Bangladesh: hold security forces accountable for torture

The Bangladesh government has failed to address widespread allegations of torture and ill-treatment by its security forces, ten rights groups said on the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. The groups called on the United Nations and concerned governments to take decisive action.

Law enforcement and intelligence agencies in Bangladesh, including both the police and soldiers seconded into civilian law enforcement, are credibly accused of torture and ill-treatment of detainees and suspects. Such acts have included: beatings with iron rods, belts, and sticks; using electric shocks on their ears and sexual organs; waterboarding; hanging detainees from ceilings and beating them; deliberately shooting to maim, including knee-capping them; forcing prolonged exposure to loud music and sounds; committing mock executions; and subjecting them to forced nudity. Hundreds have become victims of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

"Bangladesh human rights activists, international groups, and UN experts have all raised concerns about security force abuses including ill-treatment in custody only to be met with denials and lies," said Brad Adams, Asia director. "Over the past several decades Bangladesh leaders pledged reform, but each government has scaled up such atrocities, fostering a culture of abuse and impunity among security forces."

The Bangladesh government failed to follow up as required in August 2020 after the UN Committee Against Torture made concrete recommendations to prevent and address torture during the country's review under the Convention against Torture in July 2019. These recommendations included official statements at the highest levels that torture will not be tolerated and that law enforcement authorities must end unacknowledged detentions.

The committee said that the government should establish an independent mechanism to investigate all allegations of torture or ill-treatment by law enforcement officials, enact legislation to protect victims and witnesses, and publish a list of all detention sites.

Following the review, the UN human rights body described the police as a "state within a state," asserting that "in general, one got the impression that the police, as well as other law enforcement agencies, were able to operate with impunity and zero accountability."

Seven years after its implementation, in 2020, a Bangladesh court ordered the first-ever conviction under the 2013 Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act. Activists hoped this would pave the way for investigations and accountability for the dozens of documented reports of torture by security forces. However, following the 2020 conviction, the victim's family told the media that they faced repeated pressure, threats, and offered bribes by law enforcement to drop the case. Furthermore, Bangladesh police have repeatedly called for the government to amend the 2013 Torture Act to make it less prohibitive., casting doubt on the hope some harbored that Bangladesh's security forces may be serious about ending torture.

Mushtaq Ahmed, a writer, died in prison on February 25, 2021, after being held in pretrial detention for nine months for posting on Facebook criticism of the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. His death caused a public outcry. Ahmed Kabir Kishore, a cartoonist, who had been detained with Ahmed by members of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), was released on bail. Kishore filed a legal claim alleging that he was tortured, and also described the torture Ahmed said he had undergone while they were illegally detained.

"Mushtaq was smelling strongly of urine," Kishore said. "He too had been picked up a few days ago and had been beaten a lot. He was electrocuted in the genitals. There were newspapers on the floor and I asked Mushtaq to use that to clean himself. He took off his underwear and threw it away – I saw that it had excrement in it. He had defecated in his pants from the torture, he told me."

When 13 diplomats expressed grave concern about Ahmed's death in custody and called for "a swift, transparent, and independent inquiry into the full circumstances" of his death, Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen told the media to "stop giving publicity to this sort of nuisance." The government has yet to hold an independent and transparent investigation into Ahmed's death.

Rights groups have extensively documented crimes of torture, extrajudicial killing, and enforced disappearances, in particular by the Detective Branch of police and the RAB, a paramilitary force notorious for committing acts of torture, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances, and have called for RAB to be disbanded. In March 2021, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet affirmed that "[al]legations of torture and ill-treatment by the Rapid Action Battalion have been a long-standing concern."

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India COVID-19 cases rise by 50,040 amid concern about Delta variant

NEW DELHI" - India's daily COVID-19 infections rose by 50,040 on Sunday, official data showed, as concerns grew about the detection of the highly infectious Delta variant of the coronavirus in some states.

The COVID-19 death toll in the country rose by 1,258, including 511 deaths reported from the state of Maharashtra, the health ministry data showed.

New variants are a particular concern in India, where more than half the population has not been vaccinated. Less than 6% of India's adult population of 950 million has received two doses.

At least 20 cases have been found linked to the Delta variant, which India last week designated a variant of concern last week, according to the health ministry.

India's official death count is now 395,751, but experts and global health agencies such as the World Health Organisation believe the toll may be much higher. Of the 35.51 million people infected, 29.25 million have recovered.

State governments eased lockdown restrictions earlier this month after a fall in cases, but scientists fear that the presence of the Delta variant, which was first detected in India, and the slow pace of vaccination could trigger another wave of infections.

Reuters

Uzbekistan confirms 493 new coronavirus cases

Uzbekistan registered 493 new coronavirus cases for the past day, the Ministry of Health reported.

The total number of confirmed coronavirus cases reached 109,223.

Two patients died from coronavirus infection for a day. The death toll from coronavirus infection reached 729.

545 patients recovered from COVID-19 for a day. The total number of recoveries reached 105,006.

3,488 patients remain in hospitals.

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China's 'ally' Greece aligns with India for a 'free' Indo-Pacific

Greece, which has developed close ties with China, even allowing China to operate the Piraeus port, on Saturday signed on to the Indo-Pacific vision, aligning with India.

