

Woman 'gang-raped' in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A housewife was allegedly gang-raped by some unidentified youths at Char Sirta union in the district's Sadar upazila on Tuesday night.

The victim's husband, a tank lorry driver from Chandpur, said he has been living at a rented house in Kolapara area for four months as he works for a local refuelling station.

He drove to Dhaka on Tuesday on a trip and returned home around 1:30am yesterday.

"Entering my house, I found my wife crying. Asked about the reason, she told me about the incident," he told The Daily Star.

He said a gang of seven to eight youths broke into their house around 10:30pm on Tuesday. They tied her up and gang-raped her.

The 20-year-old housewife along with her baby boy, aged about nine months, was in the house during the

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Myanmar planned it long before ARSA attacks

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throughout August, the report said. Amid heightened tension before August 25, Myanmar media increasingly reported on alleged ARSA activity in an inflammatory manner while state-sponsored hate speech targeting the Rohingyas continued, it added.

A build-up of troops and military equipment across northern Rakhine began earlier that month, following a meeting between Rakhine politicians and the Tatmadaw commander-in-chief.

Soldiers from the 33rd and 99th Light Infantry Divisions were airlifted into Rakhine, with additional deliveries of military equipment.

"The increased presence was evident," it reads.

Soldiers took over Border Guard Police posts. Rakhine men were recruited into the security forces. There was "fast track" recruitment into the police. Local Rakhine men were mobilised and armed, the report said.

This build-up required logistical planning and time to implement and indicated that the subsequent opera-

tions were foreseen and planned.

The UN report also contains recommendations of the Mission on Myanmar.

The three-member Mission, established by the UN Human Rights Council last year, meticulously assembled hundreds of accounts of displaced Rohingyas, research, analysis, satellite footage and other information to prepare the report.

While Myanmar claimed its "clearance operations" ended on September 5 last year, military engagement continued well into October. Freedom of movement was further constrained, restricting remaining Rohingyas to their houses, with limited access to markets and livelihoods and exacerbating malnutrition.

"Humanitarian access was severely restricted or blocked. Conversely, no protection was provided to Rohingyas against vigilante attacks and the theft of property, livestock and other possessions by civilians of other ethnic groups. Sporadic attacks, including sexual violence, continued. These factors forced more Rohingya to

Bangladesh, an average rate of 1,733 per month since the beginning of 2018."

The mass displacement and burning of Rohingya villages was followed by systematic appropriation of emptied land. Bulldozers flattened, burned and damaged even surviving structures to erase trace of the Rohingyas and destroy criminal evidence.

In the place of Rohingya villages, new structures for security forces and new housing for other ethnic groups were built.

While the Government has, in principle, committed to Rohingya repatriation, nothing thus far indicates this will be in a manner ensuring respect for human rights, essential for a safe, dignified and sustainable return of the refugees from Bangladesh.

"The root causes of the exodus, including state-sanctioned oppression and an exclusionary and divisive rhetoric, are denied and continue unabated."

WHAT HAPPENED ON AUG 25

According to the report, ARSA in

the early hours launched coordinated attacks on a military base and up to 30 security force outposts across northern Rakhine State, in an apparent response to increased pressure on Rohingya communities and with the goal of global attention.

A small number of minimally-trained leaders had some arms, and a significant number of untrained villagers wielded sticks and knives. Some had improvised explosive devices. Twelve security personnel were killed.

The security forces' response, starting within hours, was immediate, brutal and grossly disproportionate. Ostensibly to eliminate the "terrorist threat" posed by ARSA, in the days and weeks that followed, it encompassed hundreds of villages across Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Raungdaw. The operations targeted and terrorised the entire Rohingya population.

Over 7 lakh Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh in the following month.

Hasina, Modi

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which will pave the way for buying and selling electricity among the seven Bimstec member states once the cross-country energy grids are put in place.

Diplomatic sources said the MoU will open the door for energy cooperation among seven South and South East Asian countries and will also facilitate promoting efficient, economic, and secure operation of power system through the development of regional electricity networks.

A senior Bangladesh foreign ministry official said, "The Bimstec member states have already finalised the MoU, and now it is ready for signing. The accord will provide a broad framework for the Bimstec members to cooperate towards implementing grid interconnections for the trade in electricity with a view to promoting rational and optimal power transmission in the Bimstec region."

The main theme of the fourth Summit is "Towards a Peaceful, Prosperous and Sustainable Bay of Bengal Region."

Dhaka hosts the secretariat of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (Bimstec).

Foreign ministry officials said apart from meeting Modi, the Bangladesh premier is also likely to hold bilateral meetings with the participating heads of state and government, including Nepalese Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli. The chief justice of Bhutan and chief adviser to the Bhutanese interim government, Dashi Tshering Wangchuk, will also call on Hasina.

It was not yet confirmed whether the Bangladesh PM would hold any bilateral meeting with Myanmar President Win Myint.

A VVIP flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines carrying the PM and her 57-member delegation will depart Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 8:00am today and is scheduled to touch down at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu at 9:15am (local time).

Briefing reporters at the foreign ministry about the Kathmandu Summit and the PM's two-day official visit, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahrar Alam yesterday said the Bimstec Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters would also be signed during the Summit, aiming to curb crimes and terrorist activities in the region and promote mutual assistance in carrying out investigations.

Replying to a question from a journalist, he said the Rohingya crisis would not affect the Bimstec process as it solely deals with economic and technical cooperation. He said Bangladesh was always mindful about the bilateral relations with other countries so that it was not harmed due to a crisis.

"One of the outcomes of this Bimstec Summit will be the signing of an MoU on grid connectivity which is already agreed to by all the member states, including Myanmar," he said.

It was unlikely that the Rohingya issue would be discussed in the Summit, Shahrar said, adding the leaders can discuss the issue during the retreat session.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali attended the Bimstec foreign ministers' meeting in Kathmandu yesterday. The previous day, Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque led a Bangladesh delegation to the senior officials' meeting.

After the Islamabad Saarc Summit scheduled for November 15-16, 2016 got stalled, India started actively pushing Bimstec as an alternative to the platform, according to diplomatic sources.

Pakistan on Sept 30, 2016 announced postponement of the Saarc Summit after India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka had pulled out of the event, indirectly blaming the host country for creating a "discouraging environment".

Soon after the postponement, India hosted the Bimstec leaders during the BRICS Outreach Summit in Goa in October 2016.

The Bimstec members are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand. It came into being on June 6, 1997, through the Bangkok Declaration.

The grouping has focused intensely on trade and investment, technology, energy, transport and communications, tourism, fisheries, agriculture, cultural cooperation, environment and natural disasters, public health, poverty alleviation, people-to-people contacts, counter-terrorism and climate change.

MODI ISSUES STATEMENT

Indian PM Narendra Modi in a statement last night said he would meet Sheikh Hasina on the sidelines of Bimstec Summit, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

"On the margins of the Bimstec Summit, I will have the opportunity to interact with the leaders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand," Modi said.

He expressed confidence that the Summit would further consolidate the progress made thus far by the seven-nation grouping and will chart the course for building a peaceful and prosperous Bay of Bengal Region.

Outrage

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Sudha Bharadwaj, who has been fighting for the rights of workers in parts of India such as Chhattisgarh where left-wing guerrilla groups operate, said the action against her was part of a broader crackdown on opponents of the government.

"The effort is whatever is the opposition to this regime, whether it is workers rights, tribal rights, everybody who in the opposition is being rounded up," she told reporters outside her home in Faridabad, a short distance from New Delhi.

The homes of other activists and lawyers were raided as part of the investigation. Five other people were detained in June.

Police have been investigating violence between low-caste Dalits and upper-caste groups following a political meeting near Pune on December 31 last year.

The Press Trust of India news agency quoted police as saying the five detained Tuesday had links to the meeting.

