



In this photograph taken on Thursday, unidentified men carry knives and slingshots as they walk past a burning house in Gawdu Tharya village near Maungdaw in Myanmar's Rakhine State. The men were seen by journalists walking past the burning structure during a Myanmar government sponsored trip for media to the region. Thousands of Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh in the last two weeks after a crackdown operation led by the Myanmar military. PHOTO: AFP

From land of death, despair

FROM PAGE 1
All the Rohingyas, who talked to The Daily Star correspondents, came up with a common version of what happened to their people in Rakhine.

They said members of the Myanmar security forces stormed into their homes, searched for young and adult men, and killed them. In many cases, the security forces members violated women and burnt down villages after villages inhabited by Rohingyas, they said.

UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, in a statement yesterday said the number of people killed in violence since August 25 in Myanmar could be more than 1,000.

Newly arrived Rohingyas echoed the same view.

Noor Sabah's husband Fazal Ahmed, of Kuarchong village in Maungdaw, said he saw burning homes all around the village on August 27.

Suddenly, he heard that Rohingyas men were being murdered one after another. As quickly as possible, he ran to his home and fled to a nearby hill along with his family members.

"We hid there for three days. After we came down to see our home, we found nothing but ashes.

"There were some 1,300 houses in our village. Almost all of them were burnt down," Fazal said while sitting beside Cox's Bazar-Teknaf Road at Kutupalong in Ukhia yesterday morning.

"It was the moment we decided to flee." However, their journey was not smooth.

While coming down the sloppy hills, Fazal slipped twice and hurt himself. His son Noor Ahmed carried him a long distance.

The Rohingya family could bring with it only some rice, dry fish and old clothes. They somehow cooked the rice and survived the days of the hazardous journey.

"We spent nights in fear in the jungles with our elderly parents and children," said Noor Ahmed.

After walking for almost five days, the family reached the Rezu Amtoli border in Bandarban's Naikyangchhari, where they stayed for two days and came to Kutupalong only yesterday, hoping for better facilities from the Bangladesh authorities.

The Bangladesh Border Guard per-

sonnel provided them with some flattened rice and molasses. They are surviving now with that.

"It is quite tough to live this way," said Fazal.

Mohammad Salimullah, 45, who was a madrasa teacher and imam of a mosque at Dakkhin Merullah in Maungdaw, said they had been facing troubles in their locality for the last six months.

"We could not sleep at night," he said. Myanmar police frequently used to search their homes for adult men and picked them up. All of the youths went missing.

He said 18 youths of his village were killed on August 31.

Salimullah claimed the Myanmar security forces dropped something from helicopters and their homes caught fire.

On September 1, he left home for Bangladesh with his elderly mother, wife and children.

"We faced many challenges in Myanmar. But this time Myanmar army and police have been their worst to the Rohingyas."

Salimullah's mother Jamila Khatun, 70, said, "My life is almost over. I could have stayed there [Myanmar] and just died. But I didn't want to get separated from my son."

Meanwhile, with thousands of Rohingyas continue to enter Bangladesh, Human Rights Watch yesterday in a statement said military atrocities on Rohingyas have hallmarks of ethnic cleansing.

A UN official said the flow of the refugees may continue for two more weeks. The 270,000 new Rohingyas are an addition to around 5 lakh others who escaped violence in Myanmar between 1978 and 2016.

"We are facing challenges to provide basic services to so many Rohingyas who arrived only in two weeks," he told The Daily Star yesterday, requesting anonymity.

Vivian Tan, a spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said the estimated number of Rohingya who fled to Bangladesh since violence erupted on Aug 25 had risen from 164,000 because aid workers had found big groups of uncounted people in border areas, Reuters reported.

On Thursday, UN spokesman

Stephane Dujarric said the UN was extremely concerned about the reports of continuing violence, especially violence that targets civilians in Myanmar.

"The reports of land mines are not one we can confirm, but, obviously, if they were to be true, those would be extremely troubling if they were to be confirmed."

On Wednesday, Stephane said the World Food Programme was appealing for \$11.3 million to support the influx of new refugees and those already living in the Rohingya camps.

Meanwhile, up to eight villages were burned down yesterday in a part of northwest Myanmar where large numbers of Rohingyas had been sheltering from a wave of violence engulfing the area, a witness and three sources briefed on the matter told Reuters.

The fires were blazing in the ethnically mixed Rathedaung township, where populations of Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists live side by side.

'NO RESTRICTIONS ON ROHINGYAS ENTRY'

Disaster Management and Relief Minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya yesterday said the government had a plan to allocate land for building a camp in Kutupalong for all the Rohingyas.

"At this moment, the government's priority is to bring all the Rohingyas in Bangladesh to a particular place," he said.

