French PM vows 'massive' police deployment

Blames ultra-left groups for 'insurrectionary plan' in riots

AGENCIES

French Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu said yesterday authorities would mobilise a "massive" security presence next weekend, with organisers announcing plans for new protests after riots erupted on the sidelines of nationwide demonstrations.

"The deployment for next Saturday will be massive," Lecornu said in parliament, acknowledging that the security operation for the protests last weekend had been "too static and not mobile enough."

He accused ultra-left radical groups of forging an "insurrectionary plan" that led to the violent rioting over the weekend, reports AFP.

Paris police yesterday ordered a temporary ban on people carrying cans or bottles of petrol or gas, or possessing fireworks.

Overnight curfews in violence-hit zones of France's biggest cities helped bring respite from the nation's worst unrest in years, the government said.

"The targeted curfews have contributed to the calm of last night," Lecornu said earlier in a post on X, adding they may be extended further into the week where needed.

Buoyed by protests in France, crowds have also taken to the streets in other countries, including Italy and Albania, where similar anger over living conditions has led to clashes, reports Reuters.

In central Paris, police emptied and guarded the Place de la Republique overnight, with a helicopter overhead. In Lille, in the north, where the curfew only applied to minors, officers patrolled the city centre, checking bypassers' identities.

Paris police yesterday ordered a temporary ban on people carrying cans or bottles of petrol or gas, or possessing fireworks.

Marseille Mayor Benoît Payan said curfews for minors would be imposed in commercial areas hardest hit by the weekend's riots, with the measures due to begin last night.

High-school pupil strikes and demonstrations against falling standards and growing dilapidation have converged with a broader outpouring of anger at rising prices and the sense that health, housing and welfare needs are also no longer being met.



Vehicles were few and far between around the SAARC Fountain at Karwan Bazar in the capital yesterday afternoon. Dhaka's usually bustling streets remain relatively quiet during the Durga Puja holidays, with major intersections seeing fewer vehicles than on regular working days.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Ousted autocrat, opposition out to stir unrest

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and factories had reopened in the past seven months, he said.

"The core objective is to ensure that our workers do not remain unemployed and can return to work," he said.

The government had also taken initiatives to reopen around 46 more closed factories across the country between January and December next year, he said, adding, "We want our workers to have jobs so they can earn a living and sustain themselves."

Tarique said the government planned to double the bed capacity of every upazila health complex from 50 to 100 over the next five years to improve access to healthcare.

Separate beds for women and children, along with dialysis facilities for kidney patients, would also be introduced so rural residents would not have to travel to distant towns for routine treatment, he said.

At the start of the rally, the prime minister distributed Tk 12 crore in incentives among 38,970 sugarcane farmers in the Rajshahi region. He transferred the money to their mobile accounts with the press of a button on a computer and handed cheques to 15 farmers.

The rally was chaired by BNP Acting Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi and addressed by Land Minister Mizanur Rahman Minu, Commerce Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktadir, Cultural Affairs Minister Nitai Roy Chowdhury, BNP Standing Committee Member Gayeshwar Chandra Roy and Rajshahi lawmakers.

Thousands of BNP leaders and activists from across Rajshahi district attended the rally, along with men and women from the Hindu community who are celebrating Durga Puja.

Earlier, Tarique arrived at Shah Makhdum Airport in Rajshahi aboard a military aircraft at 2:50pm and went straight to the rally venue. Before visiting Rajshahi, he had attended a Durga Puja mandap at Dharmasabha Temple in Rangpur. After his engagements in Rajshahi, he left for Shah Makhdum Airport to fly to Chattogram.

Priority by power

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official said more than three patients were being treated against every available bed at the hospital, underscoring the need to expand its capacity.

However, the same rationale was not applied in the case of Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH). Despite recording the highest bed occupancy rate among all medical college hospitals in 2024, the facility has not seen an increase in bed capacity since 2013.

The 1,000-bed facility had a bed occupancy rate of 329 percent in 2024, compared with 308 percent at the hospital in Bogura.

Moreover, MMCH treated 3,21,524 inpatients, more than double the number (1,23,364) handled by the Bogura hospital.

A recent visit to MMCH laid bare a severe shortage of beds, with dozens of patients being treated on floors and corridors.

