

Rohingya militants massacred Hindus

Says Amnesty underscoring complex ethnic rivalries in Rakhine

AFP, Yangon

Rohingya militants massacred Hindu villagers during last year's uprising in Myanmar's Rakhine, Amnesty International said yesterday in a report that sheds fresh light on the complex ethnic rivalries in the state.

The killings took place on August 25, 2017, the report said, the same day that the Rohingya insurgents staged coordinated deadly raids on police posts that tipped the state into crisis.

Myanmar's military responded to the insurgent raids with harsh reprisals that forced some 700,000 Rohingya Muslims out of the mainly Buddhist country where they have faced persecution for years.

The UN says the army crackdown amounted to "ethnic cleansing" of the Rohingya, with soldiers and vigilante mobs accused of killing civilians and burning down villages.

But the Rohingya militants have also been accused of abuses.

Those include the mass killing of Hindus in the far north of Rakhine, where the military took reporters -- including AFP -- to witness the exhumation of putrid bodies from a grave in September.

The militants, known as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), denied responsibility at the time.

But Amnesty International yesterday said that a new investigation had confirmed the group killed 53 Hindus "execution-style" -- mostly children -- in the Kha Maung Seik village cluster in northern Maungdaw.

"Our latest investigation on the ground sheds much-needed light on the largely under-reported human rights abuses by ARSA during northern Rakhine state's unspeakably dark recent history," said Tirana Hassan, crisis response director at Amnesty International.

"Accountability for these atrocities is every bit as crucial as it is for the crimes against humanity carried out by Myanmar's security forces in northern Rakhine state," she added.

Citing interviews with eight survi-

vors, the rights group said dozens were rounded up, blindfolded and marched out of town by masked men and Rohingya villagers in plain clothes.

"They slaughtered the men. We were told not to look at them... They had knives. They also had some spades and iron rods," 18-year-old Raj Kumari told Amnesty.

He said he hid in the bush and watched as his father, brother and uncle were killed.

The report said that in a separate village nearby called Ye Bauk Kyar, 46 Hindu men, women and children disappeared on the same day. It cited information from local Hindus who believe they were killed by ARSA.

While Rakhine was home mainly to Buddhists and Muslims before the crisis, it also boasts a small but long-standing Hindu minority -- many of whom were brought in by British colonisers looking for cheap labour -- as well as several other smaller ethnic groups.

Myanmar has faced a flood of international condemnation for its persecution of the Rohingya, who are stateless and have been targeted by bouts of communal violence.

The government denies any widespread abuses and has accused rights groups of a pro-Rohingya bias, while highlighting the suffering of other ethnic groups swept up in the violence.

"It is important that the international pressure on Myanmar won't favour ARSA's actions," government spokesman Zaw Htay told AFP when asked about the Amnesty report.

But David Mathieson, an independent analyst, said the report should strengthen the argument for Myanmar to allow independent investigations into the crisis.

Authorities have severely restricted media access to the conflict zone and barred UN investigators from entering the country.

"Failing to grant access to humanitarian aid workers and researchers and journalists will continue the official culture of denial, which has zero credibility in the eyes of the world," he told AFP.

HC hearing

FROM PAGE 1

Md Bashirullah told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the BNP chief yesterday filed two bail petitions with the HC in two other cases lodged in Dhaka in 2016 on charges of observing "fake" birthday and "demeaning" Bangladesh's national flag.

With the two, Khaleda has submitted five petitions to the HC seeking bail in five cases after the Supreme Court's Appellate Division upheld her bail on May 16 in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case.

The HC bench of Justice AKM Asaduzzaman and Justice JBM Hassan started hearing arguments on the bail petition in the Comilla murder case at 2:25pm yesterday.

During yesterday's hearing, Khaleda's lawyer Khandker Mahbub Hossain told the HC that his client was not involved in the incident mentioned in the case and her name was not in the first information report.

The court had already granted bail to many of the 77 accused in the case, he said, adding that Khaleda was implicated in the charge sheet as the 51st accused.

Mahbub argued that three accused gave confessional statements before the magistrate concerned, but they did not mention Khaleda's name.

On May 20, the BNP chief filed three separate petitions with the HC seeking bail in three cases that include the murder case in Comilla's Chaudhagram.

Of the three cases against Khaleda, two were filed in Comilla.

The third case was lodged against Khaleda for making a statement on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the number of freedom fighters. One Raihan Faruki Imam filed the case with a Narail court on September 24, 2015.

Khaleda made the comment on December 21, 2015, at a meeting at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, in the capital where she said Sheikh Mujib did not want the independence of the country, but instead wanted to be the prime minister of Pakistan.

She also said there was a controversy over the number of freedom fighters.

