

ATROCITIES AGAINST ROHINGYAS, OTHER MINORITIES

Amnesty accuses secretive Myanmar conglomerate of financing military

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Amnesty International has accused a secretive Myanmar conglomerate with links to international businesses of financing Myanmar's military, including many units directly responsible for human rights violations against the Rohingyas and other ethnic minorities.

Leaked official documents analysed by the global rights watchdog revealed that Myanmar's military received \$16 billion as dividend out of total a \$18 billion from shares in Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) between 1990 and 2011. The military continues to receive the benefits as of now.

Amnesty International (AI) revealed that MEHL is owned by 381,636 individual shareholders, who are all serving or retired military personnel, and 1,803 "institutional" shareholders, consisting "regional commands, divisions, battalions, troops, war veteran associations".

MEHL's shareholders also include military units and high-ranking military officers directly implicated in crimes under the international law and other serious human rights violations, the rights body said.

For example, the 2010-11 report listed 95 separate military units that fall within the Western Command, the regional command covering and overseeing operations in Rakhine State, as shareholders, Amnesty International said.

Together, they owned more than 4.3 million shares and received payments worth more than 1.25 billion kyat (\$208 million) in that period. The Western Command was also listed as an MEHL shareholder in the 2020 DICA document, AI said.

At the same time, military chief Min Aung Hlaing owned 5,000 shares and received a dividend payment of 1.5 million kyat (\$250,000).

The UN has called for Min Aung Hlaing, who oversaw the brutal campaign against the Rohingyas in 2017, to be investigated and prosecuted for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.

The headquarters of battalions from the 33rd and 99th Light Infantry Divisions were also listed as

shareholders. Amnesty International has documented these divisions' involvement in crimes against humanity against the Rohingyas, including massacres of women, men, and children, in Rakhine State, and war crimes in Kachin and northern Shan States.

"These documents provide new evidence of how the Myanmar military benefits from MEHL's vast business empire and makes clear that the military and MEHL are inextricably linked," said Mark Dummett, Head of Business, Security and Human Rights at Amnesty International.

"This is not a case of MEHL unwittingly financing human rights violations -- its entire board is composed of high-level military figures."

"While outsiders can't know how these dividends are spent by military units, the size and regularity of these payments suggest that they cover operational costs," he said.

Yadnanar Maung, a spokesperson of Justice For Myanmar, said any company doing business with MEHL risks contributing to these violations and must take urgent steps to cut ties.

The rights body has identified at least eight such companies -- Ever Flow River Group Public Co., Ltd, a Myanmar logistics company; Kanbawza Group (KBZ), a Myanmar conglomerate with jade and ruby mining operations; Kirin Holdings, a Japanese beverage company; INNO Group, a South Korean property developer; Pan-Pacific, a South Korean manufacturer and exporter of clothing; POSCO, a South Korean steelmaker; RMH Singapore, a Singaporean fund with a tobacco operation in Myanmar; and Wanbao Mining, a Chinese metal mining company.

Amnesty wrote to the eight companies who operate jointly with MEHL in Myanmar.

In its reply, Pan-Pacific announced that it is terminating its business partnership with MEHL. KBZ and Kirin have stated they are reviewing their relationship with MEHL. Others did not provide such commitments or did not respond at all.

"In the face of this incontrovertible evidence, businesses who currently partner with MEHL must end these relationships responsibly," Mark said.



Wearing masks, a group of students gathers outside Udayan Higher Secondary School in Dhaka University area. Students from class-VI to class-X of the school sat for midterm exams online, and many of them went to the institution yesterday to submit their answer scripts. This was the first time many of the students met each other after their school closed in March due to the pandemic.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Clinical trial begins here this month

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(BMRC), DGDA, and the Directorate General of Health Services and the study findings will be published in high impact journals and shared with relevant regulatory authorities including the WHO.

Besides, Sinovac will also provide 1,10,000 free doses to Bangladesh.

Medical scientists said in the history of medicine, rarely a vaccine has been developed in less than five years, but the Covid-19 pandemic has left countries around the world in a fierce race to get a vaccine as early as possible.

Experts say vaccines may be available in the market for mass use within the next four to 10 months. Currently, eight out of over 203 research organisations working to develop a vaccine are going through final stage trials.

The phase-III trial or the final stage means the vaccine is administered on thousands of people to confirm its safety -- including rare side effects -- and effectiveness.

This trial involves a controlled group which is given a placebo -- that has no therapeutic value but is administered to compare with those who get the vaccine.

STRONG MONITORING, REGULATIONS

Like any other final stage trial of a vaccine, icddr,b's 18-month trial involves multiple national and international research and regulatory organisations to complete it step-by-step.