"I have been trying to get a bed, but none is available," 65-year-old Ishaq Ali, who was being treated in a corridor after being admitted with a lung infection, told our correspondent on October 7.

On October 6, the hospital had 4,098 patients against its 1,000-bed capacity, said the hospital's assistant director (administration) Mohammad Mainuddin Khan. "We are providing food and emergency medicines for all admitted patients, but we cannot arrange beds for everyone."

BED ALLOCATION

The second-largest bed expansion went to Mugda Medical College Hospital in Dhaka-9 constituency of State Minister for Road Transport, Bridges and Railways Habibur Rashid Habib and the medical college hospital in Dinajpur, the home district of Social Welfare Minister AZM Zahid Hossain.

The 500-bed hospitals in Mugda and Dinajpur were each expanded to 1,000 beds between May 21 and August 19 despite occupancy rates of 157-169 percent.

By contrast, hospitals in Khulna (266 percent), Sylhet (259 percent), Cumilla (221 percent), Rangpur (199 percent) and Barishal (190 percent) received no such expansion.

The case of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital underscores the unmet need for expansion at some of the excluded hospitals.

A total of 3,172 patients were receiving treatment at the hospital against its capacity of just 900 beds on October 8, meaning the number of patients was more than three times the hospital's bed capacity.

"I have been asking for a bed for the past two days, but they cannot provide any," said Rustam Ali from the city's Jalalabad area who was being treated for injuries to his hands and feet.

Asma Begum from Sylhet's Osmaninagar upazila was tending to her grandson Jisan, who had developed measles-like symptoms, on the hospital floor.

"I found a small space, so I spread a mat for my grandson to lie on. A doctor came by once, examined him, and said we could remain here for now," she told our Sylhet correspondent on October 7.

Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, which treated more than two patients for every available bed, saw a relatively modest expansion in July with its capacity rising from 1,200 to 1,300 beds. The facility is located in the constituency of Land Minister Mizanur Rahman Minu.

Besides, the capacity of the Sadar hospital in Rajbari, home district of State Minister for Cultural Affairs Ali Newaz Mahmood Khyom, and the general hospital in Joypurhat, the home district of State Minister for Public Administration Abdul Bari, was raised by 150 beds in the same month.

Rangamati General Hospital and Langadu Upazila Health Complex (UHC) in Rangamati, home district of the then Chattogram Hill Tracts affairs minister Dipen Dewan, were also among the facilities that received capacity upgrades.

Earlier in May, the 100-bed district hospital in Narsingdi, the home district of the health minister, saw its capacity rise to 250 beds. It had an occupancy rate of 117 percent, lower than that of at least 25 hospitals in other parts of the country. Besides, the district has another 100-bed hospital.

In addition to district hospitals, three UHCs in the constituencies of two ministers saw their bed capacity double between May 17 and August 2.

On May 17, two 50-bed UHCs were upgraded to 100 beds in Chakoria and Pekua under Cox's Bazar-1, the constituency of Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed.

The UHC in Bhairab under Kishoreganj-6, the constituency of State Minister for Textiles and Jute Shariful Alam, saw a similar rise in bed capacity on August 2.

In June, the government had decided to upgrade all UHCs to 101-bed facilities to improve access to public healthcare services nationwide. On August 12, the decision was revised, and a new plan was adopted to upgrade all UHCs to 151-bed facilities in phases.

Around a month later, the health ministry upgraded Nandigram UHC in Bogura from 31 to 50 beds, along with another UHC in Feni. It also expanded the capacity of the 500-bed National Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital in Dhaka by 200 beds in September.

By contrast, only 191 additional beds were approved for five hospitals outside ministers' areas, including four 31-bed UHCs that received just 19 beds each in Taraganj of Rangpur, Osmaninagar of Sylhet, Atgharia of Pabna and Fulgachhi of Feni. The National Institute of ENT in Dhaka received the remaining 115 beds and was expanded to 250 beds.

When contacted, the health minister rejected allegations that hospital expansion projects were influenced by political considerations.

"We are doing this entirely on the basis of need. We are increasing facilities in areas where medical services are inadequate," he told The Daily Star on October 14.

