

Scores of Rohingya flee crackdown

Witnesses say Myanmar army gunned down dozens of people trying to cross into Bangladesh

REUTERS, Dhaka/sittwe

Hundreds of Rohingya Muslims are fleeing a military crackdown in western Myanmar to Bangladesh, trying to escape an upsurge of violence that has brought the total number of dead confirmed by the army to more than 130.

Some of the Rohingya were gunned down as they tried to cross the Naaf river that separates Myanmar and Bangladesh, while others arriving by boat were pushed away by Bangladeshi border guards and may be stranded at sea, residents said.

The bloodshed is the most serious since hundreds were killed in communal clashes in the western Myanmar state of Rakhine in 2012. It has exposed the lack of oversight of the military by the seven-month-old administration of Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

Soldiers have poured into the area along Myanmar's frontier with Bangladesh, responding to coordinated attacks on three border posts on Oct 9 that killed nine police officers.

They have locked down the district, where the vast majority of residents are Rohingya, shutting out aid workers and independent observers. The army has intensified its operation in the last seven days and has used choppers to reinforce, with dozens reported killed.

Aid workers, camp residents and authorities in Bangladesh estimated at least 500 Rohingya had fled Myanmar since the October attacks. The refugees are now staying in four Rohingya camps on the Bangladeshi side of the border, they say.

But on Tuesday, Bangladeshi border guards pushed back a large group of Rohingya trying to cross.

Early Tuesday, 86 Rohingya including 40 women and 25 children were pushed back by the BGB (Border Guard Bangladesh) from the Teknaf border point," said Lt Col Anwarul Azim, commanding officer of the Cox's Bazar sector in eastern Bangladesh.

"All of them tried to enter Bangladesh and came by two engine-operated boats. Now we have beefed up our patrolling and additional forces have been engaged to ensure security

in the border area," he said.

Reuters sources said the Rohingya group was unlikely to have gone back to the villages in Myanmar and might be stranded at sea.

The stateless Rohingya are seen by many Myanmar Buddhists as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

Col Htain Lin, Border Affairs Minister of the Rakhine state government, refused to comment on the situation. Police Major Kyaw Mya Win, from the Maungdaw police, said the people were trying to escape because they tried to attack the military.

"The villagers have become insurgents, including women in the village," said Kyaw Mya Win.

The recent upsurge in violence has brought the number of suspected militants killed to 102 since Oct 9, while the security forces' toll stands at 32, according to a Reuters tally based on state media releases.

Four Rohingya from northern Rakhine contacted by Reuters by telephone on Wednesday confirmed that hundreds were trying to escape and cross the river to Bangladesh. They said some were gunned down.

"The residents told me nearly 72 people were killed near the riverbank, that the military shot into the crowd on the river bank," said a Rohingya community leader who declined to be identified.

Another man from Maungdaw said women and children from around 10 villages were trying to flee to Bangladesh and some were killed as they were trying to get into the boats.

"A lot of dead bodies were floating in the sea," said the man. He added that these people were not travelling together, but that they had separated into groups of 20 or 50 to get on to the boats.

Residents and rights advocates have accused security forces of summary executions, rape and setting fire to homes in the recent violence. The government and army reject the accusations.

Diplomats have also appealed for an independent and credible investigation, but the government has not announced any plans to carry it out, instead cautioning against a "misinformation campaign" by a "violent group based in Rakhine".



A Santal woman near her wood-burning stove at Madarpur village of Gobindaganj of Gaibandha. The local Santals like her, who were evicted recently, did not celebrate Nabanna Utsab yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

EVICTED SANTALS No Nabanna this year

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Every year Santals in Gaibandha's Gobindaganj celebrate Nabanna Utsab, a traditional festival to hail the new crops and harvest with the start of Bangla month Agrahayan. But this year they had no festival even though it was scheduled to be celebrated yesterday.

"We are not celebrating Loban [Nabanna] like other years," said Dipul Soren, a 10-grader of Madarpur village in the Rangpur Sugar Mills area.

Philimon Baske, a Santal leader, said every year they celebrate the Loban festival with their own tradition, but this year the Santals could not harvest their paddy on time.