It also quoted security officials as saying that "two letters, purportedly exchanged by Maoist leaders indicating plans to assassinate Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP president Amit Shah and Home Minister Rajnath Singh, led to the police action."

The government did not immediately comment on the case. But Congress leader Gandhi led critics of Modi, whose right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party will seek re-election next year, accusing the government of seeking to silence its opponents.

"There is only place for one NGO in India and it's called the RSS," Gandhi said on Twitter, referring to the BJP's ideological Hindu nationalist backer, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

"Shut down all other NGOs. Jail all activists and shoot those that complain. Welcome to the new India."

Booker-prize winning author Arundhati Roy, an outspoken critic of Modi, said the arrests were an attempt to muzzle freedoms ahead of next year's polls.

"We cannot allow this to happen. We have to all come together.

Otherwise we will lose every freedom that we cherish," she said, according to the Scroll news portal.

The Indian sections of Amnesty International and Oxfam released a joint statement calling the sweep "disturbing" and questioning whether the five had been detained for their rights work.

The latest wave of raids is "the second of such crackdowns on rights activists, advocates and journalists who have been critical of the state," said Aakar Patel, executive director of Amnesty International India.

"All these people have a history of working to protect the rights of some of India's most poor and marginalised people."

In July, Reporters Without Borders warned of deteriorating press freedom in the world's largest democracy amid a sharp rise in online hate campaigns directed at critics of Modi's Hindu nationalist government.

"It is sad that the government is arresting people who have been working on human rights," Prashant Bhushan, one of India's most prominent lawyers and activists told journalists after yesterday's court hearing.

"The court asked that they be kept under house arrest until the government submit their responses for the next hearing," Bhushan added.

A small demonstration was staged in central New Delhi ahead of yesterday's hearing.

"We are here today because we are fighting against the fascist and imperialist policies of this government," Aparna, president of the left-wing Indian Federation of Trade Unions told AFP.



UN Secretary General António Guterres addresses a meeting of the UN Security Council at the UN headquarters in New York. He called for accountability for the "horrendous persecution" of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.

PHOTO: PERMANENT MISSION OF BANGLADESH TO THE UN

No excuse for delaying solution

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crackdown, the UN chief said it was clear that conditions were not yet met for the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees to their places of origin or choice.

Sweden and the Netherlands, two temporary members of the UNSC organ, urged the Security Council to refer the crimes to the International Criminal Court.

But China and the Russian Federation, two permanent members of the Security Council with close ties to Myanmar government, said the international community should stop putting pressure on Myanmar and let its government work out the repatriation of the Rohingya refugees with Bangladesh as soon as possible.

They argued that the crisis required a long-term, patient approach, and must be resolved through bilateral diplomatic efforts.

Guterres, recounting his experience of visiting the Rohingya camps last month, said that he has heard stories of horrendous persecution and suffering.

"One father broke down as he told me how his son was shot dead in front of him. His mother was brutally murdered and his house burned to the ground. He took refuge in a mosque only to be discovered by soldiers who abused him and burned the Quran," he said.

The secretary general expressed concern regarding the dramatic humanitarian and human rights situations and also mentioned the risks to regional peace and security.

He said that despite the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the Myanmar authorities and UN agencies in June, the country's leaders did not invest in reconstruction, reconciliation and respect for human rights necessary for all com-

munities to live improved and resilient lives in Rakhine State.

Guterres' call for action was amplified by famed actress Cate Blanchett, a UN goodwill ambassador for refugees, who said the focus of all the efforts must be to provide much-needed support inside Bangladesh while working to ensure conditions in Myanmar are conducive to [their] return.

Addressing the UN Security Council, US Ambassador Nikki Haley said, "The world can no longer avoid the difficult truth of what happened," adding that the world was watching to see whether the Security Council would take action and hold those responsible for the violence to account.

