



Two of the injured, who survived the gun attack at Rangamati's Betchhari, are undergoing treatment at Chittagong Medical College Hospital yesterday.

Gun attack kills 5 in Rangamati

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Santu Larma-led Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), which had signed the peace accord with the government, split during the past caretaker rule in 2007-08.

Following the killing of Shaktiman, his fellow activists said it was an act of the UPDF, an allegation the party has rejected.

About yesterday's shooting, Rangamati SP Alamgir Kabir said, "The victims came under attack as they were going to attend the funeral of the slain Naniarchar chairman."

Jimit Chakma, a member of UPDF (Democratic), who was in another vehicle behind the microbus, told The Daily Star that the miscreants had taken position on a roadside hilltop and opened fire from there.

First, the driver got shot and he lost control over the wheels, he said. "Later, the gunmen came down from the hilltop and fired at others on the microbus."

Some 12 passengers were on the microbus, going to Hugurmara from Khagrachhari, said Jimit, known as a close aide to Tapan Jyoti Chakma.

The injured are Kriti Bikash Chakma, vice president of Rangamati unit of PCJSS-MN Larma, and its members Sumonto Chakma, 38, Ashim Chakma, Nitimoy Chakma, 30, Digonto Chakma, 25, Dipu Chakma, 30, and Kalomoy Chakma. They were taken to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

No cases were filed over the killings of last two days, said Abdul Latif, officer-in-charge of Naniarchar Police Station.

Meanwhile, the funeral of Shaktiman Chakma was held at Huugurmara village in Naniarchar yesterday, while the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Commission strongly condemned the killing which took place in broad daylight.

In a statement, signed by its co-chairs Sultana Kamal, Elsa

Stamatopoulou and Myrna Cunningham Kain, the Commission also called upon the local administration and the government to take measures to stop recurrence of such incidents.

"In recent days, incidents of killing and kidnapping have taken place in Chittagong Hill Tracts. But no news of arrest has been heard in this connection," it said, seeking exemplary punishment of those responsible.

POLITICS OF FACTIONS

Though the situation in the hills was relatively calm for the last three years following a "secret meeting" of UPDF and PCJSS, violence returned after the rise of the UPDF (democratic), local political activists claim.

On November 2, 1997, the faction announced its separation from UPDF at a press conference in Khagrachhari.

However, Onggo Marma, general secretary of Ganotantrik Juba Forum, the youth wing of UPDF, claimed that members of the so-called faction were

actually expelled from the main party for breaches of discipline.

This is nothing new in the CHT. Among numerous other troubles, intra-party conflicts have long been an issue in the hills.

PCJSS founder Manabendra Narayan Larma, popularly known as MN Larma and a leading proponent of the Jumma people's rights, was killed in an attack by a splinter group of his organisation on November 10, 1983.

On December 2, 1997, under the leadership of MN Larma's younger brother Santu Larma, PCJSS signed the CHT Peace Accord that a large group of students of the hill districts refused to accept, leading to the formation of UPDF.

Conflicts continued between PCJSS and UPDF until the beginning of 2015, when a resolution was finally reached following the "secret meeting". By this time, hundreds of activists had already been killed.

Besides, during the last caretaker rule, PCJSS split and PCJSS-MN Larma

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

India to raise financial assistance for Myanmar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India may announce a hike in financial assistance aimed at facilitating the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh when External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj pays a two-day official visit to Myanmar next week.

Raveesh Kumar, spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry, told the media on Thursday that some key agreements covering diverse aspects of bilateral relations are to be signed during Swaraj's visit to Myanmar on May 10-11.

India believes that normalcy in Rakhine state "will be restored with the return of the displaced persons," Kumar said adding the socio-economic development of Rakhine State was also a key factor.

India had announced on December 21 last year a development assistance of \$25 million for Myanmar's Rakhine State, from where thousands of Rohingyas crossed over to Bangladesh following "ethnic cleansing" there.

The amount, which will be spent over five years, was an "indicative figure" and depended on the actual

requirement and utilisation, leaving scope for an increase, officials said.

When then Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar visited Myanmar in December last year, he and Myanmar's Deputy Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement U Soe Aung signed a MoU on Rakhine State Development Programme under which India proposes to take up, among others, a project to build pre-fabricated housing in Rakhine so as to meet the immediate needs of returning Rohingyas.