Yesterday, the BNP chief submitted two petitions with the HC seeking bail in two cases.

One of them was filed by Gazi Zahirul Islam, former joint general secretary of Dhaka Union of Journalists, on August 30, 2016, with a Dhaka court against Khaleda for allegedly celebrating her "fake" birthday on August 15 every year.

Another case was filed by AB Siddique, president of Bangladesh Jananetri Parishad, pro-Awami League organisation, with a Dhaka court on November 3 that year, accusing Khaleda and her late husband and former president Ziaur Rahman of "undermining" the country's map and national flag.

M Masud Rana, who filed the bail petitions on behalf of the BNP chief, told this correspondent that they would move the two petitions before the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Shahidul Karim next week.

There are arrest warrants in seven cases against Khaleda, he added.

On May 16, the apex court upheld an HC order that granted bail to Khaleda for four months in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case in which she was sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

But she could not walk out of prison following the SC judgment as she was shown arrested in seven other cases.

Robots

FROM PAGE 16

weedkiller, the Swiss robot is one of new breed of AI weeder that investors say could disrupt the \$100 billion pesticides and seeds industry by reducing the need for universal herbicides and the genetically modified (GM) crops that tolerate them.

Dominated by companies such as Bayer, DowDuPont, BASF and Syngenta, the industry is bracing for the impact of digital agricultural technology and some firms are already adapting their business models.

ecoRobotix, developer of the Swiss weeder, believes its design could reduce the amount of herbicide farmers use by 20 times. The company said it is close to signing a financing round with investors and is due to go on the market by early 2019.

Blue River, a Silicon Valley startup bought by US tractor company Deere & Co for \$305 million last year, has also developed a machine using on-board cameras to distinguish weeds from crops and only squirt herbicides where necessary.

Its "See and Spray" weed control machine, which has been tested in US cotton fields, is towed by a tractor and the developers estimate it could cut herbicide use by 90 percent once crops have started growing.

German engineering company Robert Bosch is also working on similar precision spraying kits as are other startups such as Denmark's Agrobot.

ROBO Global, an advisory firm that runs a robotics and automation investment index tracked by funds worth a combined \$4 billion, believes plant-by-plant precision spraying will only gain in importance.

"A lot of the technology is already available. It's just a question of packaging it together at the right cost for the farmers," said Richard Lightbound, ROBO's CEO for Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Exploiting fear, they make a quick buck

FROM PAGE 1

anti-narcotics drives.

In Dinajpur, law enforcers allegedly threatened a paddy trader to kill him in gunfight and took a bribe of Tk 10,000 from him.

Two families in Comilla and Gazipur complained that they had given money to cops to free their two relatives, but both were killed in "gunfights" later.

Paddy trader Dabirul Islam from Amtoli area in Dinajpur's Chirirbandar upazila yesterday alleged that two plainclothes policeman demanded Tk 50,000 from him around 7:00pm on Monday.

The 42-year-old trader said Md Firozzaman and Anwar Hossain, assistant sub-inspectors of Chirirbandar Police Station, caught him while he was urinating at the back of a local restaurant.

"They took away my mobile phone and asked me to go to a nearby litchi orchard."

Treating him as a drug trader, the cops slapped him several times. They also tried to handcuff him.

As the victim protested, one of the cops pointed his gun at the trader and threatened to kill him in "crossfire".

At one point, the ASIs demanded he

paid them Tk 50,000 or face death.

Dabirul phoned one of his acquaintances and asked him to send Tk 10,000 to a mobile phone through a mobile money transfer platform. The phone number was provided to him by the policemen.

After around an hour, the cops let Dabirul go as they became sure that the amount was transferred to the mobile phone.

Talking to The Daily Star, Md Firozzaman said he had been in Amtoli area on Monday afternoon, but he knew nothing about the bribing incident.

In Comilla, "drug dealers" Peyar Ali, 24, and Sharif, 26, were killed in a "gunfight" early yesterday.

Peyar Ali's mother Komola Begum alleged that cops from Kotwali Model Police Station detained her son at her home on Monday afternoon.

"My son was accused in about 10 cases, but he secured bail in all those," she told The Daily Star.

Komola said one Sohag, an informant of DB Sub-Inspector Shah Kamal, demanded her family pay Tk 200,000 for his release.

"I managed to collect Tk 25,000 and gave it to Sohag. But he was killed," she added.

Contacted, Kamal denied the allegation. "A team of Kotwali Model Police Station had led the operation to nab criminals and we assisted the team."

In Gazipur, family members of "drug dealer" Rezaul Islam alias Beshti Rony allegedly paid Tk 8 lakh to law enforcers for his release, but he was killed in a "gunfight".