Sakhawat said the government was planning to establish a 1,600-bed hospital in Lalmonirhat and implement several other healthcare projects in different districts.

Asked why most hospital expansion projects were concentrated in the constituencies of ministers and state ministers, he said, "Would you judge the hospital expansion in Rangamati based on the minister representing the area, or on the healthcare needs of the people there? Remote and neglected areas need to be brought into the mainstream."

When this correspondent pointed out that many hospitals with higher bed occupancy rates did not receive similar expansions, the minister said projects for those facilities were also under consideration and urged all to wait for a year to see the progress.

[Our Mymensingh and Sylhet correspondents contributed to this report]

HOSPITAL EXPANSION AT A GLANCE

FACILITY	APPROVAL DATE	EXPANSION	HOME DIST/CONSTITUENCY	MINISTER/STATE MINISTER
Rangamati General Hospital	April 28	From 100 to 250 beds	Rangamati	Dipen Dewan, the then CHT affairs minister
Langadu UHC	April 28	From 31 to 50 beds	Rangamati	Dipen Dewan, the then CHT affairs minister
District Sadar Hospital, Rajbari	April 28	From 100 to 250 beds	Rajbari	Ali Newaz Mahmood Khyom, state minister for cultural affairs
Chakoria UHC	May 17	From 50 to 100 beds	Cox's Bazar	Salahuddin Ahmed, home minister
Pekua UHC	May 17	From 50 to 100 beds	Cox's Bazar	Salahuddin Ahmed, home minister
Mugda Medical College Hospital	May 21	From 500 to 1000 beds	Dhaka-9	Habibur Rashid Habib, state minister for road transport
Narasingdi District Hospital	May 24	From 100 to 250 beds	Narasingdi	Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain, health minister
Joypurhat General Hospital	July 12	From 250 to 400 beds	Joypurhat	Abdul Bari, state minister for public administration
Rajshahi Medical College Hospital	July 13	From 1200 to 1300 beds	Rajshahi	Mizanur Rahman Minu, land minister
Bhairab UHC	Aug 2	From 50 to 100 beds	Kishoreganj	Shariful Alam, state minister for textiles and jute
Dinajpur Medical College Hospital	Aug 19	From 500 to 1000 beds	Dinajpur-6	AZM Zahid Hossain, social welfare minister
Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital	Sept 8	From 1,200 to 1,800 beds	Bogura	Tarique Rahman, prime minister
Nandigram UHC	Sept 22	From 31 to 50 beds	Bogura	Tarique Rahman, prime minister

To mourn or to wait

FROM PAGE 1

he recalled how his daughter initially sent money home before the family received troubling news.

"She sent money home for the first five months. One day, she called and told us she had been sent to jail," Fazal told The Daily Star.

According to him, Sweety said she had been framed and imprisoned following an argument with other female workers in Saudi Arabia. The family then lost contact with her for about a year.

"She later began calling home again, usually once a month, but never told us about her trial or sentence.

"During one of her last calls, she said she might be released from jail in two months. She called us from jail as recently as 15 days ago. Even then, she said nothing about her sentence."

The foreign ministry recently said it had learned of the executions of two Bangladeshis in Saudi Arabia but had been unable to confirm their identities.

"We do not know what has happened to my daughter. We do not even know whether she is alive or dead. We have only heard rumours," Fazal said.

Sweety's mother, Johura, said her daughter was divorced and had a four-year-old daughter.

"After Sweety left for Saudi Arabia, her elder sister, Beauty, took responsibility for raising the child.

"I want the government to tell me what happened to my daughter. I want her back. Whether she is alive or dead, I just want my daughter back," Johura said.

Mahera Union Parishad chairman Bibhas Sarkar and Mirzapur Police Station Officer-in-Charge Abdullah Al Mamun said they had received no information about Sweety from the government.

CONSULAR MEMO RAISES QUESTIONS

A confidential consular memo obtained by The Daily Star shows that the two Bangladeshis executed in Makkah on October 14 had been detained since August 2023 on separate allegations, but a prisoner list received by the consulate made no mention of death sentences.

The October 18 memo, sent by the Bangladesh Consulate General in Jeddah to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, identifies them as Nazrul Islam Abdul Basir and Suety Akhter (identified by her family as Sweety Akhtar).

