

## KHAGRACHHARI VIOLENCE

# India dismisses allegation of involvement

### Calls it ‘false and baseless’

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday termed as “false and baseless” the claim by Bangladesh’s Home Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury about the involvement of forces from across the border in the recent violence in Khagrachhari.

“We categorically reject these false and baseless allegations from Bangladesh. The interim government in Bangladesh, as I have spoken about on several occasions, is unable to maintain law and order and has this habit of routinely trying to shift the blame elsewhere,” Indian Ministry of External Affairs Spokesman Randhir Jaiswal said in response to a pointed question at the weekly media briefing about the Bangladesh home adviser’s allegation, reports our correspondent in New Delhi.

Jaiswal said, “It would do well for them [Bangladesh] to introspect and conduct serious investigations into the actions of local extremists committing violence, arson, and land grabs against minorities and minority communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.”

Earlier on September 29, Home Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said that the recent violence in Khagrachhari following the alleged rape of an indigenous schoolgirl was being fuelled “by a neighbouring country and fascist groups”.

“A vested quarter is trying to create unrest to disrupt the peaceful atmosphere of Durga Puja. They attempted to prevent the festival from being celebrated with religious fervour and festivity. This vested group is behind the Khagrachhari incident,” he said.

While talking to reporters at the old Ramna Police Station after an event, he said a journalist asked whether firearms and money were being supplied to Khagrachhari from India.

The adviser said, “He [the journalist] said the violence is being instigated by India or by fascist groups. We are taking all-out measures to ensure that they cannot be successful.

“I did not want to name the country, but our journalist brother mentioned that country’s name. Some terrorists are firing shots from the hills, and these arms are coming from outside,” he said.



Condemning Israel's interception of the ‘Global Sumud Flotilla’, which was carrying humanitarian assistance for Gaza, a protest rally was brought out on Manik Mia Avenue in the capital yesterday afternoon. The rally, organised by Bangladesh Youth Synergy Alliance, demanded protection of the flotilla and the immediate release of detained activists.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## ‘We’re here to break the illegal siege’

### Shahidul Alam says in latest video message

#### STAR REPORT

Describing their mission as a stand against what he termed the “illegal siege” of Gaza, photographer-activist Shahidul Alam yesterday said the group’s presence was not primarily for aid delivery.

“This is not primarily for delivering humanitarian aid, though we have supplies with us, so we do not become a burden on our Gaza brothers and sisters. We are here to break the illegal siege,” Alam said.

“We are separate from the Sumud Flotilla. That was always the intention and the strategy,” he said.

According to Alam, eight boats that set out and a larger vessel he’s on remain – a total of nine vessels – and they expect to overtake other boats later in the day.

He acknowledged the risks of being the “front vessel,” saying it was a calculated decision they had prepared for.

The vessel he is on is carrying 96



people, of whom 82 are media and medical professionals, along with some organisers, members of the Flotilla Coalition steering committee, and the ship’s crew, he said.

Information is coming “in dribs and drabs” and cannot always be verified,

Shahidul said in a video posted on his Facebook yesterday.

Alam said the sea was “quite calm” in the morning, but conditions are unpredictable. He said the vessel endured extremely rough seas the previous day; he himself felt briefly unwell but had recovered.

He added the flotilla seeks to protest “the journalists and medical professionals killed alongside the ordinary women, men and children, in Gaza by Israel,” and to confront the “media siege” imposed by a blockade on foreign media.

“Your love and your encouragement give us strength. We shall prevail. Palestine will be free,” the photographer-activist said.

The Israeli military intercepted the last boat in an aid flotilla attempting to reach blockaded Gaza yesterday, a day after stopping most of the vessels and detaining some 450 activists including Swedish campaigner Greta Thunberg.

## Govt meets most conditions for next tranche

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“Since the revenue target has not been met, Bangladesh will now have to seek a waiver from the IMF,” he said.

#### ARREARS CLEARED

Bangladesh has also met two new QPC conditions on arrears to state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the energy and fertiliser sectors.

By June, foreign dues were required to be below \$870 million and domestic arrears below Tk 28,070 crore.

Foreign arrears stood at \$314 million and local Tk 18,000 crore in June, officials said.

Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed

last week said the government cleared \$5 billion foreign dues, including to Adani and Chevron, and even \$200 million in fertiliser import bills.

The \$5 billion cleared in foreign dues included \$3.5 billion accumulated during the previous government’s tenure, a senior finance ministry official said.

On the domestic side, Tk 89,000 crore in subsidies was allocated last fiscal year to settle SOE arrears, funded by cuts to the Annual Development Programme and savings in other budget areas.

