

Jolie to visit Rohingya women

REUTERS, Dhaka



Filmstar Angelina Jolie has condemned sexual violence inflicted on Rohingya women in

Myanmar's Rakhine State, where a military operation has sent hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees across the border to Bangladesh.

Jolie, a special envoy of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told a Bangladesh delegation in the Canadian city of Vancouver that she planned to visit the Rohingya victims of sexual violence.

"Later she mentioned accordingly in her keynote speech about the sexual violence faced by almost each female Rohingya who fled to Bangladesh and condemned the armed conflict in Myanmar,"

Bangladesh foreign ministry said in a statement yesterday.

It, however, gave no details of Jolie's

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Smiling villagers return home after fishing with polo, a local fishing gear, from a waterbody in Shahporan Bypass area of Sylhet Sadar. People are fishing like this across hoar-rich Sylhet as water recedes in the region ahead of the dry winter. The photo was taken on Tuesday afternoon.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Myanmar troops committed mass rape of women

Rights group finds

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Human Rights Watch yesterday accused Myanmar security forces of committing widespread rape as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Rohingyas in Rakhine State.

The HRW report released yesterday said rape and sexual violence in Rakhine appeared to be even more widespread and systematic than earlier suspected. Uniformed members of Myanmar military were responsible for it.

The report came a day after US Secretary of State Rex W Tillerson visited Myanmar and told its leaders to investigate "credible reports of widespread atrocities".

In the 37-page report, "All of My Body Was Pain: Sexual Violence against Rohingya Women and Girls in Burma," many women described witnessing the murders of their young

children, spouses, and parents.

Rape survivors reported days of agony, walking with swollen and torn genitals while fleeing to Bangladesh.

The ongoing persecution of Rohingyas has displaced hundreds of thousands. Over 620,000 people have arrived in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar in the last three months.

The HRW report was based on interviews with 52 Rohingya women and girls who had fled to Bangladesh. The interviewees included 29 rape survivors from 19 villages in Rakhine State, three of them girls under 18, as well as 19 representatives of humanitarian organisations, UN agencies, and Bangladesh government.

It found that Myanmar security forces had "raped and sexually assaulted women and girls both during major attacks on villages but also in the weeks prior to these major attacks,

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Over 300 cases filed this year

FROM PAGE 1

Law Minister Anisul Huq on November 7 told The Daily Star that they would hold a meeting on the Digital Security Act on Sunday where the issue would be discussed.

Replying to a query about the delay in holding the meeting, he said, "Other ministers and officials concerned were not available for the meeting."

Organisations of journalists and human rights activists said the section goes against the people's right to freedom of expression and free speech as it contains vague wording, allowing its misuse against newsmen and social media users.

Law Minister Anisul on several occasions said the section would be scrapped.

"We have discussed the proposed Digital Security Act. We will incorporate a summary of the meeting in the draft and will sit in a meeting in August. We will take the final decision in that meeting. You [journalists] can then know about our decision on section 57," the minister said, after a views-exchange meeting on the proposed act on July 9.

But no meeting in this regard was held in the last four months, a ministry source said. Recently, a discussion about the meeting was held in

the section concerned of the ministry, the source added.

The cabinet approved the draft Digital Security Act in August last year, and the prime minister then directed the law ministry to scrutinise the draft to avoid any repetition, contradictory provisions or inadequacies.

ICT CASES AGAIN

Amid huge criticism, Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque on August 2 instructed all police stations to consult the legal wing at the police headquarters before registering any case under section 57.

On the day at a programme, ruling Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader said there was an urgent need to stop the misuse of section 57.

Later, the ruling AL directed its men to obtain permission from its central unit before filing any case under the section.

In many of those cases, ruling party men were seen as plaintiffs.

Recently, three people have been sued under the section.

On November 1, journalist Anisur Rahman, Roumari upazila correspondent of the daily Sangbad in Kurigram, was arrested under section 57. He is now in prison.

Anisur and another man were

sued for allegedly taking a "screenshot" of a Facebook post involving the president and the prime minister and for showing it to the plaintiff, a Juba League leader, and some other locals.

On the following day, one Vishnu Malo of Hatkrishnapur Bazar in Faridpur's Sadarpur upazila was arrested after a mob vandalised his home and shop over an alleged post "hurting religious sentiments".