If the vaccine is passed in the clinical trial, it will go through three more stages before its mass use -- regulatory review and approval, manufacturing, and quality control.

For ensuring a rigorous process, icddr,b has engaged a leading South Korea-based contract research organisation -- LSK Global -- for data monitoring and providing other support during the study period.

The study will also be monitored by an independent Data and Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB), consisting of experts from Bangladesh and abroad, organised by LSK Global, according to icddr,b officials.

Additionally, icddr,b will form a National Advisory Committee involving eminent scientists, public health experts and physicians of the country to oversee the clinical trial.

The icddr,b will provide periodic updates to the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA), and relevant authorities of Bangladesh as the trial proceeds, an icddr,b scientist told The Daily Star.

Preliminary findings of the study will also be shared with the Bangladesh Medical and Research Council

all participants the day the first dose was administered and on day 28 or two weeks after the second dose. This will allow the study team to determine the level of pathogen as measured in blood serum, an official said.

Only the participants having no virus in their swabs or blood serum during the tests will be included in the primary analysis of vaccine efficacy six to eight months after the vaccination, he added.

Nasopharyngeal and throat swabs will be collected from all participants on the first day in order to determine their infection status upon enrolment in the trial.

Participants will be instructed to call the 24/7 healthcare communication service for any illness. Weekly reminders by SMS will be sent to encourage compliance, icddr,b said.

They will be asked to inform study team members if they have any symptoms suggesting Covid-19 disease, including fever, cough, sore throat, loss of smell, and respiratory distress.

"Anyone with Covid-19 symptoms will get their nasopharyngeal and throat swab samples tested by RT-PCR at the icddr,b," it said.

All participants will be observed for 30 minutes following vaccination.

A randomly selected subsample -- 420 volunteers -- will be advised to record daily any medical events in online diary cards to be provided for seven days after the first and second dose.

Also, a referral system will be established and all serious adverse events (SAEs) will be managed and necessary treatment will be ensured, if needed, according to the National Treatment Guidelines for Covid-19.

All SAEs following vaccination will be reported to LSK Global within 24 hours for onward reporting to Sinovac, DSMB and the ethical review committee of icddr,b.

All suspected unexpected serious adverse reactions will be reported to the DGDA.

The DSMB will review these data according to a schedule outlined in its charter. Safety follow-up will be continued for six months after vaccination.

LIABILITY

Icddr,b said the study participants will not receive any financial benefit for their participation, but in case of any illnesses during the trial, they will be provided with appropriate treatment.

As the sponsor of the trial, Sinovac assumes all liability concerning the investigated vaccine and shall adopt an appropriate liability scheme including insurance, Prof Clemens said.

Blood samples will be taken from

Police submit charge sheet

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But a mob beat her brutally to death in front of the school gate, suspecting her to be a child kidnapper. Videos taken on mobile phones and CCTV, which later went viral, showed some young people kicking, striking, and trampling Taslima amid a gathering of several hundred people, most of whom were just silent spectators.

The killing, which touched off a firestorm of outrage in the country, took place at a time when incidents of mob attacks on people labelling them as "child kidnappers" were on the rise.

Such incidents went up following rumours on "human sacrifice" at the construction site of Padma bridge.

Following the incident, Syed Nasir Uddin Titu, a nephew of Taslima, filed the case against 400 to 500 unknown attackers with Badda Police Station.

At least eight people were killed while a couple of dozen others were injured in mob beatings at different places across the country in July last year.

Asked about the motive of Taslima murder, Inspector Abdul Haque said a vested quarter tried to destabilise law and order spreading the rumour.

"Taslima is a victim of an ill-effort and provocation," he told The Daily Star. Asked whether they found involvement of the headteacher of Badda Uttar-Purba Primary School as alleged by the complainant of the case on several occasions, the IO said he did not get any involvement of the headmaster.

Rather, the headmaster tried to save

the victim shutting the collapsible gate of the school.

Syed Nasir Uddin Titu yesterday said many other people were involved in the killing and they wanted more attackers' names to be included in the charge sheet.

"Now we want the judgment to carry a message that helps create a rumour-free Bangladesh for the new generation," he added.

Probe body seeks

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the report as soon as possible, and they assured me that they have made progress, and need some more time," said the DC.

Amid allegations of negligence and corruption, Titas formed its own probe committee.

Titas Managing Director (planning) of Abdul Wahab Talukdar told The Daily Star, "We have physically inspected the site. We spoke with the mosque management committee last night and they've handed us some written complaints. Our report is nearly done and will be submitted soon."