As foreign minister S Jaishankar met his Greek counterpart Nikon Dendias in a bilateral visit that happened after 18 years, the two leaders discussed "geo-political and geo-economic realities, including the Indo-Pacific". An official readout said the two countries acknowledged "the convergence of each others' vision for a free, open, inclusive and cooperative Indo-Pacific ensuring connectivity and growth for the region."

This was a significant outcome from India's perspective. Greece has been an important linchpin for China's BRI in Europe. China's shipping firm Cosco took a majority stake in Piraeus 2016. The port is at a strategic location between the Asian and European continents.

An official MEA readout said Greece became an official signatory to the International Solar Alliance (ISA), with the Greek foreign minister submitting the agreement to the Indian side, and was "welcomed to the family of the ISA". "Both sides agreed that this will assist the two countries in realisation of the energy goals set by the respective governments to make renewable energy a significant part of the energy supply After the India-Europe summit, India is getting down to the business of engaging almost every member of the EU.

Jaishankar also called on Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis and conveyed greetings on the 200th anniversary of Greek independence. He also unveiled a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Athens.

The discussions, said the MEA statement, covered trade and investment, and ongoing cooperation in science and tech, culture, academics etc. India is keen to restart formal negotiations on an FTA with Europe, and all member countries would have to sign off on it. Therefore, its important, according to sources for India and Greece to begin discussions to elevate the relationship to a strategic partnership

The ministers discussed the recent developments pertaining to Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus and Libya. Both sides agreed on the importance of rule of law and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; recognised the threat posed by radicalisation, violent extremism, as well as terrorism, including cross border terrorism.

Multilateral and a rules based international order was also emphasised "so as to make them more inclusive, transparent, accountable, and better reflective of contemporary geopolitical realities." MEA said Greece "reiterated its support for permanent membership of India in a reformed UNSC."

indiatimes

Tajikistan: sewing face masks to keep the disabled safe

FMT in partnership with The Global Institute For Tomorrow (GIFT) brings you a Covid-19 "healer" from Tajikistan.

Mahfuza Yorova, 35, is a community-based rehabilitation worker from Anzob village in northwest Tajikistan. She helps those with disabilities remain safe from Covid-19.

At her own expense, she makes face masks with cotton gauze fabric and distributes them for free.

Since the first cases were announced in the country on April 30 last year, Mahfuza has distributed over 800 homemade face masks, along with hygiene kits and food packages, to nearly 200 people with disabilities in her village and the neighbouring village of Marzij.

The hygiene kits and food packages were provided through a project funded by the European Union and Caritas Germany.

Mahfuza joined the project two years ago, and provides rehabilitation services to 25 persons with disabilities in her community.

She shares basic knowledge of Covid symptoms and causes, and advises on preventative measures including how to properly wear a face mask, use disinfectant, and wash hands with soap.

"Persons with disabilities may be at higher risk of contracting Covid-19, and I do this charitable work to receive God's blessing," Mahfuza says.

Millions of coronavirus vaccine doses to arrive in Pakistan next week

KARACHI: Pakistan is expected to receive millions of doses of coronavirus vaccines starting next week, as per government officials.

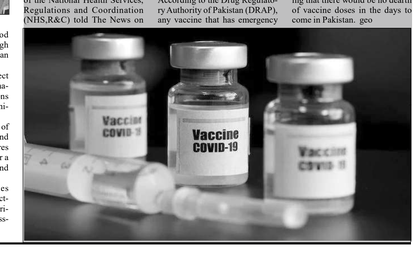
On either Monday or Tuesday, Pakistan is expected to receive 2.5mn doses of Moderna's mRNA 1273 Covid-19 vaccine through COVAX while another 100,000 doses of Russian vaccine Sputnik V are being acquired by Islamabad through bilateral purchase and are expected to reach the country by next week, they said.

"Pakistan has also signed an agreement for the purchase of one million doses of Russian Sputnik V vaccine, whose 100,000 doses are also expected to reach Pakistan early next week," an official of the National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (NHS,R&C) told The News on Saturday.

"We will also receive three million doses of Sinovac on June 29 so there will be millions of doses available to inoculate a large number of the population in the country in July," he added.

He revealed Pakistan will also receive over 12 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine and an unspecified number of Pfizer's mRNA vaccine in July, through COVAX.

However, the official admitted that the official date has not been communicated to Pakistan as to when the vaccines will be provided to it

"We have conveyed the regulatory requirements to the COVAX regarding the use of Moderna's mRNA vaccine in Pakistan. According to the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP), any vaccine that has emergency use authorization by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or European Medicine Agency (EMA) can be imported and used in Pakistan," the official said, adding that now they were waiting for flight details of the consignment.

Pakistan would also get at least 1 million doses of Pfizer's mRNA vaccine by the end of July through COVAX, the official said adding besides, COAX would also provide over 12 million doses of AstraZeneca's Bovishield vaccine either by the end of July or early August. "Similarly, Pakistan would acquire two million doses of Pfizer's mRNA vaccine in July through bilateral purchase by the National Disaster Management Authority," the official said, adding that there would be no dearth of vaccine doses in the days to come in Pakistan. geo