



A truck dangerously carries iron rods at Dholaiyer in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Myanmar army chief discusses Rohingya issue with Xi Jinping

REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar's top military general met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing yesterday, and discussed China's support amid international criticism over Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya minority, according to a statement from the general.

China has offered diplomatic backing to its southern neighbour throughout the crisis, despite growing pressure from Western countries for the Myanmar military to be accountable for alleged atrocities.

More than 600,000 Rohingyas have fled from Myanmar's Rakhine State to Bangladesh in three months since insurgent attacks on security posts sparked a brutal counter-insurgency campaign.

China helped to block a resolution on the crisis at the UN Security Council, while the United States this week called the response by the military and local vigilantes "ethnic cleansing", echoing earlier statements

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Ensure quick, safe return

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Mogherini further said the EU is ready to help find a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis and is ready to further support the two countries in this process.

The EU top diplomat also pointed out that they look forward to the swift implementation of the recommendations of the Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

China has also welcomed the deal on repatriation, and said it "feels gratified at the current positive progress that has been achieved", reports Reuters.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told reporters yesterday that the situation in Rakhine "has obviously been alleviated".

Rights groups, however, have voiced concern over the repatriation process, saying it was not clear where the persecuted minority will be resettled, or how their safety will be ensured.

Some aid workers fear the refugees could be forcibly interned.

Amnesty International, a London-based human rights organisation, has said the UN and the international community "have been completely sidelined" and the talk of return is "premature" while the flow of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh

continues.

Speaking at a press briefing in Geneva yesterday, UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards said, "At present, conditions in Myanmar's Rakhine State are not in place to enable safe and sustainable returns. Refugees are still fleeing, and many have suffered violence, rape and deep psychological harm. Some have witnessed the deaths of family members and friends."

He also said most of the Rohingyas have little or nothing to go back to as their homes and villages were destroyed.

"Deep divisions between communities remain unaddressed. And humanitarian access in northern Rakhine State remains negligible."

He said the UN Refugee Agency has not yet seen the details of the deal.

The UNHCR looks forward to seeing details of the deal between the two countries, and stands ready to help both governments work towards a solution that meets international refugee and human rights standards, he mentioned.

Edwards further said the refugees have the right to return and the UNHCR will welcome a framework that enables them to exercise this right

in line with the international standards.

"First and foremost, this means that return must be voluntary, and take place in safe and dignified conditions that pave the way for lasting solutions."

It is critical that returns do not take place precipitously or prematurely, without the informed consent of refugees or the basic elements of lasting solutions in place, he noted.

"People must have the option of returning home, and not be confined to specific areas. Progress towards addressing the root causes of flight, including their lack of citizenship, as recommended by the Rakhine Advisory Commission, will also be crucial."

Terming the new deal on Rohingya repatriation a public relations stunt, Bill Frelick, refugee rights director at the Human Rights Watch, called upon the international community to "make it clear that there can be no returns without international monitors to ensure security".

"The idea that Burma will now welcome them back to their smouldering villages with open arms is laughable," said Frelick, according to a Reuters report.

"Instead of signing on to a public

41-NATION ISLAMIC MILITARY COALITION Riyadh hosts first meet tomorrow

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The defence ministers of the 41-nation Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) will meet in Riyadh tomorrow to discuss various issues, including ways to establish the alliance as a major bloc to address security challenges and terrorism issues.

This will be the first meeting of the Saudi-led IMCTC defence ministers since the formation of the coalition on December 15 in 2015, with 34 Muslim majority states, including Bangladesh.

Prime Minister's Security Affairs Adviser Maj Gen (rtd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique left Dhaka for Riyadh yesterday to lead the Bangladesh delegation to the meeting. The delegation comprises top officials from the defence and foreign ministries.

Diplomatic sources said though the alliance was formed nearly two years ago, it's still not clear how and under what terms and conditions it will function.

Foreign ministry officials said though Bangladesh is a founder member of the IMCTC, it will not take part in any military operation under the platform.

According to them, there are two

parts in the alliance's concept -- military and political. It fully depends on Bangladesh in which part it would contribute to.