Noted rights activist Nur Khan Liton said although the law minister talked about scrapping of the section, the government was undecided over the issue.

"It, many people think, may be a delaying tactic to contain the movement against the section," he told this correspondent.

"This section must be revoked immediately as it is muzzling people's freedom of speech and expression," he added.

Meanwhile, IGP Shahidul on November 11 said journalists would not be harassed or arrested without investigation if a case was filed against him or her under section 57.

"Allegations under section 57 come to me from districts across the country. I have given instructions after going through these. Directives have been given to take legal

action, as we, after investigation, found evidence in connection with some cases," the police chief said at a views-exchange meeting with journalists in Chandpur.

CASES

Under the ICT Act, police, upon investigation of crimes, submit either a charge sheet or a final report to the Cyber Tribunal in Dhaka, the lone tribunal to deal with such cases.

According to a tribunal source, the court till July 30 received 763 final reports from police since the law was amended in 2013 with provisions for harsher punishments.

Ninety percent of the cases were filed under section 57 and a large number of those were filed by ruling party men, the source added.

The actual number of cases is much higher as police file final reports with the court only after completing investigations into the cases.

Of the 763 cases, 205 have so far been disposed of -- 84 after trial and the rest either after getting final reports or after being withdrawn by plaintiffs.

This year, the tribunal has received 342 reports in as many cases till July 30. Of them, 300 have been filed under section 57.

Bridging the gap

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Said Esber along with Bangla Academy Director General Shamsuzzaman Khan and Dhaka Lit Fest directors raised the curtain on this year's event.

Esber, known by his pen name Adonis, along with the others inaugurated the festival by unveiling the graphic novel "Muhib" on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman around 11:00am.

Stating how freedom of expression around the world is under threat, Sadaf Saaz, director and producer of the festival said, "Our mission is to stand up for freedom of expression.

"It's important to continue to protect

space for free discourse and dialogue at a time when such spaces are under threat and pressure at many parts of the world," she said.

Praising the organisers Bangla Academy DG Shamsuzzaman said the festival creates a platform for local and international authors to come together.

Kazi Anis Ahmed, another director of the festival, said not many people abroad are aware of Bangladesh's rich culture and locals do not get enough from the culture of other countries.

"With this in mind, we have arranged the festival in a way so that our esteemed international guests can learn something

from us and we can learn something from them," he said.

Dhaka Literary Festival (DLF), or Dhaka Lit Fest as it is popularly known, has been held at the historic premises of the Bangla Academy every year since 2012, marking a resurgence of Bangladeshi literary culture while vigorously engaging with other cultures far beyond the borders.

From its inception the organisers of the festival have had a vision to connect Bangladeshi writing and writers to the wider world.

With three rapid iterations -- 2012, 2013 and 2014 -- the festival established Dhaka's place in the global literary cir-

cuits. DLF began its journey with a pilot event in 2011 under the aegis of the world famous Hay-on-Wye festival.

Before the inaugural ceremony, a Pung Cholom performance was staged by Manipuri Theatre at Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad auditorium. A session of Bahai Writings was held on the lawn of the Bangla Academy.

A total of 28 sessions in participation with local and international writers, journalists and bloggers took place alongside the festival yesterday.

Today 38 sessions on various issues are scheduled to be held of which three sessions are especially designed for children.

Trishal girls in action

4 child marriages foiled in 10 months

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

child marriages and stop eve-teasing.

Its members are all students from class six to nine at a local school.

The girls' squad is the first such initiative by the local administration that has provided the girls with bicycles, uniforms and caps and assists them all the time.

The squad members are connected to the office through a hotline number, said Abu Jafor, who is also the chief coordinator of the group.

Once a squad member finds out a

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Record growth in tough year

FROM PAGE 1

last fiscal year, lower than the provisional estimate of 3.4 percent. The growth was 2.79 percent in FY 2015-16.

Flashfloods in the north-eastern haor region during the last Boro season and fungal attack inflicted extensive damages on the agrarian economy.

The BBS data says floods and heavy rainfall caused the rice production to fall by more than nine lakh tonnes to 3.38 crore tonnes in FY 2016-17 compared to the previous fiscal year.

The agriculture sector's contribution to the GDP is 14.74 percent.

Kamal said the rice production was low because of floods and rains, but the overall growth in the agriculture sector was not negative.

Providing data on other crops, including potato, jute and maize, BBS Secretary KM Mozammel Haque said the overall production of crops has increased.

Contacted, Zahid Hussain, lead economist at the World Bank Dhaka office, said, "I see two significant improvements in the final estimates relative to the provisional estimates. The agricultural growth estimate has been revised down to 2.97 percent, compared with the 3.4 percent in the preliminary estimate."

"The revision takes much better account of the losses suffered due to haor floods and the blast fungus attack. Second, the statistical discre-

pancy between the expenditure and value added estimates is reduced from over 1 percent of the GDP in the preliminary estimate to 0.1 percent of the GDP. Private consumption and private investment share in the GDP are correspondingly higher in the final estimate relative to the preliminary estimates," he noted.

After the BBS provisional estimate was released in May, the World Bank raised questions about it in September. The WB estimated that the GDP would grow by 6.4 percent in fiscal 2016-17.

Yesterday, WB economist Zahid said, "The larger puzzle -- the inconsistency between the 7.3 percent GDP growth estimate and the growth related high frequency indicators -- remains unresolved."

He further said, "Public investment to the GDP has increased by 0.75 percentage points in a year when the ADP implementation rate is 3 percent -- points lower than last year."

How could manufacturing growth be nearly 11 percent in a year when LC settlement for import of industrial raw materials grew by only 3.5 percent and exports in nominal dollar terms increased by only 1.7 percent? How could construction grow by nearly 8.8 percent when LC settlement for the import of construction materials declined by 0.5 percent," he asked.

However, the public administration and education sectors saw a drop in

growth.

Kamal said Bangladesh's economy has been growing steadily over the last several years. "We never lagged behind. We are always advancing in a sustainable way."

Replying to a query, the minister said the steady growth was possible because of an increase in per capita productivity.

He also noted that there may be questions over the BBS figures but the state-run agency did the calculations in a transparent way.

The same methodology, used last year and the year before, was applied this year as well, he added.

Greece in mourning, several still missing in deadly flood

AFP, Athens

Greece was in mourning Thursday as rescue crews tried to locate several people missing in a flood that killed 15 people near the capital, as rain continued to fall.

Authorities said at least five people were still missing in Mandria, one of three towns some 50 kilometres (30 miles) west of Athens hit by a freak flood early on Wednesday.

"It was like a tsunami," Evangelos Kolovtzos, a local shopowner, told AFP.

Another local informed that the waste from local restaurants also go to feeding the crows instead of rotting out in the open.

However, it was no easy transition. A farmer, Hatem Ali, 60, said, "Crows start returning to the village before sunset to pass the night and they make a lot of noise even till night but the local people have gotten used to it."

The changes are indeed remarkable. The children no longer throw stones at the birds and the feathered friends actually allow humans to get close to them. The bond shared between man and bird is evident to see.

Alamgir Hossain, president of 'Setubandhan' said, "Natural cleaners such as vultures and kites are now on the verge of extinction due to our disregard for them."

We thus took the initiative to make Kanganpara village a crows' sanctuary to create peoples' awareness as they protect the environment by clearing waste and dead creatures," he added.

Al-Helal Chowdhury, chairman of Botlagari union parishad said, "We're happy as our village has gotten a special identity for laudable service to crows."

And if the free birds could sing, they too would be waxing lyrical about their new found sanctuary.

LOWER COURT JUDGES

Gazette on discipline rules by December 3

Says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is likely to issue a gazette notification on the rules determining the discipline of lower court judges by December 3, Law Minister Anisul Huq said yesterday.

The minister told this to The Daily Star last night after a meeting with the apex court judges at the Kakrail residence of Justice Abdul Wahhab Miah, who has been performing the functions of chief justice.

"We have resolved the issues that had created the problem. Now the draft [of the rules] will be sent to the president for his approval. Once the president approves the draft, it will be published in the Bangladesh gazette," he said.

"No issues other than the disciplinary rules [for lower court judges] were discussed at the meeting," he added.

Four other apex court judges -- Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, Justice