Meanwhile, a four-member probe committee of the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defense has inspected the site and are currently interviewing locals and victims.

The charge of investigation of a case filed over the fire was transferred to the Criminal Investigation Department yesterday.

Promise that keeps ringing hollow

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Since 2000, more than 1,000 Bangladeshis have been killed in border areas, according to rights defenders who described the Indo-Bangla border as "killing fields".

The border-killing issue also came up at a meeting of the Jatiya Sangsad committee on foreign affairs. Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen had said that India assured Bangladesh that it would probe as to why people were still getting killed at the borders.

Momen told the committee that Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla had assured him that he would discuss the border-killing issue with the high-ups of the Indian government.

BGB's Director (operations) Lt Col Fayzur Rahman told The Daily Star that all important border related issues would be discussed and border killing was one of them.

He mentioned border violations, construction of different establishments on the border, and raising barbed wire fences within 150 yards of zero line as some of the other key issues that would be discussed.

Lt Col Fayzur told The Daily Star, "The entry of waste from India through Akhaura-Agartala ICP [check post] will also get priority in the talks as we have been trying hard to stop the inflow of such waste."

The BGB official said chemical waste was flowing in via a canal even

though India had been claiming that it was only human waste.

Mosabber Hossain Mohammad Rajib, assistant director at the Department of Environment (DoE) in Dhaka, on Monday said they tested the canal water in 2017.

"The presence of dissolved oxygen [DO] was found to be very low. The DO level was only 0.24-0.36 mg/L, against the standard 5mg/L in the canal water. No fish or other aquatic lives can survive in such low DO level," said Rajib, who was at the Brahmanbaria DOE office.

There were heavy metals, like lead, chromium, and iron, in the water, he added.

Meanwhile, officials in India said issues like better mechanisms to stop attacks and assault on BSF personnel and Indian civilians by criminals of both the countries were expected to be discussed, reports our New Delhi correspondent Pallab Bhattacharya.

The Indian side is expected to take up the issue of joint border security management, fencing of unfenced areas, and effective steps to curb cross-border crimes.

Cattle smuggling, smuggling of fake Indian currency notes, illegal migration, human trafficking, breaching or damaging border fence, and illegal crossing by Rohingyas would also be taken up, Indian officials said.

THAKURGAON BORDER

Bangladeshi man killed in BSF firing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A Bangladeshi national was shot dead allegedly by the members of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) near Beurjhari border in Baliadangi upazila of Thakurgaon yesterday.

According to locals, the victim -- Shariful Islam alias Khota Mohammad, 30, of the upazila's Charaigati village -- was fishing on the Nagor river when he was shot.

Lt Col Shahidul Islam, commanding officer of 50th Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Battalion, said a group of four to five Bangladeshi men were fishing on the bordering Nagor river.

The BSF men of Barabillah camp opened fire on them around 11:45am as they entered about 50 yards inside the Indian territory.

Soon after the incident, Shariful's other fellows brought the body inside Bangladesh territory.

On information, BGB men went to the spot, recovered the body and handed it over to Baliadangi police who later sent it to Thakurgaon Hospital for autopsy.

After completion of autopsy the body would be handed over to family, said Hasibul Haque Prodhon, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Covid vaccine

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stage Phase 3 human trials.

Meanwhile, Serum Institute of India has put on hold trials of AstraZeneca's vaccine in the country until the British drugmaker restarts them, the company said yesterday.

"We are reviewing the situation and pausing India trials," Serum, the world's biggest vaccine manufacturer by volume, said in a brief statement.

The move to pause the trials in India comes after the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) V G Somani asked Serum for details on the suspension of trials overseas, in a show-cause notice that was reviewed by Reuters.

Somani asked the company to explain why the trials should not be suspended in India until patient safety is established and he warned Serum could face action if it did not offer an explanation.

Serum said yesterday that it was following the DCGI's directions and would not comment further on the matter.

The DCGI did not respond to an email seeking comment.

In the US, AstraZeneca began enrolling 30,000 volunteers across dozens of sites on August 31, and smaller groups are being tested in Brazil and elsewhere in South America.

The vaccine, called AZD1222, uses a weakened version of a common cold-causing adenovirus engineered to code for the spike protein that the coronavirus uses to invade cells.

After vaccination, this protein is produced inside the human body, which primes the immune system to attack the coronavirus if the person is later infected.

The director of UK scientific research charity the Wellcome Trust, Jeremy Farrar, said there were often pauses in vaccine trials.

He told BBC radio in an interview that it demonstrated the importance of conducting vaccine trials properly, with independent oversight and the involvement of the regulator.