"They were evicted from their land, and they are in grief as they lost three people of their community and four others, who were injured, are now either in hospital or jail."

The Santals cultivated paddy on 100 acres of land in Madarpur and Joypur villages. The paddy needs to be

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Sudanese problem hurting BJMC

FROM PAGE 1

Then he played a different game.

Amin came to Bangladesh on September 2 and concluded two deals worth \$32 million (Tk 250 crore) with the BJMC on September 4. The first one for the entire stock of 20,020 bales, and the second one for the remaining production capacity of 90,000 bales up to December 31 this year.

The price was \$101 for 100 bags.

Amin paid in full -- Tk 46 crore -- for the goods in stock and 10 percent (Tk 20 crore) as commitment fee for the BJMC's production capacity up to December this year. The BJMC was supposed to ship its stock 20,020 bales to Amin by September 25.

The deals made Mushtaq Hussain, managing director of the Golden Fibre Trade Centre, a Bangladeshi jute trading company, furious as he is the sole agent of BJMC for selling its goods to three organisations, including ABS, SCC and Farmer's Commerce Bank in Sudan.

"Over the years I have seen that the BJMC has some weaknesses towards Amin," said Mushtaq.

"We don't want any favours. We buy goods from the BJMC at its price and we have never manipulated the price to

take undue advantage," he said.

When asked why he was the sole agent of the BJMC for three major buyers in Sudan, he said any manufacturer and exporter can become such an agent. He also said Amin himself was the sole agent of the BJMC for entire Sudanese market for several years.

"Amin gives benefits to some BJMC officials who in return try to give business to him," Mushtaq alleged.

On September 07, Mushtaq who is politically connected in Bangladesh also bought the BJMC's current stock of 20,020 bales, which were earlier bought by Amin. Mushtaq also paid the same amount -- Tk 46 crore -- for the goods.

The BJMC had to provide goods to both the buyers -- Amin and Mushtaq. Amin was given the stock and Mushtaq 20,020 bales from production.

Golden Fibre Trade Centre has exported jute goods worth Tk 600 crore to Sudan in the last five years.

Many BJMC officials told The Daily Star that the show off of power by two businessmen was badly hurting the state-run corporation's production and exports. The BJMC's exports are almost halted due to their feud, they said.

They said the fight is about who gets to control the production of the BJMC,

which is the largest manufacturer and exporter of jute goods in the world. Presently, the BJMC runs 22 jute mills that have a capacity to produce 700 tonnes of jute products a day.

Asked Mirza Azam, state minister for textiles and jute, said he knows all these issues. He said the BJMC has made the sale order deals with Amin following due diligence.

"He [Amin] is a foreign buyer and there are some certain terms and conditions. If the BJMC failed to ship the goods, it might have faced a case or fine," said the state minister.

On the allegations against Amin, he said the ministry was investigating those. Azam said being the consul general of Bangladesh, Amin has no right to work against Bangladesh's interests.

"The issue is now with the top level of the government. Probably, his consul generalship of Bangladesh to Sudan will be cancelled," said the state minister.

The Daily Star also received emails and had an interview over phone with Amin.

"Mushtaq is using his political connections to cancel my purchase orders with the BJMC," Amin told The Daily Star over phone early October.

On the allegation of working against Bangladesh's interest, the Sudanese said he has executed his duties in an honourable and professional manner.

But according to the letter Amin sent to different Sudanese companies and government agencies, including the central bank and the finance ministry, the allegations of working against Bangladesh's interests was not absolutely baseless.

The letter, which The Daily Star obtained, shows that Amin said rejection of imports from India and Pakistan was a clear violation of the law.

He also stressed the formation of a lobby in Sudan from the private and public sector to confront external monopoly through unified platform.

Bangladesh is the second largest jute producer with 12-14 lakh tonnes per year after India's 18-20 lakh tonnes, according to industry people. While, India has to import more to meet its domestic demand, Bangladesh exports around 70 percent of its annual production, mostly to India and African markets.

Sudan imports 1,50,000 to 2,00,000 bales of B Twill jute bags annually from Bangladesh.