"The meeting of the defence ministers aims to strengthen cooperation and integration between the Islamic military alliance members," said a report of the Saudi Press Agency (SPA). The theme of the meet is "Allied against Terrorism".

Diplomatic sources in Dhaka and Riyadh said with around one-third of the Arab world currently embroiled in conflicts caused mainly by terror groups, the meeting is a significant step towards close cooperation between the IMCTC members to fight terrorism in the Islamic world.

The defence ministers will discuss plans and proposals to unify the efforts of the Islamic alliance and promote coordination with other international agencies.

The meeting will also be attended by ambassadors and senior diplomats representing their countries in Saudi Arabia.

The SPA report said the meeting would mark the "real beginning" of the military alliance. A declaration issued

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ation operations to ensure that the international standards are met.

ISTANBUL DECLARATION

The Istanbul Declaration, adopted in the 10th Plenary Session of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly yesterday, called for a safe, dignified and sustainable return of all forcibly displaced Rohingyas to their homeland from Bangladesh.

It also put emphasis on the implementation of the recommendations by the Kofi Annan-led commission to resolve the crisis permanently, reports UNB.

BNP ON REPATRIATION DEAL

The BNP has said the process of repatriation will result in disastrous consequences for the Rohingyas if their security is not ensured.

"If the government sends the Rohingyas back [to Myanmar] without ensuring their security, it will be like casting them into hell," BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told journalists at the party's Nayapaltan office yesterday.

Expressing frustration over the repatriation deal, he said, "We don't know the details of the deal. The government has not yet made it public."

Diplomatic sources in Dhaka said it is standard practice that the UNHCR would be involved in voluntary repatriation operations to ensure that the international standards are met.

seeking justice.

Contacted, Farida Yasmin, deputy commissioner, Victim Support Centre under the Women Support and Investigation Division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said women with various types of allegations like torture and rape communicate with them and seek justice each day.

Alongside regular policing, the support centre, which is connected with 49 police stations of the DMP and collaborates with several NGOs, provides them psychological counselling to recover from incidents of torture, Farida told The Daily Star over the phone.

She said related police stations contact them before recording a complaint as the support centre sends female police officials for primary enquiry and immediate support.

A handful of women becoming victims of cyber crime and abuse are also seeking police help. The sensitive matter has to be dealt with tactfully, the police official said.

'Explosion' dashes last hopes for missing sub

AFP, Mar Del Plata

An explosion apparently occurred near the last known position of an Argentine submarine, the navy confirmed on Thursday, dashing last hopes of finding the vessel and its 44 crew members.

Relatives of the missing sailors reacted with grief and anger to the news after holding out hope since the sub was reported overdue at its Mar del Plata base on November 17, two days after the explosion.

"An anomalous, singular, short, violent and non-nuclear event consistent with an explosion," occurred shortly after the submarine's last communication, navy spokesman Captain Enrique Baldi told a news conference in Buenos Aires.

Ex-UP member shot dead in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Operatives of an outlawed party shot dead a former member of Dhalarachar Union Parishad in Pabna's Bera upazila last night, police said.

The victim, Sabuj Mondol, 40, of Durgapur village, was also the regional leader of Purbo Banglar Communist Party's Sharabhaara faction, according to police.

Sukumar Roy, officer-in-charge of Aminpur Police Station, said his rivals shot him at a tea stall in Durgapur village around 8:00pm, killing him on the spot.

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Power tariff

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1, said BERC Chairman Monowar Islam at his office on Thursday.

The price was hiked to meet the revenue requirement of power distributors.

Consumers, rights groups and businesses expressed disappointment over the decision.

Meanwhile, left-leaning political parties called for a half-day hartal across the country on November 30, protesting the hike.

Govt to equip

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activities, read the document.

The agencies are being equipped with sophisticated technologies to fight crimes, especially the increasing militant activities by using various digital platforms.

The police's Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit, Rapid Action Battalion and an intelligence agency have some technical equipment. Plans have been drawn up to buy more sophisticated devices to monitor and track down suspected criminals and militants, said home ministry sources.

Rise in violence against women

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attached to it and being shunned by their families.

Ensuring justice, like quick disposal of cases, is something the government has to look into. Social awareness has to be built through campaigns and providing women the conditions needed for addressing gender-based incidents, the activists added.

