

Iran executions seemingly 'tool of state intimidation'

Says UN rights chief; Tehran to consider lifting internet ban; state TV hacked

AGENCIES

Iran appears to be using executions "as a tool of state intimidation", the United Nations said yesterday, as it denounced a jump in capital punishment globally in 2025.

The Islamic republic reportedly executed 1,500 people last year, UN rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement.

"The scale and pace of executions suggest a systematic use of capital punishment as a tool of state intimidation, with disproportionate impact on ethnic minorities and migrants," he warned.

The spike in executions in Iran -- which according to rights groups is the world's most prolific executioner after China -- had contributed to "an alarming increase" in the use of capital punishment worldwide last year, Turk said.

Meanwhile, Iran may lift its internet blackout in a few days, a senior parliament member said yesterday, after authorities shut communications while they used massive force to crush protests in the worst domestic unrest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.



In the latest sign of weakness in the authorities' control, state television appeared to be hacked late on Sunday, briefly showing speeches by US President Donald Trump and the exiled son of Iran's last shah calling on the public to revolt, reports Reuters.

Iran's streets have largely been quiet for a week since anti government protests that began in late December were put down in three days of mass violence.

An Iranian official told Reuters on condition of anonymity that the confirmed death toll was more than 5,000, including 500 members of the security forces, with some of the worst unrest taking place in ethnic Kurdish areas in the northwest. Western-based Iranian rights groups also say thousands were killed.



Members of the Spanish Civil Guard and other emergency personnel work beside one of the trains involved in a deadly derailment of two high-speed trains near Adamuz in Córdoba, Spain, yesterday. At least 39 people were killed in the collision.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Russia hits energy system in 5 regions of Ukraine

Kyiv air defence units shoot down 126 drones

REUTERS

Russia launched a barrage of drone strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure overnight yesterday, cutting off power in five regions across the country amid freezing temperatures and high demand, Ukrainian officials said.

The Ukrainian air force said that Russian troops had launched 145 drones. Air defence units shot down 126 of them, it said.

"As of this morning, consumers in Sumy, Odesa, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Chernihiv regions are without power," the energy ministry said in a statement. "Emergency repair work is underway if the



security situation allows."

In the southern Odesa region, energy and gas infrastructure was damaged, the regional governor said, adding that one person was hurt in the attack.

DTEK, Ukraine's largest private energy company, said its energy facility in Odesa was "substantially"

damaged, knocking out power for 30,800 households.

A local power grid company in northern Chernihiv region said that five important energy facilities were damaged, leaving tens of thousands of consumers without power.

Russia also hit Ukraine's second-largest city of Kharkiv with missiles yesterday morning, significantly damaging a critical infrastructure facility, Mayor Ihor Terekhov said.

Moscow has stepped up a winter campaign of strikes on the Ukrainian energy system, including generation, electricity transmission and gas production facilities, amid freezing temperatures that complicate repair works.

91 BNP rebels still

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Some have questioned whether the BNP can effectively enforce its own decisions at the grassroots level -- a concern that senior party leaders acknowledge but say is difficult to resolve overnight.

Syed Ehsanul Huda, chief of Bangladesh Jatiya Dal, dissolved his own party and joined the BNP. Nominated as a Kishoreganj-5 candidate, he said, "I am facing an extremely uncomfortable situation.... Many committees are not working with me. These issues should have been resolved much earlier by the BNP high command."

Fariduzzaman Farhad, chairman of the National People's Party also dissolved his party and joined the BNP. Contesting from Narail-2 now, he said a rebel candidate remains in the race in his constituency, which he described as deeply unfortunate. "Just allowing the use of the sheaf of paddy symbol is not enough. The central leadership should have arranged an understanding between me and the rebel candidate. The party should have been stricter."

Despite meetings with BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman, who urged rebel candidates to withdraw, some are still contesting from seats given to allied candidates.

Expelled leader Saiful Alam Nirab is still contesting Dhaka-12, where the BNP has not fielded any candidate as allied Biplobi Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Haque is vying for the seat.

In Munshiganj-3, the BNP nominated central leader Kamruzzaman Ratan, while district BNP Member-secretary Mohammad Mohiuddin is contesting as an independent candidate.

In Munshiganj-1, local leader Sheikh Md Abdullah received the party nomination, while two

rebel candidates -- district convener committee member Momin Ali and central Swechhasebak Dal leader Mir Sharafat Ali -- are contesting the seat.

In Patuakhali-3, the BNP did not field any candidate, as Gono Adhikar Parishad President Nurul Haque is contesting under the seat-sharing arrangement. However, a BNP rebel candidate remains in the race there.

Other constituencies where rebels are in the race include: Chattogram-14 and 16; Sylhet-5; Natore-1; Brahmanbaria-1 and 2; Mymensingh-1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 11; Joypurhat-2; Madaripur-1; Habiganj-1; Narayanganj-2, 3 and 4; Gopalganj-2; Bagerhat-2; Jhalokathi-1; Chandpur-2; Tangail-1 and 2.

EXPULSIONS
The party has expelled at least 10 leaders for contesting against party nominees or working against officially backed candidates. Most of them remain in the race.

The central leadership has issued fresh instructions to district and upazila units to throw their weight behind nominated candidates and avoid engagement with campaigns of rebels.

As grassroots leaders were found supporting the rebel candidate in Patuakhali-3, two committees there were dissolved on Saturday.

ANOTHER SETBACK
Three BNP candidates have had their nominations rejected, leaving the party with no alternatives to those seats.

Affected candidates have already moved the courts, seeking restoration of their candidacies through appeals and writ petitions.