Nepalese Army Chief Gen Rajendra Chhetri, right, calls on Chief of Army Staff Gen Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiqul Huq at the Army Headquarters in the capital on Wednesday.

PHOTO: ISPR

Jamdani finally gets recognition

FROM PAGE 1

"This is a step forward in our efforts to protect the rights of our indigenous product," said Industries Minister Amir Hossain Amu at the programme at the ministry.

After the GI registration, the DPDT would register weavers for using the GI tag in Jamdani products. The BSCIC earlier submitted a list of nearly 400 weavers who are involved in making the fabric.

Jamdani got the GI tag a few years after India registered "Uppada Jamdani" sari as a GI product. India's move caused concern among many people in Bangladesh, as they thought Bangladesh might lose GI recognition for Jamdani despite having a century-old tradition.

On behalf of Jamdani producers, the state-run BSCIC applied to the DPDT for GI registration for Jamdani in September last year.

The DPDT on August 4 this year published a GI Journal on Jamdani and waited for two months, as per its rule, to see whether anyone had any objection to the registration of the fabric as a GI product.

The two-month period expired in early October. As the DPDT did not receive any objection, it proceeded on to give GI tag to Jamdani, said officials.

Minister Amu said there would be no questions now that Jamdani got GI

registration.

GI is a name or sign used on certain products to certify that they possess certain qualities because they are made as per traditional methods or enjoy a certain reputation due to their geographical origin.

As per rules, an association of producers or a government organisation that works to safeguard producers' interests can apply for GI tag of a product, said officials.

Jamdani, a surviving variety of muslin, is characterised by geometric or floral designs. For centuries, it has been a coveted textile both at local and international market, according to *Banglapedia*, the national encyclopaedia of Bangladesh.

From various historical accounts and folklore, it may be assumed that a fine quality of fabrics was available in Bengal as far back as the first century AD, it said.

In the GI Journal, the DPDT also referred to the historical accounts related to the tradition of weaving fine textiles in Bengal.

The DPDT said Jamdani has been woven in Dhaka district for more than centuries, especially on the bank of Shitalakhya. Its water was used for making colour in the fine clothes.

The minister said muslin from Bengal was once a globally famous and adored cloth. "We have been able to

retain that heritage because of Jamdani," he said.

Annually, Bangladeshi weavers make more than 2 lakh pieces of Jamdani sari, which is also exported abroad. Some 68,000 people are directly and indirectly involved in Jamdani, which has also been recognised as a world heritage by the Unesco.

Minister Amu said the process to recognise hilsa as a GI item was underway.

Md Mosharrar Hossain Bhuiyan, senior secretary of the industries ministry, said, "Gradually, we'll give GI registration to more products." He referred to fazli mango and silk of Rajshahi, nakshi kantha, sathranji and sweets in this regard.

The senior secretary said GI tags to the product would ensure good prices in the international market and thus be beneficial for the people involved in the trade.

DPDT Registrar Sanowar Hossain said products that are popular due to their geographical origin did not have any tag for branding like industrial product.

Now, GI registration would help branding of products, he said.

Citing studies, Sanowar said buyers pay 10-30 percent higher prices for a good GI product.

Buyers would also get better quality products, he added.

Trump misusing his freedom

FROM PAGE 1

Before Bannon joined Trump's campaign as chief executive officer in last August, he spent four years as executive chairman of Breitbart News, a website he himself has described as a "platform for the alt-right".

Democrats, civil rights groups and even some Republicans slammed Trump Monday over his choice of Bannon as a key aide, saying it would elevate the white nationalist movement into the top levels of the White House.

Democrats and advocacy groups on the left called Bannon a promoter of racism and misogyny who is backed by the white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan.

More than 150 members of the House of Representatives belonging to Democratic Party on Wednesday signed a letter urging Trump to rescind the appointment of Bannon. According to them, this appointment "sends a disturbing message about what kind of president Donald Trump wants to be".

John Weaver, a top strategist for Republican Ohio Governor John Kasich, tweeted that the "racist, fascist extreme right is represented footsteps from the Oval Office. Be very vigilant America".