The forest department has 5000 acres of land in Kutupalong. A portion of the land would be allocated for all the Rohingyas, Maya told reporters after visiting Kutupalong Registered Rohingya Refugee camp in Ukhia yesterday afternoon.

"R Rohingyas are human beings. So, we cannot force them to go back. The government will provide them with all kinds of cooperation," he said.

He said there was "no restriction on Rohingyas' entry to Bangladesh and the refugees would be given shelter as long as they wanted".

The minister said Bangladesh was trying to solve the Rohingya problem. "The international community should put pressure on Myanmar so that it takes back the Rohingya people."

Unmanned 'ghost'

FROM PAGE 16
allow unmanned ships to operate across oceans. This raises the prospect of crewless "ghost" ships crisscrossing the ocean, with the potential for cheaper shipping with fewer accidents.

Several Japanese shipping firms, for example, are reportedly investing hundreds of millions of dollars in the technology. And British firm Rolls-Royce demonstrated the world's first remote-controlled unmanned commercial ship earlier this year.

However, removing experienced crew from ships means that any accidents that do occur could be far more severe. On top of this, many practical, regulatory and technological barriers remain in turning the world's cargo ships into a fully autonomous fleet, and that could mean it's a long time before it's actually profitable to invest in the technology.

The IMO's Maritime Safety Committee sat for the 98th time in June 2017, starting discussions that

may well lead to a change in the rules set by the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea. But indications are that it is likely to be a long and complex process. The issues relating to the safety and economics of unmanned ships have barely started to be considered. A lot of work will need to be done before solutions are found, or agreements are reached.

One of the biggest issues is the safety of solely relying on computers to operate ships over vast ocean distances. Some think that autonomous ships would have fewer accidents because the majority of maritime accidents involve collisions or groundings, caused by humans. In its 2016 annual overview, the European Maritime Safety Agency found that 62% of the 880 accidents occurring globally (2011-2015) were caused by "human erroneous action".

If we accept that autonomous vessels might be navigated without making the same mistakes as a human

crew, then the statistics do seem to stack up. But things are actually much more complex than that.

A study from March 2017 analysed 100 accidents that occurred from 1999 to 2015. The researchers attempted to assess whether the accidents would have been more or less likely to happen if the vessel had been unmanned. They found that the likelihood of groundings or collisions might have been decreased significantly if those vessels had been unmanned.

But they also identified that where accidents do happen, the consequences may become more severe without a crew to intervene. In particular, accidents involving fires may be more serious if there is no crew to act as firefighters. This means it's far from clear that the overall risk from accidents would decrease significantly if ships were unmanned, although there is certainly a case to be made that there will be fewer.

One judge, 2,000 cases

FROM PAGE 16
Talking to The Daily Star last night, Law Minister Anisul Huq said the police verification was taking time as the law enforcers were doing the job alongside carrying out their regular duties.

Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha on October 31 last year in a message on the occasion of the Separation of Judiciary Day had stressed the need for doubling the number of lower court judges.

"The number of approved posts of judges for the lower courts is 1,655, of which 387 are now vacant. It is not

possible for 1,268 [the then number] judges to dispose of more than 27 lakh cases pending with the courts across the country," the CJ said.

The Law Commission in September, 2014 had recommended recruiting 3,000 judges for lower courts for quick disposal of cases and easing the sufferings of justice seekers.

Meanwhile, SC sources said the number judges at the Appellate Division of the apex court came down to six from 11 after the retirement of Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana, the first-ever female judge of the SC.

The HC has also been facing short-

age of judges following retirement and death of some other judges. The number of HC judges now stands at 86, down from 100 in June 2012.

The six judges at the Appellate Division of the SC have been dealing with over 13,000 cases. On the other hand, 86 HC judges are overseeing more than 4.31 lakh cases.

The law minister in July had told The Daily Star that the government had a plan to promote some HC judges to the Appellate Division and appoint some new judges to the HC.

However, the government is yet to do so.

Rab wraps

FROM PAGE 16
grenades, 50 "bottle bombs" made with different chemicals, 10kg gun-powder, 3kg sulphur, eight to 10 containers and 100 homemade weapons from the house.

The two arrestees -- Habibullah Bahar Azad, owner of the building, and night guard Sirajul Islam -- have meanwhile been placed on five-day remand in connection with a militancy case.

They are shown arrested in the case filed earlier in April in connection with the arrest of militant suspect Tamim Dari.

The Rab started the operation at 12:40am on Tuesday that resulted in the death of Mir Akrabul Karim alias Upal alias Abdullah, 43, his two wives Nasrin, 35, and Fatema, 25, sons Osama bin Akrabul, 10, and two-and-a-half-year-old Omar bin Akrabul.

After concluding the sweep, Rab confirmed the house was cleared of explosives. But the building was badly damaged between the fourth and sixth floors and might be risky to use as per the structural damage, Mufti observed.

