

# From misery to misery

By Farid Hossain back from Cox's Bazar

Thousands of Rohingya Muslims are arriving in Bangladesh every day to live a life of misery with disease and hunger being spawned in ill-equipped refugee camps. But they don't seem to care.

The refugees are happy to have escaped what they say is a systematic brutal oppression by the Myanmar (Burma) soldiers in Arakan, a predominantly Muslim province in western Myanmar.

"We have escaped the barbarians. Now in Bangladesh we will be able to live in peace," said Gulfaraz Begum, 50, who reached Teknaf last weekend in a rickety wooden boat crossing the Naf river with 200 others.

Gulfaraz and her group from Naikongdong village in Arakan's Buthidong thana said they trekked through forests and mountains for six days to reach Bangladesh.

According to the refugees, their number is increasing by at least 5,000 a day as Myanmar's military government has unleashed a pogrom to purge Arakan of its predominant Muslim population of 3 million.

About 130,000 Rohingyas have fled Arakan since the exodus began in March last year and they all tell the same stories: the soldiers are conscripting the men for forced labour, raping the women and shooting those who disobey.

It is difficult to verify their stories independently but the grim statistics underlay the refugees' hair-raising tales of atrocities.

Dr Abu Hanif at the Rabita hospital near Duchiapalong camp said they treated a 2-year-old boy for burn injuries on the face. Villagers who brought the boy said soldiers poured hot water on him because the child was crying while they were trying to rape his mother at an Arakan village near Mangdwe.

The atrocities are aimed at evicting the Rohingya Muslims from the region that has been their homeland since the 7th century. They are called Rohingyas, a term derived from Rohang, the ancient name of Arakan, an independent Muslim kingdom until the 18th century.

The Rohingyas claim to be the descendants of Arabs, Moors, Pathans, Moguls and Bangladeshis and speak a local dialect known as Rohingya, a mixture of Arabic, Persian Urdu and Bengali.

Persian was the official language of Arakan during the Muslim rule.

According to Rohingya his-

torians Arakan was conquered by Burmans in 1784 and consequently by Britain in 1824 and by Burmans again in 1948 when Burma, the old name of Myanmar, gained independence. Since then the Rohingyas have been subjected to religious and political discrimination by Burmans, the ruling community.

That's why the Myanmar junta has now renewed its campaign against Rohingyas saying, they are illegal immigrants, a claim denounced by the United Nations.

"The soldiers come and tell us, 'you are Muslims. Go to your homeland', Bangladesh," said Abul Hashem, a refugee.

To gain this objective Myanmar, seems to be pursuing a policy of persecuting the Rohingyas so that they leave their homes. "Conscription for forced labour is a major component of this policy."

This is reflected in the composition of the refugees, majority of them being women and children as many men have already been conscripted.

The practice of polygamy is said to be another reason of women and children's outnumbering the men. There are men who have as many as 20 children from more than one wife.

Most of the refugees are landless poor with the middle class and affluent Rohingyas staying behind.

They are impoverished, hungry, diseased, malnourished and illiterate. Nearly all the children are unimmunized.

"It's a pity that Burma has ignored so many of its citizens for so many years," said a UNHCR official watching the caravans of homeless people scattered along the rugged plains and hills stretching from Ukhlia to Cox's Bazar.

The extreme poverty has perhaps made Myanmar's task of eviction easier.

The refugees arriving on the muddy banks of Teknaf take a short break before climbing the Bangladesh hills, hardly looking back at the land they left.



Refugees waiting for shelter.

—Star photo



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at an Iftar party arranged by Army officers at the Senakunja yesterday. —PID photo

## Private limited cos

From Page 1 Col 8

Taka 50 lakh without prior permission of the government. Under the new provision of the law, excepting the banks, insurance and the non-banking financial institutions, there will be no restriction in withdrawing capital in case of the privately owned limited companies. However, in case of public limited companies the existing law will prevail.

As per the Act of 1947, any company required prior permission from the Controller of Capital Issues, for giving bonus or right of share. The government has exempted all companies from this rule of the law.

The provision for taking prior permission as compulsory.

## Golam Azam

From Page 1 Col 7

are not at all afraid, but the issue (trial) will not remain confined to Golam Azam only, rather it might become a threat to the country's existence.

Nizami, however, did not rule out the possibility of foreign involvement in trumpeting the trial but did not specify.

Terming the party a 'power though little, Nizami said futile attempts to agitate people against the Jamaat would not yield any fruit to anyone.

Nizami urged all to follow the universal code of democracy and called for united efforts to consolidate it.

Referring to the party's firm belief in the democratic process, the Jamaat leader said that it did not have any vendetta against anyone, and called upon all to do politics following the universal rules and norms of democracy.

He further added that the Jamaat did not believe in the politics of annihilation because 'Prophet Muhammad and Islam direct us to think about the welfare of people'.

Prof Yusuf Ali, Quamruzzaman, Abdul Kader Mollah, Sheikh Ansar Ali, Prof Mujibur Rahman and Ali Ahsan Mujahid were among others present at the press conference.