Appointment of Bannon even surprised chairman of the American Nazi Party, Rocky J Suhayda, who wrote a post after Trump's election victory celebrating it as a call to action.

He could not imagine Trump could have made the appointment that would surely trigger outcry. This choice, he said, showed Trump could follow through on his campaign promises.

In an interview between Trump and Bannon that took place last year, and that resurfaced in The Washington Post on Tuesday testifies to the similarity of beliefs between the duo against immigrants, Muslims and women rights.

TASTE OF BANNON

According to a CNN report on Tuesday, Bannon hails from his Breitbart News website that traffics in incendiary headlines, many of them outwardly racist, misogynist, anti-Semitic -- and very, very pro-Trump.

One of the headlines is "Birth control makes women unattractive and crazy".

In a December 2015 article, Breitbart News made a case against birth control and concluded, "We need the kids if we're to breed enough to

keep the Muslim invaders at bay."

Under the headline "There's no hiring bias against women in tech, they just suck at interviews", a July article suggested that research revealed "women might just suck at job interviews".

"The solution to online 'harassment' is simple: Women should log off" -- this was another headline of Bannon's news website in July. In this article it was argued that women are "screwing up the internet for men by invading every space we have online and ruining it with attention-seeking and a needy, demanding, touchy-feely form of modern feminism".

An article published in July 2015, weeks after a mass shooting at a historic black church in Charleston, South Carolina, slammed critics of the Confederate flag, a symbol embraced by the gunman.

Under the headline "Hoist it high and proud: The Confederate flag proclaims a glorious heritage", the article said, "Those who initiated identity politics are attempting to obliterate the Southern identity".

The author also wrote that "Every tree, every rooftop, every picket fence, every telegraph pole in the South should be festooned with the Confederate battle flag."

But no outcry may be able to force Trump to change his mind about Bannon.

Moreover, Trump has got support for this appointment.

White nationalist leaders are praising Trump's decision to name Bannon as his chief strategist, telling CNN in interviews they view Bannon as an advocate in the White House for policies they favour.

Bannon's appointment perhaps also made cheerful far rightists politicians in UK, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, Austria, Netherlands and Hungary who were first to congratulate Trump on historic upset.

Trump will have about 4,000 government positions to fill. His transitional team is now at work coming up with possible candidates for the top jobs. Bannon will certainly play a key role in making those appointments. He will certainly choose people like himself.

As morning shows the day, many of his appointments may go to far rightists, sparking further outrage, forecast political observers.

'I AM THE ONLY ONE'
A previous forecast that Trump if elected may emerge as an autocrat to run the

White House has been proved true.

As infighting grew in his White House transition team, Trump on Wednesday tweeted: "Very organised process taking place as I decide on Cabinet and many other positions. I am the only one who knows who the finalists are!"

A CNN report on Wednesday said, "He [Trump] hires people, he fires people, he sets things against one another, he says things and takes them back, with the chaos often unfolding in real time on cable TV. It happened in the campaign and there's no reason to think his presidency won't be the same."

Former Congressman Mike Rogers said on Tuesday he parted ways with Trump's transition team.

Rogers was told on Monday over telephone that he was out. This was part of an effort to replace the transition team members associated with New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, who previously headed up the transition team's efforts until being replaced by Vice President-elect Mike Pence, said a CNN report.

Trump's son-in-law and close adviser Jared Kushner is at the centre of the "infighting" inside Trump's transition team.

Kushner has been rubbing allies the wrong way in his recent efforts to purge the transition team of Christie associates, said CNN.

Kushner's father was prosecuted by then US attorney Christie in 2004 for tax evasion, witness tampering and illegal campaign contributions.

So, by ousting Christie from transition team, Trump's son-in-law took the revenge.

After winning the election, he announced that he would be president for all Americans and urged people not to get scared. But his picks for White House suggest a deviation from his promise. Picking a far rightist person like Bannon sparked fresh fear among people.

In the US system, each president is given the freedom to choose his own team.

The underlying principle behind such freedom is that the president will choose people of competence, reputation and those who uphold the fundamental values that the US constitution is representing.

But what Trump is doing is misusing that "freedom of choosing team" by appointing people who are racists, white supremacists, and bigoted.