Rasheda K Chowdhury, a noted rights activist, said domestic violence like torture in the hands of a husband or his family members is one area where most women keep silent because they fear being further isolated by the family as a consequence and feel that little will be done to remedy the situation.

"In many cases, women decide themselves not to disclose their torture which actually gives abusive husbands space for more such behaviour," she said.

Rasheda, also an adviser to the last caretaker government, added the local government can play an important

role in reducing domestic violence. Woman representatives of the union parishads can engage with them communities to build social awareness.

ASK's January-September report says 346 women were subjected to domestic violence while only 178 cases were filed with police against the perpetrators. Of 221 dowry-related incidents, only 138 resulted in cases filed.

The report further says 588 women were raped and 153 women were sexually harassed. Thirty-five domestic helps were tortured. There were acid attacks on 27 women while eight women fell victim to arbitrations and fatwas.

The data also showed that the 13-18 year old age group is the most vulnerable group in terms of sexual crimes followed by the 7-12 year old group. Alarmingly, the data also shows that there were 57 cases of rape in the 0-6 year old age bracket.

The data was compiled using various newspaper reports and the body's

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Form of violence	January-September 2016	January-September 2017
Domestic violence	305	346
Dowry-related violence	193	221
Victim of sexual harassment	109	153
Rape and attempted rape	512	588
Acid violence	28	27
Violence against domestic help	49	35
Salish and fatwa	8	8
Total	1,204	1,378

SOURCE: AIN O SALISH KENDRA

country between 2012 and 2016. In the Dhaka metro area, five women and children repression prevention tribunals disposed of 2,057 cases out of 4,436 filed with different police stations from 2001 to 2016. As of May this year, only 22 cases saw convictions, court and prosecution sources said.

Rowshon Ara, a member of Naripokkho that works for ensuring women rights, said although the country's women are getting empowered and gaining success in different sectors, incidents of harassment have not stopped because society's mindset is still unfriendly towards women.

She said alongside efforts and initiatives from the government, people belonging to different walks of society have to come forward and build awareness so that women can feel confident when they walk on the streets alone.

"Rule of law is a prerequisite to ending violent incidents against women," she said, adding that lengthy process in providing justice frustrates many women and prevent them from

own investigations.

According to a database of the monitoring cell of the police headquarters, 18,668 rape cases were filed across the

Hoque, seeking a meeting.

The letter said some 50 manpower recruiting agencies were "harassed by the CID" recently.

"Some CID officials have carried out sudden raids at the offices of different recruiting agencies in Motijheel, Paltan, Fakirapool, Kakrail and Malibagh areas in between September and October 10. In the name of searching, they first disconnected the CCTV cameras and seized the phones of the employees.

"Then they seized passports and threatened businessmen to implicate them in cases under the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012. They [CID men] misbehaved with the employees.... The harassment ends only after illegal transaction [of money]," read the letter.

Following the incident, Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) wrote to the Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul

11 CID men took Tk 45 lakh bribe

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CID (Motijheel division) inspectors SM Ali Azam Siddique and Abu Bakar Siddique, sub-inspectors Susanta Kumar Rahut, Habib Ullah, Samir Ranjan Majumder, Beuty Akter and Jahirul Islam, Assistant Sub-Inspector Mainuddin and constables Nazmul Hoque, Saddam Hossain and Masud Rana.

The report further recommended transferring the cops to non-operational units immediately as they committed the crime while serving in an operational unit. Strict departmental actions should be taken against them following their transfer, it added.

Under the departmental action, a cop can be terminated, suspended, demoted, and his annual salary increment can be cancelled.

After receiving Tk 45 lakh from

Anupom, the SI returned 1,100 passports, but seized 101 and filed a case against the businessman's brother Probir Banik, also an owner of the firm, and the two staff under Bangladesh Passport Order, 1973.

In another incident on October 19, some CID officials went to G-Net Tower to conduct a drive. The business and staff of recruitment agencies in the building started protesting the drive alleging that it was aimed at harassing them. At one stage, the protesters surrounded the office.

A team of Motijheel police later rescued the CID men from there.