

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-

Soaring land

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Land was not available at the price first

estimated, he added.

The revised project documents show that now Tk 6,224 crore has been allocated for acquiring 1,786 acres. Originally, Tk 2,853 crore had been earmarked for 1,700 acres.

Due to the delayed start of the project, the cost of construction also went up by Tk 959 crore.

The Ecneec had approved the project in May 2016 but the loan agreement with China was delayed causing late start to the project.

Late last month, the Economic Relations Division (ERD) signed a Tk 21,036 crore equivalent loan agreement with Exim Bank of China.

The railway ministry earlier this month at a press conference said the government was going to start construction in a month.

Under the project, a double rail line would be built from Dhaka to Jessor and 23km of it would be elevated.

The project would bring four districts -- Munshiganj, Shariatpur, Madaripur and Narail -- under the coverage of the railway network.

Now, it takes more than nine hours to travel the 412km from Dhaka to Khulna but once the project is done, the distance would be reduced to 213km and it would take four hours.

The Ecneec yesterday also approved 16 other projects that cost Tk 96,235 crore in total and Tk 43,221 crore of it would be foreign funds.

The Fourth Primary Education Development (PED) programme alone would cost Tk 44,654 crore, of which Tk 12,805 crore would be from 10 development partners, including the World Bank, ADB, and Jica.

Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said when the project was approved, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued some directives, including teaching primary students Bangla, English, and another language and lessons on traffic rules.

The council yesterday approved an 800-megawatt combined cycle power plant at Khulna's Rupsha that would cost Tk 8,498 crore. Three development partners, including the ADB, would finance Tk 5,987 crore.

The Ecneec also approved Tk 848 crore for the construction of a 52km walkway beside the 120km circular waterway around Dhaka. Earlier, 20km of walkway was built under the first phase of the project.

The Dhaka Wasa would develop canals to solve the capital's waterlogging problem spending Tk 550 crore approved by the Ecneec yesterday.

The project is, however, scheduled to be completed by June 2021 and it would bring no respite for city residents this monsoon.

The Ecneec also approved a shipping

vessel, 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 colonists 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.

ministry project for the development of Ashuganj container terminal port at a cost of Tk 1,293 crore.

The original project was taken up in 2011 with an estimated cost of Tk 245 crore with India footing a portion of the bill but yesterday the Ecneec cancelled the earlier project and approved as a fresh one where the cost increased about five times.

A planning ministry official said the project had earlier been taken up without detailed feasibility study and the real cost was not reflected.

India would now provide Tk 431 crore from its second line of credit.

Former NSU VC

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Prof Siddiqi founded and served as the dean of NSU business school before becoming the university's vice-chancellor and then vice-chancellor. He remained the VC for more than a decade.

He was one of the pioneers of the private university concept and made great contributions to the sector's growth and development.

The veteran professor joined as professor emeritus at Brac University after retiring from NSU a couple of years ago.

Before joining NSU, he had worked for the Institute of Business Administration, University of Dhaka, for about 21 years in various capacities including its director.

Besides, he taught for more than seven years at two American universities.

Educated in Bangladesh, the United Kingdom and United States, Prof Siddiqi had more than 50 years' experiences as teacher, researcher, international consultant and business executive.

According to his profile on Brac's website, Prof Siddiqi obtained a PhD degree from the Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, UK; an MBA from Graduate School of Business, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA; a Master of Public and International Affairs from Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA; and an MA (Economics) and BA (Honours in Economics) from Dhaka University.

He worked as an international consultant for different organizations around the world, including World Bank and Asian Development Bank, Manila. He advised many Bangladeshi government agencies on various aspects. Besides, he served voluntarily in several banks, business, social and cultural organisations.

He is the author and co-author of 13 books. His research articles were published in numerous national and international journals.

HC hearing

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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 Chaudhogram.

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 Raibhan 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 onboard 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 Agrointelli.

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.

"There must be a special arrange-

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" Peyer Ali, 24, and Sharif, 26, were killed in a "gunfight" early yesterday.

Peyer 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 20,000 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 sign a blank sheet of paper."

As Rezaul walked out of the DB office, ASI Abu Bakar 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 Bakar denied the allegation of taking money from Rezaul's family. He said Rezaul was accused in 14 cases.