The prisoner list, received on September 30, shows Nazrul was detained on August 1, 2023, under Saudi Arabia's cybercrime law, while Suety was detained a day later on allegations of adultery. Both had worked as cleaners for Al Majal Company and were held at Jeddah Correctional Facility and Jeddah Women's Prison, respectively.

Although the list included brief descriptions of offences involving 97 prisoners, it contained no details of the offences or death sentences involving the two Bangladeshis.

Saudi Arabia's interior ministry, however, said the two were executed after being convicted of an "immoral act" inside a mosque in Makkah. The memo does not explain how the conviction relates to the earlier allegations.

The memo does not specify whether either had access to an interpreter or legal representation during their trials. Neither family had sought legal assistance from the consulate.

It also states that Saudi authorities had not notified either the Bangladesh embassy or consulate, officially or unofficially, of the death sentences or executions.

The consulate has since sent a note verbale to the Makkah branch of the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, requesting copies of the judgments and details of the proceedings. A further report will follow once the judgments are received.

PROTEST IN SAVAR

Meanwhile, labour organisations yesterday formed a human chain in front of the National Martyrs' Memorial in Savar to protest the execution of two Bangladeshis in Saudi Arabia.

Organised by Jatiya Garments Sramik Unity, the programme demanded timely consular assistance for detained Bangladeshis, close monitoring of death penalty cases, urgent diplomatic intervention, and access to legal aid and interpreters during trials.

The protesters also sought greater transparency, accountability and oversight of Bangladesh missions, a digital system to track cases involving detained expatriates, and stronger coordination between the foreign ministry and diplomatic missions to protect expatriates' rights and security.

Leaders and activists of several labour organisations attended.

Speakers included Textile Garments Workers Federation central president Abul Hossain, Bangladesh Textile Garments Workers Federation Dhaka district president Mizanur Rahman, Bangladesh Progressive Garments Workers Federation Ashulia thana president Masud Rana Sultan, and Textile Garments Workers Federation Ashulia thana president Mansur Ali.

The programme was moderated by Jatiya Garments Sramik Unity president Md Faridul Islam.

(Our Tangail and Savar Correspondents contributed to this report)

Dhaka, Tokyo

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Philippines, Vietnam, and Laos to advance security, economic resilience, and a free and open Indo-Pacific.

"The visit of Tarique Rahman is expected to further strengthen the 'Strategic Partnership' between Japan and Bangladesh, a key regional partner that shares values and principles such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law, and enhance coordination towards realising the updated 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)'," said the Japanese foreign ministry in its announcement.

At the invitation of Japanese Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae, Tarique will pay an official visit to Japan, said Foreign Secretary Asad Alam Siam at a press conference yesterday.

The upcoming visit will provide an opportunity to deepen and broaden bilateral ties beyond the existing strategic partnership.

In particular, the signing of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between Bangladesh and Japan in February has created new opportunities for expanding trade and investment.

Dhaka and Tokyo would discuss ways to reduce interest rates on Japanese loans, he said.

Bangladesh is discussing around eight instruments with Japan, including memorandums of understanding (MoUs), with three to four expected to be signed during the visit.

Draft agreements on cooperation in agriculture, fisheries, human resource development and skills enhancement, civil aviation, trade, environmental protection, and modernisation of local government are still under discussion.

Asked about Japan's initiative to develop Matarbari as a subregional hub, Siam said Bangladesh's economic development goals are closely linked to the development of port infrastructure.

"The ports should be ready to handle and enhance capacity for our future imports and exports. That is how the Matarbari project has emerged. If the port can handle more after meeting our demands, then we will think about it," he said.

According to the preliminary itinerary, Tarique is scheduled to hold high-level bilateral talks with Japanese Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae on October 27, the second day of the visit.

The preliminary itinerary also includes visits to an LNG terminal and a power plant in Futtsu City, Chiba; the headquarters of Uniqlo; and a Toyota factory in Nagoya.

Tarique will be accompanied by his wife, his special assistant for Asia-Pacific employment Md Shakirul Islam Khan, Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, relevant advisers, state ministers and government officials.

The delegation will travel on a Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight.