in which five people were killed and said, police later arbitrarily detained hundreds of alleged AL supporters and filed 10 murder cases against more than 8,400 mostly unnamed people.

The government denied carrying out "mass arrests".

Between August 6 and September

25, 2024, police lodged cases against 92,486 people, most of them related to murder.

Nearly 400 former ministers, members of parliament and other AL officials have been named in over 1,170 cases, which also include hundreds of unnamed individuals.

For instance, former Dhaka North mayor Atiqul Islam, detained since October 2024 in at least 68 murder-related cases, but 36 of these incidents occurred while he was abroad, HRW said.

As in most other cases, the authorities have not filed charges.

Detainees in other high-profile political cases have also cited baseless grounds for arrest and accused the authorities of denying them medical care and bail.

The first high-profile trial, involving Hasina and two others, is set for August 3, but thousands remain in jail without evidence or trial dates.

Many cite arbitrary arrest, denial of bail and lack of medical care, HRW said.

A commission formed in August 2024 to probe enforced disappearances during Hasina's rule has received 1,800 complaints, but faces resistance

from security agencies, with evidence reportedly destroyed or withheld.

Several senior officials fled abroad after the interim government took office.

The New York-based rights group urged the interim government to end arbitrary detention, prosecute abusive security personnel and disband Rab.

The HRW called on foreign governments and the UN to support the interim government through targeted sanctions on alleged abusers.

The other governments should prosecute individuals allegedly implicated in serious abuses who have left Bangladesh, including under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

And they should make clear that Bangladeshi participation in UN peacekeeping operations is contingent on ensuring accountability for grave violations of international human rights law, HRW said.

"No one is in any doubt that Yunus's interim government faces enormous challenges, but more needs to be done now to ensure a real and lasting change in Bangladesh's human rights situation," Ganguly said.

Gaza aid delivery

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sufficient," the agency said.

"For example, for UN drivers to access the Kerem Shalom crossing – a fenced-off area – Israeli authorities must approve the mission, provide a safe route through which to travel, provide multiple 'green lights' on movement, as well as a pause in bombing, and, ultimately, open the iron gates to allow them to enter."

In the ground, Israel's relentless bombardment of the besieged enclave continues, with at least 34 Palestinians killed since dawn yesterday, including 15 aid seekers.

Gaza hospitals also recorded seven new deaths from "famine and malnutrition", raising the total hunger-related death toll to 154, including 89 children, since October 2023.

Meanwhile, US special envoy Steve Witkoff met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday in a bid to salvage Gaza truce talks and tackle the humanitarian crisis in the enclave.

Indirect ceasefire talks between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas in Doha ended in deadlock last week with the sides blaming trade for the impasse and gaps remaining over issues including the extent of Israeli forces' withdrawal.

team said the arrestees include leaders and activists of the AL, Jubo League, and other affiliated organisations. They are members of various WhatsApp groups such as "Priyo Swadesh", "F71 Guerrilla", "Bangabandhu Projonmo", "Projonmo 71", and "Sheikh Hasina".

Based on an intelligence report, Bhatara police arrested Jubo League leader Sohel Rana from a residence in Uttara Paschim on July 12.

On the same day, Awami League leader Shamima Nasrin (Shampa) was arrested from another house in the area, after which a police officer filed the case the following day under the Anti-Terrorism Act, Prothom Alo reported.

Based on the information provided by Sohel and Shamima during initial interrogation, Major Sadikul Haque, who allegedly participated in the meeting, was taken into custody.

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Muslims and returns of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh and Myanmar have intensified, the statement said.

Since May 7, more than 1,800 people have been forced into Bangladesh from India, Fortify Rights said citing Bangladesh government data.

Indian officials reported that more than 2,000 have been sent to Bangladesh, it said.

In the statement, the rights body said it had documented torture and ill treatment during India's arrest and expulsion campaign from May to July, speaking with 16 individuals – including Muslim residents in the states of Assam and Gujarat, Rohingya refugees in India, relatives of detainees, an Indian lawyer and a Bangladeshi police officer at the border.

The statement detailed the plight of a 50-year-old Indian Muslim detained at Matia Transit Camp, India's largest detention facility for irregular migrants and refugees in Assam's Goalpara district.

"On May 23, I was asked to report to the Mikirbitha police station at 11 pm. As soon as I arrived, I was detained. I kept screaming that I was born and raised in India, that I am a government

teacher, and that I had already served time in a detention camp for two years from 2018 to 2020."

He spent at least a couple of days in the camp before being taken to a military camp of the Border Security Force (BSF).

On the night of May 26, a group of 14 people, including him, were driven overnight by the BSF through the jungle and waterways and left in no man's land on the India-Bangladesh border.

"My hands were tied, and I was blindfolded. The BSF fired rubber bullets at us while we were in no man's land, just to force us to the other side [into Bangladesh]. I never thought that I would be made a foreigner in my own country," he said.

Four days later, with support from his relatives in India, the man negotiated with the Indian authorities to be allowed back into Assam state due to a pending Supreme Court petition filed in December 2024 related to his family's citizenship.

Another Indian Muslim resident of Assam told Fortify Rights how her father was taken into Indian police custody and later forced into Bangladesh on May 23.

"My father was called a Bangladeshi

all his life, but that he would be sent to Bangladesh was unimaginable. We are Indians. We are being thrown out of our country. Why was my father sent to Bangladesh when he had all the documents [proving his Indian citizenship]?"

Her father was, however, intercepted by Bangladeshi border guard forces and sent back to India, the reports said.

The others who were expelled were reportedly transported to coastal areas and forced into the water near the maritime border of Bangladesh.

On the night of May 8, 2025, speedboats pushed them into the sea and forced them to swim ashore, the reports said quoting a Bangladeshi police officer who received a group of more than 70 people pushed by the Indian authorities into Bangladesh.

Rohingya refugees are also being detained and sent to Bangladesh, said the Fortify Rights statement.

"India is stripping Indian Muslim citizens and Rohingya refugees of their rights. Despite its obligations under international law, India continues to violate these commitments through a series of disturbing official laws and policies tinged with ethno-religious supremacism," Quinley said.

The wounds that are yet to heal

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little," he says softly. "I can walk a few steps with crutches. That's all."

The family has received Tk 4 lakh in aid: Tk 2 lakh from the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation and the rest from the government. "We used it all for treatment. I just want to study. I want to walk again. I want my life back."

NUMBER OF INJURED

But Shahin is not alone.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, 13,811 people were injured during the uprising, most of them in Dhaka Division. Injuries ranged from gunshots and pellets to tear gas and blunt trauma. Some victims suffered burns.

Government data show that 20 individuals lost a leg, four lost an arm, 20 were blinded in both eyes, and 450 lost vision in one. Hundreds more suffered spinal, cranial or internal injuries.

The July Uprising Martyrs' Families and July Fighters' Welfare and Rehabilitation Ordinance, issued on June 17, formally recognised 12,043 injured people in three categories: A, B and C. In another gazette issued on July 28, the government included an additional 1,757 names.

So far, Tk 202.56 crore has been disbursed in one-time aid, with the rest planned for 2025-26. Monthly allowances of Tk 20,000, Tk 15,000 and Tk 10,000 are promised under Categories A, B and C respectively, but timelines remain unclear.

‘THOSE WHO PAID THE PRICE ARE FORGOTTEN’

Despite losing his left leg, 19-year-old Md Akash Mia from Netrokona was placed under Category B, which is meant for less severe injuries.

"There are people with lighter wounds in Category A," he said, pointing to inconsistencies that affect medical and financial support.

Akash, an employee of a sweet shop, had been preparing to migrate to Saudi Arabia to support his farming family. On July 20, 2024, while helping a fellow protester, police followed him back to his sweet shop in Narayanganj.

"I was closing the shutter of the shop. They forced their way in, beat the

owner, smashed everything, then shot six or seven pellets below my knee."

With no public transport available, Akash was first ferried on a vegetable cart, then picked up by an ambulance. By the time doctors saw him, six hours had passed.

Between July 20 and 22, he was taken to five hospitals before his leg was amputated at NITOR on July 23. "When the prime minister visited, people feared another police raid," he said. His family, alarmed by inquiries, discharged him on August 1. They have been treating his wounds at home since.

So far, Akash has received Tk 3.5 lakh – one lakh from the government, one lakh from the July Foundation, and the rest from his employer. "We still owe my aunt Tk 50,000."

Now fitted with a prosthetic leg, he said, "I don't want sympathy. Just a fair chance to stand on my own feet again."

Over the past year, anger over delays and poor care has driven many injured protesters to the streets. They blocked roads in Shahbagh and Agargaon, held sit-ins outside the Secretariat and the chief adviser's residence, and even tried to obstruct the health adviser's motorcade after a hospital visit.

In a desperate moment last May, four injured people attempted suicide by ingesting poison during a meeting at the National Institute of Ophthalmology.

The government, citing injury severity, sent 75 patients abroad for advanced care, mostly to Singapore, Thailand, Turkey and Russia, at a cost of over Tk 78 crore. Another 32 remain on the waiting list. Medical teams from the UK, USA, France, Singapore, China and Nepal have visited to support local hospitals, but long delays remain.

Few cases reflect that better than Khokon Chandra Barman, a driver from Sherpur. On August 5, he begged police not to shoot outside Jatrabari Police Station. They did anyway – at point-blank range. The bullet pierced his upper lip, gums, nose and palate. His speech is now slurred, often unintelligible.

Initially approved for surgery in Australia, Khokon was later redirected to Russia, where doctors proposed a

three-stage procedure. The first was completed in March. The second, scheduled for July, was delayed after his government appointed travel companion was barred from flying over corruption charges.

"Why should I suffer because someone else broke the law?" Khokon asked.

After months of appeals, he was told just days ago that his surgery has been rescheduled for August 12.

"Everyone's busy with politics, but we who paid the price are now forgotten.... I'm just waiting to look in the mirror and recognise myself again."

Myanmar forms interim govt

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to the military after its 2021 coup had been cancelled and a caretaker administration had been formed alongside a special commission to oversee the election.

The move signals no change to the status quo in Myanmar, with coup leader Min Aung Hlaing holding on to all major levers of power as acting president while retaining his position as chief of the armed forces.

A state of emergency in place since the coup, which was due to expire yesterday after seven extensions, has now been lifted, said Zaw Min Tun, a government spokesperson.

"The interim president and commander in chief said this upcoming six months are the time to prepare and host the election," he told state media.

Myanmar has been in chaos since the coup against Aung San Suu Kyi's elected civilian government plunged the Southeast Asian nation into civil war, with the military fighting to contain a rebellion and accused of widespread atrocities, which it denies.

The election has been dismissed by Western governments as a sham to entrench the generals' power and is expected to be dominated by proxies of the military, with opposition groups either barred from running or refusing to take part.