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TORTURE, DISAPPEARANCES

Prosecution details harrowing accounts in Rab-run cells

ICT rejects accused army officers' plea for virtual appearance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prosecution yesterday presented harrowing accounts of enforced disappearances and torture inside Rab-run TFI cells as the International Crimes Tribunal-1 began hearing the charge framing against Sheikh Hasina and 16 others.

Formal charges have been brought against 17 accused, including Hasina, her former defence adviser Maj Gen (ret'd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal. Ten detained army officers were produced in the dock as Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam read out four charges: ordering, enabling, or failing to prevent enforced disappearances, illegal detention, and torture over an eight-year period.

The tribunal has already appointed three state defence counsels for the seven absconding accused: Hasina, Asaduzzaman, Tareq, three former

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Street vendors return to the walkway with illegal stalls in front of the parliament building in Dhaka, weeks after being evicted by Dhaka North City Corporation. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

Ensuring digital safety a social responsibility

Say experts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh must confront the rapid rise of digital violence against women and girls, said speakers yesterday.

They cautioned that without stronger safeguards in online spaces and accessible reporting and support systems, women will remain vulnerable to harassment, exploitation, and tech-facilitated abuse, which increasingly leads to offline harm.

The seminar, "16 Days Activism Against Gender-Based Violence 2025," was organised by Ipas Bangladesh with support from the health ministry, UNFPA, and the High Commission of Canada at the DGHS Conference Bhaban in Dhaka.

Dr Sayed Rubayet, country director of Ipas, said, "Violence against women and girls remains one of Bangladesh's most urgent human rights and public health challenges, and we must respond with unity, mindset change and survivor-centred services."



- » Ensure national commitment for tackling gender-based violence
- » Prioritise safety, rights of women in online, offline spaces
- » Enhance digital literacy to protect women from online exploitation
- » Provide survivor-centred services, support throughout the year

Cyber violence is only one expression of deeper inequalities. Progress will remain slow if we keep focusing on victims instead of confronting male perpetrators through education, deterrence and stronger legal consequences.

DR HALIDA HANUM AKHTER

Dr Mohammad Shawket Hossain Khan, director of the Health Economics Unit, said, "Gender-based violence cannot be tackled in isolation. Eleven ministries are now engaged in strengthening medical, psychosocial and legal responses. No single institution can end violence without coordinated national commitment."

Former Women's Affairs Reform Commission member Dr Halida Hanum Akhter urged

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DHAKA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

Protests, counter-protests escalate over ordinance

Students of 7 colleges block road, disrupt traffic

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Students and teachers from the seven affiliated colleges yesterday staged separate demonstrations over the proposed Dhaka Central University ordinance.

A group of students initially blocked the Science Lab intersection from 1:00pm to 1:45pm and later moved to the New Market-Azimpur intersection, where they blocked the road and formed a human chain from 2:00pm to 4:00pm, demanding the immediate issuance of the ordinance.



"Due to the blockade, vehicular movement remained slow for hours and eventually came to a complete standstill for nearly two hours until the students left the road. The situation returned to normal around 5:00pm," said Twaha Yeasin Hossen, assistant commissioner (Traffic) in the New Market area.

Meanwhile, a group of students from Eden Mohila College blocked the Nilkhet intersection from 11:45am to 1:30pm, opposing the proposal, before marching toward Dhaka College, where they staged a sit-in in front of the

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Collect, analyse quake data for future safety

Experts tell programme on earthquake preparedness

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Timely surveys, data collection, and analysis are crucial for preparing for potential major earthquakes, with Bangladesh sitting on a geologically active zone, said experts at an event yesterday.

Speaking at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity, members of the Bangladesh Geological Survey also emphasised the need for geologists, researchers, planners, engineers, and other professionals to study the country's geological conditions.

This would help evaluate the potential for major earthquakes and develop appropriate preparedness measures and recommended actions, they added.

Termining the recent earthquake a wake-up call, BGS leaders explained that earthquakes measuring 5.0-5.9 on the Richter scale are considered "Damaging Earthquakes," while those measuring 6.0-6.9 are classified as "Destructive Earthquakes".

"The November 21 earthquake was a Damaging Earthquake, with a magnitude close to that of a

Destructive Earthquake. Although precise predictions of earthquake timing and magnitude are not possible, hazard-prone areas can be identified," said Dr Anwar Zahid, general secretary of BGS.

Anowar said as Dhaka and its surrounding areas are densely populated, a major earthquake could cause widespread damage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Conduct detailed surveys, risk assessments

Update earthquake risk map

Enhance geological survey dept's capabilities

Set up task force for quake monitoring

Increase public awareness, cooperation

He said building owners often prioritise short-term gains during construction, ignoring rules as Rajuk turns a blind eye. After every disaster, experts raise alarms, and the agency vows action. But after some days, the dust settles, and the dangerous cycle continues.

Prof Badrul Imam, president of GSB, emphasised that earthquakes are a natural phenomenon, and occasional tremors are normal in a seismically active region like Bangladesh.

He stressed that instead of fear or exaggeration, the most effective protection lies in data collection, analysis, and proper preparedness.

Experts noted that Bangladesh's geographic, geological, and tectonic position is highly complex, with many considering it to be located at a subduction-related plate boundary.

The subduction of the Indian Plate beneath the Burmese Plate began hundreds of thousands of years ago, resulting in the formation of the hills in Chittagong and Sylhet. The pressure from these two plates is ongoing, putting Bangladesh at risk of earthquakes.

The GSB leaders outlined several key recommendations, including conducting detailed surveys and research to determine potential earthquake magnitude and risk, identifying Bangladesh's

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Media freedom crucial for free and fair polls

Say envoys; stress need to end impunity for crimes against journos

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

As Bangladesh approaches a critical election early next year, responsible and independent journalism will be crucial in ensuring a free and fair poll, said two foreign diplomats at a media freedom event yesterday.

They also stressed the need to end impunity for crimes against journalists.

"Journalists will be key and critical to the election, where voters are able to express their franchise in the way democracy should allow it," said Canadian High Commissioner Ajit Singh at a "meet and greet" event with journalists at the Canadian Club.

The event was organised by Media Freedom Coalition, a global partnership of 51 countries dedicated to promoting media freedom and protecting journalists worldwide.

Ajit Singh said nowhere in the world is journalism more challenging than in Bangladesh. He said the challenges have grown in recent times and will become even more difficult in the coming months as Bangladesh approaches one of its biggest elections.

Deputy head of the German embassy, Anja Kersten, said in the lead-up to Bangladesh's national elections, responsible and independent journalism will play

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Labourers work with metal items without any safety gear, occupying a large section of the road in the capital's Dholaikhal area and putting themselves and pedestrians at risk. The situation is made worse by ongoing road development work, which further narrows the space for safe movement. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Consider health of Khaleda before announcing election date

NCP urges EC; raises concern over level playing field

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party yesterday urged the Election Commission to consider the illness of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and the country's current political situation before announcing the schedule for the upcoming 13th national election, scheduled for next February.

Expressing concern over the "level playing field," NCP leaders said there may be political influence in the appointment of deputy commissioners and superintendents of police across the country ahead of the polls. The party asked the EC to be more cautious about these issues.

NCP leaders conveyed these concerns while speaking to reporters yesterday afternoon after a three-member NCP delegation met the Chief Election Commissioner at the EC headquarters in Dhaka.

The party also received its official certificate from the EC as a registered political party.

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