The repatriation of Rohingyas, for which Bangladesh and Myanmar signed an accord in January this year, has remained a non-starter so far. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, during a meeting with a visiting UNSC team on Rohingyas, had wanted India, China, Russia and Japan to bring more pressure on Myanmar to take back the refugees.

During her forthcoming visit, Swaraj will review with Myanmar leaders the progress made in implementing the decisions taken during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trip to that country in September last year, Kumar said.

'Big differences'

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The American pressure on Beijing has heightened, she said, even as Beijing has taken several steps to liberalise its markets.

Those reforms include a timeline to lift foreign ownership restrictions for automakers, permitting foreign investors to take controlling stakes in some financial firms, and allowing foreign companies to trade iron futures on domestic exchanges.

But a list of demands presented to Beijing before the negotiations got under way showed such piecemeal reforms fell far short of US expectations.

The document, divided into eight sections, was presented as a starting point for negotiations, according to Bloomberg News.

The asks included cutting China's trade surplus with the US by at least \$200 billion by the end of 2020, lowering all tariffs to match American levels, eliminating technology transfer practises, and cutting off support for some industries fostered by China's industrial policies, Bloomberg reported.

INDUSTRIAL POLICY

Liu He, vice premier in charge of the economy, led the discussions for

China.

Known as President Xi Jinping's right hand man on economic matters, Liu was noticeably absent from Xi's speech yesterday morning commemorating the birth of Karl Marx and the continued relevance of his theories to China.

The speech alluded to Beijing's determination to keep true market capitalism at arm's length -- a key area of concern for the American delegation that has balked at China's state-led industrial policy and fostering of domestic industry.

Friction is highest over China's "Made in China 2025" programme, designed to spring China from a maker of sports shoes and denims into high-tech goods.

For Beijing, recent moves by Washington to ban US sales of telecom giant ZTE and the reported opening of a similar probe into goliath Huawei, have reinforced the wisdom of the policy.

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Commerce said China had taken up the ban with the US delegation.

"The Chinese side made solemn representations with the US in respect of the ZTE Corporation case" the commerce ministry statement said, adding

that the Americans said they would relay the issue to Trump.

"The trade friction between the US and China is a longterm issue, this is not something that can be solved in the short term," Zhang said.

TRADE DATA

The talks may have received some tailwinds from the latest trade data out of Washington, showing the US global trade deficit narrowing in March.

The goods deficit with China fell 11.5 percent from February to \$25.8 billion, but analysts cautioned seasonal factors like China's New Year holidays were likely at play.

Bilateral trade in coming months could be hurt by US and Chinese buyers planning to avoid tariffs, with news this week that China may already be downsizing its soybean imports from the US.

"Whatever they're buying is non-US," said Soren Schroder, CEO of agricultural giant Bunge Limited.

"They're buying beans in Canada, in Brazil, mostly Brazil, but very deliberately not buying anything from the US," Schroder said in the interview with Bloomberg News on Wednesday.

Soybeans were China's largest import from the US last year, worth \$14 billion.



An aerial view shows burned down villages once inhabited by the Rohingyas as seen from the Myanmar military helicopters that carried the UN envoys to northern Rakhine State on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

OIC to act strong

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foreign minister's conference," Youssef, also an Egyptian diplomat, said yesterday.

With 57 member states from four continents, the OIC is considered the second largest inter-governmental organisation after the United Nations.

Rashid Al Balushi, president of OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission, said the affected Rohingyas had told them of tortures, killings and rapes in Myanmar.

"OIC is working on ways to address the crisis," he said and requested the UN and other aid agencies to protect the refugees who were facing risks of landslides and flooding in the coming monsoon.

"The OIC will help as much as it can to help the Rohingya."

Hamid Hossain, a Rohingya community leader who talked to the OIC delegation, said, "We told them to help us have citizenship and safety in Rakhine. We want to go back home."

Meanwhile, UAE Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organisations' Affairs Yacoub Al Hosani yesterday visited Kutupalong refugee camp and launched cooperation between the UAE and UNHCR in a nutrition programme. It will cover the needs of 132,700 refugees, including 78,000 women and children, reports UNB.