Rezaul's mother Parvin Begum said DB police picked up her son around 2:00am on Saturday.

Around noon the following day, Rezaul's family members went to the DB's Gazipur city office. "They freed my son after receiving Tk 3 lakh and having me signed a blank sheet of paper."

As Rezaul walked out of the DB office, ASI Abu Bakkar Siddiqui of Tongi Police Station detained him again and took him to the station.

"At the police station, cops demanded Tk 5 lakh for freeing him," she said, adding that her husband gave Tk 5 lakh to police on Monday.

Later they came to know that their son was killed in a "gunfight".

Officer-in-Charge Amir Hossain of DB police claimed they did not detain Rezaul.

Abu Bakkar denied the allegation of taking money from Rezaul's family. He said Rezaul was accused in 14 cases.

Digital security act to be revised

FROM PAGE 1

in different sections of the proposed law, especially in defining the spirit of the 1971 Liberation War, and the actions to be considered as offences of hurting religious sentiment, and causing deterioration in law and order.

Anisul said, "The meeting was very fruitful as all of us have reached a consensus that there will be no law which will contradict the constitution regarding the freedom of the press and the freedom of speech."

"We will not enact any law aiming at journalists or one that will create obstacles to independent journalism."

Asked, Posts, Telecom and ICT Minister Mustafa Jabbar said, "We came out of the meeting, assuring them [the representatives] that their objections regarding eight sections of the proposed law will be considered."

At the meeting, the Editors' Council, an organisation of editors of the country's national dailies; the ATCO and the BFUI faction voiced concern over section 8, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, and 43 of the proposed law, saying these would greatly hamper the freedom of speech and independent journalism.

They also unanimously said several sections in the proposed law have ambiguity and loopholes which should be addressed. Otherwise, there will be ample scope for its misuse.

During the discussion, journalists' leaders proposed inclusion of media representatives in the Digital Security Council as mentioned in the proposed law, meeting sources said.

They also said it has to be ensured that activities of the Digital Security Agency, as mentioned in the proposed act, do not create obstacles to doing journalism.

Editors' Council President Golam Sarwar, editor of the daily Samakal; General Secretary Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star; BFUI President Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul and Secretary General Omar Faruq; and ATCO President Salman F Rahman and Senior Vice President Mozammel Babu expressed satisfaction over the meeting's outcome.

Imran Ahmed, chairman of the JS body and Awami League lawmaker, chaired the meeting.

The Editors' Council submitted a written proposal to the House body, expressing concern over eight sections -- 8, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, and 43 of the proposed law.

It said these sections would greatly harm the freedom of speech and independent journalism.

The council also said the definition of the spirit of the Liberation War, and actions to be considered as offences of hurting religious sentiment and causing deterioration in law and order should be specified in the proposed law.

Later, Golam Sarwar told reporters that they urged the standing committee to remove all sections that are obstacles to the freedom of the press.

"We waged a movement to establish democracy. We have told [the committee] that we will also wage a movement to save independent journalism."

The senior journalist also said they want to make sure that their demands are met before the proposed law is placed in parliament.

Mahfuz Anam told reporters that they pointed out the sections containing elements that may hinder the freedom of the press and create obstacles to independent journalism.

"The committee has taken the observations sincerely. We hope it will consider our concern and bring necessary changes to the proposed law."

"The committee assured us that they will try their best to make the entire law acceptable to journalists."

BFUI President Bulbul told reporters that they recommended amending the proposed Digital Security Act to incorporate a provision for forming a cell under Bangladesh Press Council.

There has to be a provision that the proposed law cannot be applied against journalists or media outlets without prior approval from the cell, they mentioned.

"There must be a special arrange-

ment in the proposed law for using any of its provisions against journalists or media outlets. It cannot be used against them instantly."

"There should be a cell at Bangladesh Press Council, which will record complaints. The proposed law can be applied against any journalist or media outlet only upon the cell's approval," he added.

ATCO President Salman said the parliamentary watchdog assured them that it would take into consideration the issues they raised at the meeting.

The House committee also said it would place the proposed law in parliament after making necessary amendments.

Talking to reporters at his office, committee Chairman Imran said there are some ambiguities in several sections of the proposed law.

"That is why we will have to bring some amendments to the proposed act to clear those ambiguities," he said, adding that they will discuss these issues at the committee's next meeting after the Eid-ul-Fitr.

On the ambiguity in defining the spirit of the Liberation War, he said they would follow the preamble of the constitution in that case.

About hurting religious sentiment, Imran said the committee might include section 295(A) of the penal code in the proposed law.

He also said the Official Secrets Act might be followed in defining the offences of computer or digital spying as mentioned in Section 32 of the proposed law.