"In the end the public must have absolute trust that these vaccines are safe and of course effective, and in the end will hopefully bring the pandemic to a close," he added.

UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock said the pause was "not necessarily" a set-back, and said a similar pause occurred recently but was "resolved without a problem".

The pandemic has killed at least 904,534 people worldwide since surfacing in China late last year, according to an AFP count yesterday based on official sources. More than 27.9 million cases have been confirmed.

RECORD CASES, DEATHS

India reported record jumps in coronavirus infections and deaths yesterday, taking its tally of cases past 4.4 million, health ministry figures showed.

In the last 24 hours, 95,735 new infections were detected, with 1,172 deaths accounting for the highest single-day mortality figures in more than a month, to push the toll beyond 75,000.

The French government will discuss today whether to impose new, local lockdowns to try to tackle rising Covid-19 while keeping economic and social activities going.

Government spokesman Gabriel Attal said yesterday that nothing would be ruled out at the cabinet meeting, while President Emmanuel Macron said he hoped any new measures would not be too restrictive.

53 SC lawyers

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different types of crime, including extra judicial killing, custodial torture and deaths, enforced disappearances, rapes, stalking and drug trading.

Around 500 incidents of such offences have reportedly taken places since January 2017 to July 2020, the legal notice said.

It further stated that law enforcers conduct inquiries into the allegations against themselves, and therefore, the probes are not done fairly and neutrally.

The lawyers said that there were independent commissions in different countries such as the USA, the UK, France, India and Pakistan to conduct investigate allegations against law enforcers.

They added that they will take appropriate legal steps if an independent commission is not formed in this regard.

Govt not sparing anyone involved

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Hasina said people should not do anything which might cause fear among the law enforcers. It is necessary that law enforcers do not lose their morale in carrying out their duties, she said.

She said the law enforcement agencies have been working tirelessly and they have achieved a huge success in controlling narcotics, terrorism and militancy.

"If any accident occurs while carrying out their duties, it occurs unusually. But the government is not sparing anyone and it is taking appropriate actions against those responsible. Nobody can say that we are sparing anyone involved in crimes."

Hasina said people call law enforcement agencies when they are in danger. It is the police who are called first during danger periods and the people's security is ensured by them, she added.

The PM said her government does not spare anyone involved in crimes as it wants to end the legacy of extrajudicial killings initiated by Ziaur Rahman.

"You [deputy opposition leader GM Quader] are talking about extrajudicial killings. But who had initiated it? It started during the regime of Ziaur Rahman. Bodies of many leaders and activists were not found at that time. Later it [extrajudicial killing] was given an institutional shape. We are looking into ways of controlling it," the PM told parliament.

CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

About the government's initiatives on controlling the Covid-19 pandemic, Hasina said the government is set to use the vaccine whichever would be available first in the world to save the country's people from the virus.

"Different countries across the world have been carrying out researches on vaccines for Covid-19. We have heard from many countries [about their invention of vaccine]. We have approached all the countries [to avail the vaccine] and allocated funds to procure it. We will take the vaccine whichever comes first and use it to save our people from the novel coronavirus."

Responding to allegations made by GM Quader about corruption and irregularities in the health sector, the premier said the government has taken various measures to tackle the crisis arising out of the coronavirus pandemic and keep the wheels of the economy running. She said the government was spending money like water for this reason.

Noting that the government did not consider how much money was spent for fighting Covid-19 or if there was any system loss, Hasina said the government's first priority was to save people's lives. "Saving lives of people matters for us rather than considering how much money was spent."

She urged all to talk about corruption after having specific data.

Referring to the corruption allegation

made by GM Quader about the purchase of a chair or milk testing kit for the livestock department, the PM said the amount mentioned against the procurement was not only for buying a chair and a kit for testing milk, rather for purchasing a set of chairs and setting up a laboratory for testing milk.

NARAYANGANJ MOSQUE

About the September 2 explosion at a Narayanganj mosque, Hasina said the mosque was built on a piece of unauthorised land and construction work was done on a gas pipeline in an unplanned way. Besides, no permission was taken from the authorities concerned, she added.

The PM said it was very unfortunate that many lives were lost when people were saying prayers inside the mosque. She prayed for the salvation of the departed souls.

She asked people to construct structures following rules and building codes to prevent any accidents in future.

'OPPOSITION DOMINATES THIS SESSION'

About prorogation of the 9th session of the Jatiya Sangsad, Hasina said none from the ruling Awami League got the opportunity to speak during this session, except for the day (September 6) when the discussion on a condolence motion was held. "This session of parliament was only of the opposition. They spoke on different issues. During the passage of the bills, parliament was under the dominance of the opposition," she said.