Legal teams are closely monitoring court proceedings, aware that unfavourable rulings could significantly weaken the party's electoral presence in certain regions.

Sust students

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morning. They did not specify a time.

Speaking to this correspondent after the meeting, Sust VC Prof Dr AM Sarwaruddin Chowdhury said, "Since the day I joined the campus, I've been trying my best to hold the Sucusu polls. Even after the EC turned us down in a gazette notification, we convinced them and achieved a decision."

"However, we are unable to hold the elections due to the HC order following the student's writ. But we have already appealed and will do everything we can do legally to hold the elections as soon as possible."

An HC bench of Justice Fahmida Quader and Justice Md Ashif Hasan yesterday passed an order suspending the poll process for four weeks following the writ petition filed on Sunday by a Sucusu vice-president candidate.

Immediately after the order was issued, the Sust authorities filed a petition with the Appellate Division, challenging the HC order.

Students who had been protesting the petition since morning then announced they would continue their demonstrations demanding the polls. They confined the VC, pro-vice chancellor, treasurer, and other top officials inside the administrative building from

noon, locking its entrance. After the emergency syndicate meeting, the university administration around 10:00pm initiated a meeting with a section of the protesting students at the administrative building's conference hall.

Contacted by The Daily Star, Mohammad Belayet Hossain, a senior lawyer for the university, said the Sust authorities have sought a stay on the HC order so that the elections could proceed, and that a chamber judge of the Appellate Division may hold a hearing today in this regard.

"The writ petition that led to the High Court staying the elections was not acceptable, as there was no nexus between the Sucusu election and the national parliamentary polls."

On Sunday, independent vice-president candidate Mominur Rashid Shuvo filed the petition, saying the Election Commission had earlier issued directives to halt all elections ahead of the national parliamentary polls, arguing that holding the Sucusu election under those directives was not legally valid.

Citing security concerns, the EC on January 12 circulated a notification ordering that no polls, including those of student unions, can be held

before the February 12 parliamentary election.

However, after repeated discussions with the Sust administration, the EC on January 15 issued another notification allowing the Sucusu polls.

Abu Saleh Md Nasim, a protesting student of the Bangla Department, said, "For one political party's wish, the election is deferred, foiling all our joy for the Sucusu polls after 28 years. The university administration was not interested in holding the polls, and it was our demand to hold them. But they are now creating obstructions."

Shibir-backed VP candidate Delwar Hossain Shishir said, "I would blame the administration for the failure. The polls were supposed to be held in December, but they intentionally deferred the date to January 20 and created this situation."

Students began protesting the petition yesterday morning in front of the administrative building, demanding that the elections be held as scheduled. Around 2:00pm, after the HC order, they marched towards the university's main gate and blocked the Sylhet-Sunamganj Highway.

The students removed the blockade and marched back

onto the campus around 6:00pm. They continued their protest in front of the administrative building.

Eight Sucusu election commissioners, who are part of the Jatiyatabadi Teachers' Forum, submitted their resignations to the VC following the protest.

At a press conference, Prof Dr Ashraf Uddin, president of the forum and head of the mathematics department, said they had resigned over anomalies surrounding the polls, adding that more than a hundred teachers would refrain from election duties.

In contrast, Jamaat-backed teachers' organisation University Teachers' Link said it would stand by the administration in holding the election and pursue any necessary legal action.

Dr Abul Mukid Mohammad Mukaddes, chief election commissioner for the Sucusu polls, said, "We have nothing to do with the High Court order, as the university authorities are legally doing what's necessary and have also called an emergency syndicate meeting over the issue."

"The duties of the commissioners are almost over, and the resignation of eight will not impact the election. We are awaiting the court and the administration's directions."

'Serial killer' held in Savar

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and produced before a court with a prayer for 10 days' remand.

Dhaka Senior Judicial Magistrate Tajul Islam Sohag sent Samrat to jail after recording his confessional statement, said an assistant sub-inspector working at the court.

Details of the statement could not be known immediately till filing the report last night around 8:30pm.

Police said Samrat lived in Savar's Bank Colony area, but his permanent address is unknown.

Although Samrat is widely known as "mentally unwell" by locals, police said no such symptoms were found during

interrogation. "As he roams around like a vagabond, people assume he is mentally unwell. However, during interrogation, we did not find any signs or symptoms of that," the police official said.

Following earlier recoveries of bodies from the abandoned community centre, police intensified surveillance in the area, Arafatul said. With assistance from the municipality authorities, the building was cleaned, lighting improved, and CCTV cameras installed. Police also deployed regular patrols.

After the latest discovery of bodies, CCTV footage was reviewed, leading to the identification of a suspicious individual. A subsequent raid resulted in Samrat's detention, he added.

Police said five bodies have been recovered from the community centre over the past five months. Another victim, Asma Begum, 75, was found dead behind a tea stall adjacent to the Savar Model Mosque July 4, last year.

Except for Asma Begum, the other five victims remain unidentified, police said, adding that separate cases have been filed in connection with each incident.

Initially, police believed Asma Begum had died of natural causes and filed an unnatural death case. However, a post-mortem examination later revealed she had been strangled, prompting the filing of a murder case.

According to police, a body was recovered on August 29 last year from the second floor

of the community centre. The unidentified victim, believed to be around 30, was found in a decomposed state with his hands tied.

On October 11, the body of an unidentified woman, also aged around 30, was recovered from a second-floor bathroom with her throat slit. On December 19, another unidentified man, aged about 35, was found dead in the building.

On Sunday night, police recovered two more burnt bodies from the same building. "We believe one of the victims is a 13-year-old girl, while the other is estimated to be around 25. However, the gender of the latter could not be confirmed immediately," Arafatul said.



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