#### IMF CONCERNS

Eastern coast sinking faster as sea level rises

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Gaza and the West Bank, respect international humanitarian law, and immediately cease what it described as a genocidal war and humanitarian blockade in Gaza.

“Israel must allow unhindered access to Gaza,” said the statement, adding that the flotilla symbolised global solidarity with the Palestinian people, who continue to be denied their fundamental rights to life, dignity, and livelihood.

“The government and people of Bangladesh stand in unwavering solidarity with the people of Palestine in this hour of grave distress and continued suffering,” the statement added.

## Insecurity grips

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Most of the roadside shops were open, but a sense of fear was still lingering among the people.

The alleged incident took place when the eighth grader was returning home from private tuition around 9:00pm. Her father filed a case the next morning with Khagrachhari Sadar Police Station against three unidentified men.

A man named Shayan Sheel was arrested in connection with the case. However, the accused’s mother Swaraswati Sheel alleged that her son was implicated falsely.

Protests and violence erupted over the incident under the banner of Jumma Chhatra Janata. Amid the violence, three people were shot dead and at least four others were injured on September 28.

By contrast, the western region, dominated by expansive mangrove forests, has seen less human intervention and lacks dense urban structures, with most of the land used for agriculture.

“In the west, the Sundarbans acts as a buffer, a natural shield... But in the east, most of the land is flat and vulnerable, apart from the hills,” he told The Daily Star.

He also pointed out that a few areas, including Chattogram’s Sadarghat and Teknaf are experiencing a land uplift as the eastern region is a tectonically active zone.

Ashraf said the findings carry urgent implications. “Since our infrastructure is not climate-resilient, many along the eastern coast will gradually be damaged and unusable in the future if the issue is not addressed immediately.”

He warned that farmlands could be submerged and crop yields may decline, endangering the livelihoods of millions.

#### THE FINDINGS

The study, titled “Estimating Vertical Land Motion-adjusted Sea level Rise in a Data-sparse and Vulnerable Coastal Region”, drew on decades of tide gauge records, satellite altimetry, and radar-based remote sensing to measure the changes in both sea levels and vertical land motion.

It flagged changes in tidal range, which is increasing in many coastal

Besides reserves and arrears, Bangladesh has met two other mandatory conditions, according to finance ministry officials.

By June, around 18 other programme benchmarks were also due for review by the IMF mission later this month.

The finance ministry official said Bangladesh has met most of these conditions.

Even so, Zahid Hussain said the IMF may express discomfort on two issues: the central bank’s dollar purchases and a recent circular on rescheduling default loans.

## Eastern coast sinking faster as sea level rises

areas. Amplified high tides mean greater risks of flooding and erosion, with the eastern coast showing the most pronounced effects.

Researchers noted that melting glaciers, warming oceans, groundwater extraction, sediment loss, and natural ground shifts are driving the rise, while monsoons and air pressure changes cause short-term fluctuations.

Human interventions such as polders and embankments have further disrupted water flow, altered tidal patterns, and reshaped sediment movement, they added.

#### CALL FOR LOCALISED ACTION

Stressing the need for localised solutions, Ashraf said, “Our combined data on land subsidence and sea level rise highlight an urgent need for targeted climate adaptation and infrastructure planning in vulnerable regions like Bangladesh.

Blanket policies will not work in a landscape where sea level rise, land motion, and tidal behavior vary widely, Ashraf said, calling for regular satellite and ground monitoring.

“When infrastructure is designed, climate information must be incorporated at the planning stage. Otherwise, at some point, it will no longer withstand the pressure,” he said, adding that disaster preparedness and climate adaptation strategies should also be tailored to the unique conditions of each zone.

Nandan Mukherjee, director at Binks Sustainability Institute in the UK, said that risk assessment remains a missing link.

He said the authorities must first measure and assess risks before taking any steps, especially for those working at the grassroots level.

“One of our biggest knowledge gaps is that we often confuse risk with vulnerability. The first and most essential task is to identify where the risks are, the level at which they

exist, and the timeframe over which they may pose a threat – only then can we respond appropriately,” added Nandan, also a teacher at the University of Dundee in the UK.

#### REASONS

- Urban sprawl, mega projects in Ctg, Cox’s Bazar
- Deep piling, construction accelerating land subsidence
- Melting glaciers, warming oceans, sediment loss driving rise
- Human interventions like embankments, polders altering water flow

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop zone-specific climate adaptation strategies
- Incorporate climate data into infrastructure planning
- Regular monitoring using satellites, ground measurements
- Strengthen disaster preparedness tailored to each region
- Conduct proper risk assessments before interventions

## Israel seizes last boat

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Israel’s foreign ministry yesterday said that it deported four Italian activists who were on board the flotilla, adding that “the rest are in the process of being deported”.