OIC COUNCIL BEGINS TODAY

The OIC Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) will begin its 45th session in

the capital with the theme "Islamic Values for Sustainable Peace, Solidarity and Development."

Apart from more than 40 foreign ministers and state ministers from 57 OIC countries, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland is attending the event and will address the opening session.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the two-day meet at Bangladesh International Conference Centre this morning.

Diplomatic sources said the visiting ministers would focus on the issues facing the Rohingya Muslims and raise the collective voice of Muslim world for early repatriation of over 1.1 million Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh.

Bangladesh constitutes the ideal country through which the OIC's message to find an end and a sustainable solution to the crisis can be conveyed to the international community, they added.

The OIC meet is also expected to make a call for "proper investigation" into the military crackdown in Rakhine State.

It will make a declaration and call for early implementation of the Kofi Annan Commission's recommendations, which includes restoration of citizenship of the Rohingyas, officials said.

The inaugural session will also be addressed by OIC Secretary General Dr Youssef A Al-Othaimen, Bangladesh

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, Ivory Coast Foreign Minister Marcel Amon-Tanoh and Turkey Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Yildiz.

The OIC secretary general will present a Gilaf of the holy Kaaba to the Bangladesh prime minister at the inaugural session.

President Abdul Hamid will host a dinner in honour of the visiting dignitaries at the Bangabhaban this evening.

After inauguration of the OIC meet, heads of delegations will make their statements in the first working session.

In parallel sessions, OIC special committee will hold discussions about Palestine, challenges facing the Muslim Ummah such as conflicts, divisions, tension and instability, problems of terrorism and violent extremism, sectarian tendencies, hatred, prejudice and Islamophobia and massive humanitarian crises with forced displacements from and to the Muslim countries.

There will be a special session on humanitarian challenges facing OIC countries tomorrow.

An election will take place in which Bangladesh has nominated Kamrul Ahsan, secretary (bilateral and consular) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a candidate for the post of assistant secretary general for science and technology for the Asia group of the OIC.

Bangladesh first hosted the OIC CFM in 1983.

Nat'l issues dominate local polls

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telling voters that they should take the election as an opportunity to protest against the "government's misdeeds as it has destroyed all the democratic institutions in the country and indulged in corruption".

The mayor hopefuls are trying to convince voters that victories in the polls will intensify the BNP's ongoing movement to free party Chairperson Khaleda Zia from jail. The former prime minister is now behind bars in a graft case.

However, election experts said the way the electioneering is taking place in Khulna and Gazipur cities, it seems that a national election is going to be held there. According to them, campaigns of councillor aspirants failed to attract voters' attention as the councillor polls are non-partisan.

AL mayoral candidate in Khulna Talukder Abdul Khaleque said carrying out development works locally was not possible without the support from the government.

"Rampal power plant, Mongla Port

and other national development projects will surely have an impact on Khulna city. So it is very natural that national issues will dominate the electoral campaign here."

He also said as the AL was in power, carrying out development works in Khulna city would be easy if the mayor was elected from the ruling party.

Mayor hopeful Nazrul Islam Monju of BNP said he was stressing that people should cast their votes to "get back their voting rights". "In our polls campaign, we are focusing on Khaleda Zia's release and the local issues. People are just waiting for a chance to show no-confidence in the government and Khulna city election will bring them one such chance."

Hasan Uddin Sarker, mayoral candidate of BNP in Gazipur, said, "I am urging voters to cast their votes for an experienced and tested candidate. As the election is being held along party lines, I am focusing on the government's misdeeds and the local issues."

Local government expert Tofail Ahmed said a mayor should be elected

from the elected councillors to strengthen the local government. Only then the local issues will get priority during polls campaigns.

As the parliamentary election is only a few months away, it is quite normal that the ruling party candidates will try to get advantage of the government's major development projects and the opposition party will try to focus on the government's failures, he added.

Former election commissioner Brig Gen (ret) Shakhawat Hossain said the central leaders of the political parties were picking the mayor candidates and also taking part in the polls campaigns.

"When the central leaders join the electioneering, they focus more on national issues. The party candidates and their supporters have nothing to do but follow the tone set by the central leaders," he told The Daily Star.

The central leaders' involvement in the process should be stopped to make an election to a local government body a local election in true sense, he observed.