The authorities concerned would check the condition of the building and decide about its use by the tenants, he said, adding, the fourth to sixth floor would be under law enforcer's control for now.

A number of tenants yesterday expressed their anger and frustration as they could not enter their houses for last four days on security ground.

"We left the house in one dress. I have three sons, one of whom is disabled. I have also two grandchildren. We are temporarily living with one of the acquaintances. But how long can we continue like this?" said Mushika Begum, 55.

Another 60-year-old woman came to the area to know when they could get into their house but got frustrated getting no certainty.

"We are wandering like the Rohingya refugees. We have no-one in Dhaka," she lamented.

Asked, Mufti said after the search was completed in the afternoon they allowed dwellers of adjacent buildings to return to their houses.

China, Pak

FROM PAGE 16
money laundering, officials said Thursday.

Habib, Pakistan's largest private bank, neglected to watch for compliance problems and red flags on transactions that potentially could have promoted terrorism, money laundering or other illicit ends, New York banking officials said.

The state's Department of Financial Services, which regulates foreign banks, also slapped a \$225 million fine on the bank, although that is much smaller than the \$629.6 million penalty initially proposed.

Habib has operated in the United States since 1978, and in 2006 was ordered to tighten its oversight of potentially illegal transactions but failed to comply, reported AFP.

New York regulators said Habib facilitated billions of dollars of transactions with Saudi private bank, Al Rajhi Bank, which reportedly has links to al Qaeda, and failed to do enough to ensure that the funds were not laundered or used for terrorism.

"DFS will not tolerate inadequate risk and compliance functions that open the door to the financing of terrorist activities that pose a grave threat to the people of this State and the financial system as a whole," DFS Superintendent Maria Vullo said in a news release.

"The bank has repeatedly been given more than sufficient opportunity to correct its glaring deficiencies, yet it has failed to do so."

Habib permitted at least 13,000 transactions that were not sufficiently screened to ensure they did not involve sanctioned countries, the agency said.

And the bank improperly used a "good guy" list to rubber stamp at least \$250 million in transactions, including those by an identified terrorist and an international arms dealer, regulators said.

In an August letter to the Pakistan Stock Exchange, Habib company secretary Nausheen Ahmad called the proposed fine of \$629.6 million "outrageous" and "capricious" and said the bank had decided to close its New York operations "in an orderly manner."

But DFS said Habib will have to surrender its license after it meets the agency's requirements.

400 sued

FROM PAGE 16
Sheikh, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Meanwhile, police arrested 30 people, including Jhodia Union Parishad Chairman Keramat Ali, in this connection.

Billal Hossain, 30, and Nazrul Islam, 32, of Bakhoil village and also AL supporters, were killed in the clash between the men of incumbent Jhodia UP Chairman Keramat and its former chairman Bokhtiar Hossain over establishing supremacy in the area.

Barely visible

FROM PAGE 1
parties, asking them to inform the Commission by July 10 about their progress in achieving the target -- 33 percent women representation by 2020.

The EC later extended the deadline to August 4, by which time 33 parties responded, explaining their current status and future plan in this regard.

The RPO, originally formulated in 1972, is the law that regulates political parties and electoral conducts.

Asked to comment on the progress, Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda said, "We have got response from some parties. We will evaluate the progress after we get response from all the parties."

The EC prepared a report based on the response it received so far.

The report shows the AL has 19 percent women in its central committee against 13 percent women in BNP's national executive committee.

However, both the parties claimed to the EC that they had 15 percent women representation in different tiers.

Given the current status, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, for the parties to meet the target within the 2020 deadline.

In its response to the EC, Jatiya Party, the main opposition party in parliament, said women were less interested to be involved in active politics. So it is not possible to ensure 33 percent women in any level by any political party, including the JP.

Most of the parties, however, did not mention the progress they made so far.

Almost all the religion-based parties demanded extension of the deadline, saying women were not yet interested in active politics.

Left-leaning political parties also failed to show any good progress. For example, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) has 11.99 percent female members in its central committee and 8 percent to 10 percent in its district committees.

Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) and Bangladesh Biplobi Workers Party did not mention their progress.

The JSD demanded that the EC push the deadline to 2030.

Bangladesh Biplobi Workers Party said although it was difficult to ensure 33 percent women in all tiers considering the socio-economic reality of the country, it was trying to achieve that.

Bangladesh Nationalist Front (BNF) said party's standing committee already had 33 percent women and it would ensure the same in all its tiers by the timeframe.

Bangladesher Sangskritik Muktijot (BSM) said its central committee was divided in three parts -- one part has 51 percent women and another part has 30 percent and yet another part has 20 percent women.

Both BNF and BSM got registration during the army-backed caretaker government tenure.

Dragon fruit

FROM PAGE 1
that this year the predicted harvest should amount to a minimum of 250 kilograms.