## Indo-Bangla border meeting March 18

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Mar 9: A Deputy Director General (DDG) level meeting between the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and the Border Security Force (BSF) will begin here on March 18, officials sources said.

Brig Khairul Bashar will lead the meeting on the part of Bangladesh while Shankar Sen, Additional Director General of (BSF) Calcutta and Tripura will lead the 12-member Indian delegation.

The Sector Commanders of Khulna, Kushtia, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Sylhet Comilla and Khagrachari will also participate in the meeting.

The meeting will discuss on the dispute over catching fish at Talpatti island area, reconstruction of the border walls and other border disputes.

When the report is made, we will consider providing help to the refugees in an appropriate manner, the spokesman said, adding that the Japanese Red Cross has already donated 9.4 million yen (72,300 dollars) to the International Red Cross for the relief of the refugees.

He did not elaborate on how Japan would help the refugees. UNHCR Sadako Ogata, a Japanese, launched Monday an emergency international appeal for 27.5 million dollars in assistance.

Malaysia broke ranks with other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) over the weekend to seek and end to the alleged military oppression.

UNB from Cox's Bazar says: Relief officials have registered nearly 100,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar until Monday while about 30,000 new arrivals were still in the queue awaiting registration, officials here said.

## Humayun Rashid clarifies position on passports

From Page 1 Col 7

1971 stood for socialism but shifted to 'mixed economy' in its election manifesto in 1991. The need for further liberalisation of the party's economic policy was felt in the wake of changed global perspective.

Sources close to the meeting told UNB that the committee, which began deliberation on the draft proposals on Monday, also discussed the party's economic policy with country's eminent economists, including Prof Rehman Sobhan and Dr. Anisur Rahman.

They said that before finalising the policy, the Awami League leaders would

also exchange views with members of the Task Force that was constituted by the Caretaker Government of Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed.

One of the draft proposals presented by Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser and discussed at the Working Committee meeting on Monday suggested that the country's economic philosophy be 'welfare economy' and the means of implementing the programmes to be mixed economy.

Kaiser, party's Economic and Planning Affairs Secretary, advocated for determining the priority of the public and private sectors on the basis of national and social utility.

Another report adds: Awami League Joint Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday demanded immediate repeal of the Indemnity Ordinance to clear the way for trial of the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Addressing a workers' meeting at Savar Thana Awami League office yesterday afternoon, he also called for holding trial of 'war criminal' Golam Azam to protect the country's independence and sovereignty, says a party press release.

## Customs officials raid city markets

From Page 1 Col 8

Mohammed Moksed and Abul Kashem, witnesses said. The clash ensued when local businessmen at Basatpur confined an alleged BDR informant during a quarrel over payment for 35 bags of kintil, reportedly smuggled in from India.

Sources at the 2nd Rifle Battalion Headquarters here admitted the incident and stated that members of 35 Battalion from Satkhira were involved in the clash.

Our Staff Correspondent adds: Khulna Sector Commander of Bangladesh Rifles said that the BDR personnel had to defend themselves when they were gheraoed and attacked by the smugglers with the help of villagers.

They fired blank shots and no one was hurt in the BDR action, Col Anwar Hossain told The Daily Star.

He said that the BDR men left the spot immediately after recovering the smuggled goods.

## Woman police officer robbed

From Page 1 Col 5

alternative measures during the strike, an official of the DCC said adding that the cleanliness programme was continuing under the system. Measures have also been taken to put the street lights on at night during the strike, he added.

Meanwhile, the DCC has directed the employees of the corporation to join their duties immediately.

A DCC press release said that the corporation had directed some 1000 master roll employees to join their duties by today (Wednesday).

If they failed to join duties, legal actions would be taken against them, the press release added.

An official of the DCC said that the employees were trying to make some seven million city dwellers hostage during the month of Ramadan.

He said that the authorities would take all possible measure to maintain the emergency services.

A source of the 'poua federation' which called the strike complained that the intransigence of the authorities forced the employees to go on strike.

Our staff correspondent from Chittagong and Khulna add: The strike of corporation employees continued for the second day Tuesday in the Port City of Chittagong and in Khulna.

The employees brought out processions during office hours outside their offices. In Khulna the employees locked the main gate of the corporation office on Tuesday.

## 23 injured

From Page 1 Col 8

Foreign office sources say, the government is comparing the numbers of the passports once held by Chowdhury and his wife with that found in the possession of a Bangladeshi in Tokyo.

The clarification issued by Chowdhury says, "For over three years since my resigning from the government I have travelled on two successive passports. The first passport I obtained in lieu of my surrendered diplomatic passport was an ordinary green passport where my profession was shown as 'member of parliament'."

"This passport I surrendered on my ceasing to be a member of parliament and obtained a fresh passport where my profession was shown as a retired government servant. It was this passport that was taken from my possession by the Special Branch in connection with some government business. I was assured by a Mr Kibria of the Special Branch that the passports would be returned within a couple of days. This happened on the 24th of February, 1992."