About Section 43 of the proposed law that empowers a police official to conduct search or arrest anyone without any warrant issued by a court, Imran said a special committee could be formed in this regard, and no one would be arrested without the committee's permission.

Members of the parliamentary committee, including State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak, and lawmakers Moazzem Hossain Ratan, Showkat Hasanur Rahman, Kazi Firoz Rashid and Hosne Ara Lutfia Dalia, were present at yesterday's meeting.

Mustafa Jabbar and Anisul Huq attended it at the JS body's invitation.

WHAT SECTIONS 21, 25,

28, 29, 31 and 32 SAY

Section 21 of the proposed law says anyone spreading negative propaganda against the Liberation War or the Father of the Nation, using digital devices or instigates to do so, can be sentenced up to 14 years in jail or fined up to Tk 1 crore or both.

He or she will face up to life sentence or a fine of Tk 3 crore or both for committing the offence for the second time, it said.

Section 25 says a person may face up to three years in jail or Tk 3 lakh in fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast in a website or electronic form something which is attacking or intimidating or which can make someone dishonest or disgruntled; knowingly publish or broadcast false and distorted (full or partial) information to annoy or humiliate someone; knowingly publish or broadcast false and distorted (full or partial) information to tarnish the image of the state or to spread rumour.

Second-time offenders will face up to five years in jail or a fine of Tk 10 lakh or both, it said.

Section 28 says a person may face up to seven years' imprisonment or Tk 10 lakh in fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast something in a website or in electronic form or gets it done to hurt one's religious sentiment and values.

A person will face up to 10 years in jail or a fine of Tk 20 lakh or both for committing the offence for the second time, it said.

Section 29 says a person may face up to three years in jail or a fine of Tk 5 lakh or both if he or she commits the offences stipulated in Section 499 of the Penal Code through a website or in electronic form.

He or she will face up to five years in jail or a fine of Tk 10 lakh or both for committing the offence for the second

time, it said.

Section 31 says a person may face up to seven years in prison or Tk 5 lakh in fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast something on a website or in electronic form which can spread hatred and create enmity among different groups and communities, and can cause deterioration in law and order.

Second-time offenders can be punished with up to 10 years' imprisonment or Tk 10 lakh in fine or both, it said.

According to section 32 of the proposed law, a person may face a maximum of 14 years in jail or a fine of Tk 25 lakh or both on the charges of computer or digital spying if he or she illegally enters the offices of the government, semi-government, autonomous or statutory bodies and collects or preserves or sends any top secret or secret documents through a computer, digital device, computer network, digital network or any electronic form or help others to do that.

He or she will face imprisonment up to life term or a fine of Tk 1 crore or both for committing the crimes for the second time.

According to Section 34 of the proposed law, a person may face up to 14 years in jail or Tk 1 crore or both for hacking.

Close shave

FROM PAGE 1

evacuation of the plane while four others were taken to the health center, according to reports.

There were 141 passengers on board in addition to 10 crew members.

Golam Moshi, Bangladesh ambassador to Saudi Arabia, told The Daily Star that '17 to 18' Bangladeshis who were on the plane suffered minor injuries.

"The airlines authorities are making preparations to send the Bangladeshi passengers to Dhaka through alternative arrangements," he added.

Abdurahman Al-Tayyib, spokesman of Saudia, said that SV3818 flight, which was traveling from Madinah to Dhaka, developed some malfunction of the hydraulic system at around 8:00pm local time and was therefore diverted to Jeddah airport, Al-Madinah daily reported.

The aircraft had circled over Jeddah for several hours and was forced to make two low passes, before it was allowed to land at around 10:00pm (1900 GMT), it added.

"The pilot made several attempts but failed to correct the malfunction with the front landing gear. Subsequently, the Air Bus 330 made an emergency landing with the nose gear retracted," he said.

The concerned authorities have started a probe into the accident, he added.

IS attack in Syria desert kills 26 pro-regime forces

AFP, Beirut

More than two dozen pro-government forces based in Syria's desert died in a surprise Islamic State group attack yesterday, a day after the jihadists' ouster from the outskirts of Damascus, a monitor said.

"At least 26 regime soldiers and allied forces were killed in an IS attack at dawn today, against one of their posts in the Syrian Badiya," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Among them were Iranian militiamen, said the Britain-based monitor.

The Badiya is a vast desert region stretching from central Syria to the eastern border with Iraq, where IS still holds small pockets.

Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said the attack hit a small base east of Palmyra, the famed ancient city that Islamic State (IS) has overrun twice in Syria's war.

"It began with a car bomb targeting regime forces that set off clashes that are still ongoing," he said.