Each cactus bush is grown attached by a rubber tie to a concrete pillar for support. The plant usually flowers overnight, with blooms wilting by morning. Dragon fruit cacti rely on nocturnal pollinators such as moths and bats for fertilisation. While several self-fertile varieties exist, cross-pollinating varieties usually produce more and better quality fruit.

"Dragon fruit actually doesn't need much care," says Rustam Ali, the caretaker of another garden. "Yields stretch across five months of the year. It's a very profitable enterprise." He is likewise grateful to the horticulture centre for training and advice.

Talking to this newspaper last month, Samor Tripura said he planted dragon fruit seeds in Lalit Karbari Para of the district last year. "I visited the Khagrachhari Agro Garden and

Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), which made headlines during the last caretaker government quite often, claimed it already had 33 percent women in its central committee.

Bangladesh Muslim League proposed that the Commission extend the deadline by 10 years and reduce the 33 percent quota to 15 percent as women were still reluctant to take part in active politics.

Islamic Oikya Jote (IOJ) has one percent female member in the central committee. The party said it was trying to achieve the target though it was difficult for Islamic parties to do so.

Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan said it was difficult to include women in active politics.

Generally, educated, veiled and pious women avoid active politics, the party wrote in its response, and requested the EC to relax the law.

Bangladesh Islami Front said they could ensure one percent women in all tiers.

Contacted, rights activist Sultana Kamal said wider participation of women would bring about a positive change in politics and help create a balanced society.

If these 33 percent women rise to leadership position through a "proper process," and not just by random selection, it will encourage democratic practice within the parties as well as other women to join politics, she said.

But it should not be only about the number; rather it should be about the process through which they make it to the top, she noted.

Asked about the poor progress, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif said his party was trying to meet the legal obligation.

"It is very difficult in Bangladesh. In our conservative society, many people don't like woman leadership or woman's precipitation in active politics. Besides, it is not possible to ensure women's representation if woman leadership is not created in grassroots level," he said.

"We will try our best. Let's see what we can do before 2020."

Both the AL and the BNP held their last councils in October and March last year respectively. By 2020, they are supposed to hold their next councils, where leaders of various committees are elected and selected.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said, "A good number of women have already been included in our central committee. We think it won't be difficult for us to achieve the target by the timeframe."

In the past, women were reluctant to join politics, but the situation in the BNP is different now, he said. "Students, housewives and service holders are joining politics and the competition among women is really impressive."

became interested in growing the fruit," he says. "I've sown seeds in 130 bushes and already around forty are bearing fruit. I hope from the next year to achieve full production."

"Dragon fruit cacti can cope well with lower rainfall," says Director of the horticulture centre Muazem Hossain. "It's a major crop in countries like Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia. We hope it can do well here in the hill districts too." The horticulture centre is providing farmers with seeds and technical assistance to encourage dragon fruit production.

Many locals, potential consumers, are unfamiliar with the dragon fruit thus far; but by all accounts the dragon fruit is likely to prove popular. "People in this region don't know the dragon fruit," says farmer Halshimang Chowdhury from Mohalchhari upazila. "But the fruit and its juice are really delicious. I am confident it will rapidly gain popularity."

Mega quake

FROM PAGE 16
The tremor was felt as far away as neighboring Guatemala.

The quake triggered waves as high as 2.3 ft (0.7 m) in Mexico, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said. Mexican television showed images of the sea retreating about 50 meters, and authorities evacuated some coastal areas.

President Enrique Pena Nieto said the tsunami risk on the Chiapas coast was not major.

"We are alert," he told local television.

More aftershocks were likely, the president said, advising people to check their homes and offices for structural damage and for gas leaks. The USGS reported multiple aftershocks, ranging in magnitude from 4.3 to 5.7.

Classes were suspended in most of central and southern Mexico yesterday to allow authorities to review damage.

There was no tsunami threat for American Samoa and Hawaii, according to the US Tsunami Warning System. The national disaster agency of the Philippines put the country's east-

ern seaboard on alert, but no evacuation was ordered.

People in Mexico City, one of the world's largest cities, ran out into the streets in pajamas and alarms sounded after the quake struck just before midnight, a Reuters witness said.

Helicopters buzzed overhead a few minutes later, apparently looking for damage to buildings in the city, which is built on a spongy, drained lake bed.

"I had never been anywhere where the earth moved so much. At first I laughed, but when the lights went out, I didn't know what to do," said Luis Carlos Briceno, an architect, 31, who was visiting Mexico City. "I nearly fell over."

In one central neighborhood, dozens of people stood outside after the quake, some wrapped in blankets against the cool night air. Children were crying.

Liliana Villa, 35, who was in her apartment when the quake struck, fled to the street in her nightclothes.

"It felt horrible, and I thought, 'this (building) is going to fall.'"