Sweden's deputy UN ambassador Carl Skau went further, saying, "the gravity of the atrocities committed by the Myanmar security forces," reinforced his country's call for the Rohingya situation to be referred to the ICC, the world's permanent war crimes tribunal.

"We believe it is time to move forward and we need to consult among council members on a resolution to this end," he said and stressed that the international community must shoulder its responsibility.

Tariq Mahmood Ahmad, British Minister of State for the Commonwealth and United Nations, who presided over the Security Council session, said the Council had a duty to ensure that Rakhine State's Rohingya population received justice and the prospect of a peaceful future.

"The Council must be prepared to use the full range of tools at its disposal to exert pressure on relevant parties, including the Burmese military," he said.

The crisis would not be solved over-

night or without clear action from the Council, he emphasised. "We need to be acting," he said while appealing to Council members to set their differences aside and act in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter and for the sake of humanity.

Myanmar's UN Ambassador U Hau Do Suan said the government refused to cooperate with the investigation because of concerns about its "impartiality." He added that the report's release on the eve of the council meeting "raises serious questions about [its] objectivity, impartiality and sincerity."

China's deputy UN Ambassador Wu Haitao told the council Myanmar and Bangladesh should solve "the Rakhine issue" bilaterally, and the priority now was to start repatriating the Rohingyas as soon as possible.

"There should not be any precondition," he said. "Issues such as freedom of movement and citizenship should be solved gradually during the repatriation process." The international community should focus on alleviating poverty in Rakhine, "continue to be patient" and promote dialogue between Myanmar and Bangladesh, Wu added.

Russia's UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzia called for "a balanced and non-confrontational approach," and said the "deep problems" in Rakhine should be solved through "peaceful and diplomatic means". He also expressed hope that all parties would act with restraint.

But Bangladesh's UN Ambassador Masud Bin Momen said every week there was new evidence of the "persecution and dehumanisation" of the Rohingyas and urged the Security Council to respond to the emerging evidence of "atrocious crimes" against them.

Trial reaches last stage

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leader Abdus Salam Pintu's Dhanmondi residence" were not proved.

Moreover, the charges of supplying and detonating grenades were not proved and therefore his client should be acquitted of the charges, Nazrul added.

The prosecution and the defence took a combined total of 113 working days to complete the arguments which started from October 23 last year. The prosecution took 25 days while the defence took 88 days.

A total of 225 prosecution witnesses and 20 defence witnesses testified during the proceedings.

On August 21, 2004, a grenade attack killed twenty-four leaders and activists of

the AL and its associate bodies and injured over 300 others.

Ivy Rahman, the then Mohila AL president and also the wife of late President Zillur Rahman, was among the deceased.

The then AL Chief and current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped with an ear injury.

Later, two cases -- one for murder and another under the Explosive Substance Act -- were filed with Motijheel Police Station.

In March 2012, the tribunal framed charges against the accused in the two cases.

Of the 49 accused, eight, including three former inspector generals of police, are now on bail; eighteen, including BNP Senior Vice Chairman Tarique Rahman,

are on the run; and twenty-three, including Babar and Pintu, are in jail.

Following the attack, government high-ups tried to bury the truth and protect the masterminds by derailing the investigation.

But during the rule of the last caretaker government, led by Fakhruddin Ahmed, a new Criminal Investigation Department (CID) official was given the charge of a fresh probe in July 2007.

On June 11, 2008, the CID submitted a charge sheet accusing 22, including Huji leader Mufit Hannan and former deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu.

It also hinted at the involvement of some government and security officials.

After the AL assumed power, the prose-

cution on June 22, 2009, sought further investigation to identify the grenade suppliers and the patrons of the attack.

On August 3, 2009, the court ordered the probe and a new CID official was assigned to the case.

Finally in July, 2011, the CID submitted a supplementary charge sheet, which pointed to a collaboration between the militant outfit Huji, a section of influential BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami leaders, and senior officials of the home ministry, police, Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), National Security Intelligence (NSI) and the Prime Minister's Office in the attack.