

## PFUJ condemns attacks on media in Bangladesh

## STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) has strongly condemned the recent violence, vandalism and arson targeting media houses in Bangladesh.

In a joint statement issued yesterday, PFUJ President Afzal Butt and Secretary General Arshad Ansari denounced the targeted attacks on the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, as well as the assault on Nurul Kabir, editor of New Age and president of the Editors' Council.

"Silencing the press through physical intimidation is a direct violation of the constitutional right to freedom of expression and the rule of law," the PFUJ leaders said.

They also expressed deep concern over reports that more than 100 journalists in Bangladesh remain detained without trial, demanding their immediate and unconditional release.

The PFUJ further highlighted what it described as a disturbing regional trend, pointing to similar incidents of violence in Nepal. Just months ago, mob attacks targeted the Kantipur Group, Annapurna Post and Image TV.

The leadership also paid tribute to photojournalist Suresh Rajak of Avenews TV, who died in an arson attack in Kathmandu on March 28, 2025, noting that the perpetrators of these crimes remain unaccountable.

The PFUJ called upon the governments concerned to conduct fair, impartial and speedy investigations into all incidents of arson and violence, identify and bring the perpetrators to justice, end the culture of impunity and ensure the safety of journalists as they perform their professional duties.

"Violence and harassment aimed at silencing the media are unacceptable in any democratic society," the statement concluded.

## Contraceptive

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dropped to 58.2 percent from 62.7 percent in 2019. Access to modern contraception also declined, meeting the needs of 73.5 percent of women compared to 77.4 percent in 2019, shows the survey carried out by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with UNICEF.

DGFP officials said the unmet demand for contraceptives rose sharply during the Covid pandemic that hit the country in 2020. However, the then government deprioritised family planning rather than boosting contraceptive supply.

In 2023, the health ministry halted the purchase of contraceptives for about a year, resulting in a significant supply gap. It opted to channel funds meant for buying contraceptives towards the procurement of other items. Family planning took a back seat at that time, said a DGFP official, seeking anonymity.

When contacted, DGFP Director General Ashrafi Ahmad said the crisis deepened after the expiry of the Fourth Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Programme (HPNSP) in June last year. In the past, most contraceptives were bought under the scheme.

A lack of field level workers worsened the situation, she said, adding that recruitment for some posts was halted due to legal complications.

## CONTRACEPTIVE SUPPLY DROPS

DGFP provides people with five types of contraceptives -- condoms, oral pills, intrauterine devices (IUDs), injectables, and implants -- to people free of cost through its field level workers across the country.

According to its national contraceptive summary report, condom supply dropped by 57 percent over the last six years.

Condom supply stood at 97.48 lakh in September 2019, months before the Covid outbreak -- a period when the unmet demand for contraceptives rose sharply.

The number continued to decline to 41.52 lakh in September this year, down from 87.31 lakh in September, 2022.

The other four contraceptive items have also seen a steady decline

since 2019: oral pills by 63 percent, IUDs by 64 percent, injectables by 41 percent, and implants by 37 percent.

As of December 11 this year, the agency had stocks of condoms for 39 days; implants for 33 days; IUDs for 45 days; oral pills for five months and 18 days; and injectables for six months and 15 days.

Asked, Abdur Razzaque, director of the DGFP's logistics and supply unit, said they already initiated the purchase of implants.

"These contraceptive items could be restocked soon, provided that an ongoing legal issue over the purchase is resolved."

However, condoms are likely to run out of stock, depriving people of supplies for at least a month, he said.

Razzaque said the government approved a project last month to buy all five types of contraceptives, but the procurement process will take at least three months to complete.

For the time being, DGFP is using available funds to buy condoms in limited quantities, but their supply may still be disrupted for a month next year, he said.

Asked about the manpower shortage, Ershad Ahmed Nomani, deputy director (personnel) of DGFP, said that of the 50,648 field-level posts, at least 12,720 (25 percent) remain vacant.

Those include posts of family planning assistants and inspectors; family welfare volunteers; and sub assistant community medical officers, he said.

These field-level workers not only distribute contraceptives but also provide advocacy and counselling to service seekers.

All these activities, which are crucial for birth control, have been seriously disrupted due to shortages of contraceptives and manpower, ultimately contributing to the rise in TFR, said Aminul Islam, a professor of Population Sciences at Dhaka University.

He also noted that in recent years, many couples have shown reluctance towards family planning, with some preferring to have more than two children.

A combination of all these factors explains the recent rise in the total fertility rate, he added.

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