"On March 3, 1992 I wrote to the Home Minister requesting return of the passports in view of my impending treatment abroad. I again wrote to the Home Minister on March 7, 1992 informing him that I had found receipts issued to me by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in respect of the surrendered diplomatic passports and enclosed photocopies of the same."

Chowdhury expected that his statement will remove any possible misconception arising from 'The Daily Star' report."

## F Kabir Chowdhury dead

From Page 1 Col 3

to the Secretary of the Finance Division of the Ministry of Finance, the Governor of the Bangladesh Bank and to the Managing Directors of the banks and concerned financial institutions requesting them to take necessary measures in this regard.

The banks and financial institutions are Bangladesh Shilpa Bank (BSB), Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha (BSRS), Bangladesh Krishi Bank (BKB), Sonali Bank, Agrani Bank, Janata Bank, Rupali Bank, Pubali Bank and Uttara Bank.

The body on sick industries has so far received 1767 applications from the entrepreneurs and over 150 entrepreneurs were sued by the concerned banks and financial institutions for not repaying the overdue loans.

The body in the meantime has finalised its recommendations for the rehabilitation of the sick units of four sectors. The sectors are: jute, rubber, steel and engineering and printing and packaging.

The recommendations regarding the rest of the sectors are likely to be finalised by the current month.

## Sick industry DPRK freighter

From Page 1 Col 7

strongly protested against the transfer of the improved Scuds from Korea to the Middle East and had demanded that the shipment be halted.

Administration officials said last week that the White House was trying to decide whether to stop Korean ships headed for Iran, possibly with missiles destined for Syria and Iran. Those missiles would put Israel at greater risk of an attack from the two countries, they said.

## Employees storm CMCH director's office

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 10: A group of employees Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) on Tuesday attacked and ransacked the office of the Director of the Hospital (CMCH) protesting alleged irregularities in recruiting some class III and class IV employees.

Employees of the hospital, who were protesting against the recruitment of some class III and class IV employees, stormed the office of the Director of the Hospital (CMCH) on Tuesday.

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# UNHCR appeals for funds

From Page 1 Col 5

the district authorities out of local materials. According to latest official estimates, 1 lakh 20 thousand Myanmar Muslims have so far crossed into Bangladesh and the unofficial figure will run up to 1 lakh 50 thousand.

The situation is worsening as the influx is continuing at the rate of 5,000 to 6,000 every day.

Eleven camps have so far been constructed in the districts of Cox's Bazar and Bandarban to accommodate the refugees, thousands of whom are living on their own under twig and thatched shelters.

The World Health Organisation has also donated health kits for the refugees.

BSS reports: Only a quarter of the over 1,10,000 refugees have been given shelter in a total of ten camps in Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts, an UNHCR press release said here yesterday.

Nine of these camps are operative in Cox's Bazar and one in Nalkhyanchhari under Bandarban district. Besides "thousands of people are putting up their own shelters made of leaves and twigs," the press release added.

Narrating pitiable condition of the refugees, the UNHCR said as thousands of refugees are stranded on the roadside awaiting registration and shelter, the UNHCR High Commissioner Sadako Ogata has requested the Government for land to establish necessary additional camps.

The UNHCR press release said the request of Sadako Ogata for land to establish additional camps had been placed before the Prime Minister.

The UNHCR said she had responded positively and a site known as Nayapara has been proposed on the stretch of

road between Cox's Bazar and Teknaf. The UNHCR engineers and water experts would visit there on Thursday in order to assess the suitability of the site.

Ogata has expressed her distress at the plight of the refugees. She has also written to the Myanmar authorities informing them of the UN body's concern. Though UNHCR has no political mandate, the press release quoted its Director of Regional Bureau for Asia and Oceania, Jamshid Anvar, stating at a press conference earlier this week: "If every government in the world begins tracing the origins of its ethnic minorities to centuries ago and sending them back, we would have complete chaos."

It also lauded the UNICEF's role for ameliorating the water problem. The UNICEF is running feeding centres in several camps and distributed eight medical kits. OXFAM has also offered to donate five metric tonnes of biscuits.

Considering the continuing influx of the refugees, the Government is also planning to construct a huge camp with capacity to accommodate 100,000 people.

BSS from Cox's Bazar reports: Death toll in different refugee camps here rose to 35. Seven persons died during the last three days.

According to local authorities over 25,000 people have been attacked with various diseases like diarrhoea, malaria, dysentery, and gastroenteritis.

According to refugees reaching here, at least 10 Rohingyas were killed on Friday last in a communal clash with rival community at Sikderpara in Mangdow township.

BSS in Dhaka reports: The Commission of the European Communities has approved a

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City Juba League President Hashem Bhuiya addressing a protest rally against suspension of central Juba League Secretary Mostafa Mohsin Montu in front of the Awami League central office yesterday. —Star photo