Israeli police said “more than 470 flotilla participants were taken into custody by the military police, subjected to rigorous screening, and transferred to the prison administration”.

Authorities earlier said that none of the vessels had breached its maritime blockade of the territory.

“Marinette, the last remaining boat of the Global Sumud Flotilla, was intercepted at 10:29am (0729 GMT) local time, approximately 42.5 nautical miles from Gaza,” the flotilla organisers said on Telegram.

They added that Israeli naval forces had “illegally intercepted all 42 of our vessels – each carrying humanitarian aid, volunteers, and the determination to break Israel’s illegal siege on Gaza”.

Among those detained from the flotilla were more than 20 journalists, according to media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF), including reporters from Spain’s El Pais, Qatar’s Al Jazeera and Italy’s public broadcaster RAI.

“Arresting journalists and preventing them from doing their work is a serious violation of the right to inform and be informed,” said Martin Roux, head of RSF’s crisis desk.

#### WORLDWIDE PROTESTS

The interception of the final boat came as a general strike was held across Italy in solidarity, disrupting trains and port traffic.

Over 200,000 people protested across Italy yesterday, condemning the treatment of the Global Sumud Flotilla.

Worldwide protests erupted Thursday, including in Barcelona, where the flotilla began its voyage, and where about 15,000 people marched chanting slogans including “Gaza, you are not alone”, “Boycott Israel” and

“Freedom for Palestine”.

Protests were also held in countries including United States, United Kingdom, Colombia, Spain, Germany and Turkey.

Israel has branded some of the activists, including Thunberg, as antisemitic, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu praised the navy’s interception efforts.

#### FFC FLOTILLA

Meanwhile, the international organisation the Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC) on Thursday said that 11 more ships are sailing toward the Gaza Strip to challenge the Israeli blockade.

In a statement, FFC said two boats flying Italian and French flags left Oranto, Italy, on Sept 25, and were joined by the vessel Conscience on Sept 30.

It said the vessels are expected to rendezvous with another 8-boat convoy, “Thousand Madleens to Gaza,” within hours. Together, the two groups will form an 11-ship convoy heading toward Gaza.

According to the coalition, about 100 people are aboard the boats, off the coast of Crete.

FFC, established in 2008, launched dozens of missions aimed at delivering aid and drawing global attention to the humanitarian crisis in the Israel-besieged Gaza Strip.

Israel has maintained a blockade on Gaza, home to nearly 2.4 million, for nearly 18 years, and further tightened the siege in March when it closed border crossings and blocked food and medicine deliveries, pushing the enclave into famine.

Since October 2023, Israeli bombardment has killed more than 66,200 Palestinians, most of them women and children. The UN and rights groups have repeatedly warned that the enclave is being rendered uninhabitable, with starvation and disease spreading rapidly.

## Finland dismisses case over Baltic cable cuts

AFP, Helsinki

A Helsinki court on Friday dismissed a case against three members of a ship from Russia’s “shadow fleet” suspected of cutting Baltic Sea cables, saying it was beyond its jurisdiction.

The captain and two senior officers of the Cook Islands-registered oil tanker Eagle S were accused of dragging the anchor on the seabed for around 90 kilometres (56 miles), damaging five undersea cables in the Gulf of Finland on December 25, 2024.

The EstLink 2 power cable and four telecommunications cables connecting Finland and Estonia were damaged, one of several similar incidents last year.

With tensions mounting around the Baltic Sea since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, many experts and political leaders have viewed the suspected sabotage as part of a “hybrid war” by Russia against Western countries.

The Helsinki District Court said it was “dismissing the charge in the case involving the tanker Eagle S along with the claims for damages... as it was not possible to apply Finnish criminal law”.

Prosecutors had argued the captain, Davit Vadatchkoria of Georgia, and senior officers Robert Egizaryan, a Georgian, and Santosh Kumar Chaurasia from India, neglected their duties intentionally, after leaving the Russian port of Ust-Luga.

The three were charged with “aggravated criminal mischief and aggravated interference with communications”.

## Mystery drones fly over Belgian military base

AFP, Brussels

Unidentified drones flew over a military training base in eastern Belgium, near the German border, Belgian Defence Minister Theo Francken said yesterday.

The sightings came after several airspace violations by Russian drones in European skies and mysterious drones flying over Denmark late last month before two gatherings of European leaders in Copenhagen.

“Several drones were spotted by local police, both on the Belgian side and on the German side,” the minister told broadcaster RTBF, adding that an investigation had been launched.

Francken said he did not know how many drones had flown or where they came from.

The drones flew over Elsenborn military base overnight Thursday to Friday, a spokeswoman for the defence minister told AFP.

“We are checking, we are looking into what happened, but at this stage, we don’t have more details,” she added.