

'Abnormal' situation in Cox's Bazar Rohingya camp

Govt, WFP officials supplying ration to 8,000 refugees thru' camp supervisors

RAFIQ HASAN, back from Cox's Bazar

An 'abnormal' situation has been prevailing in Kutupalong Rohingya camp here for about a month.

The situation was created after a field officer of the WFP (World Food Programme) named Mehnaz Khan was allegedly manhandled by a group of young refugees in the camp while he was taking snaps of empty bags of ration on September 23, according to sources in a nearby police camp.

Since then over 8,000 refugees in the camp have been receiving their weekly rations through Majhis (camp supervisors).

Government officials or representatives of donor agencies responsible for supplying food and other relief goods to refugees, stopped entering the camp fearing further attack or being mishandled.

Alleging regular misappropriation of ration by WFP field workers, a group of young refugees refrained Mehnaz from taking snapshots of the bags. They also allegedly snatched away his camera.

The unpleasant situation happened out of frustration and a sense of insecurity among themselves, police sources told this correspondent. Besides, complaining of inadequate ration, they alleged pressure from Bangladesh government for their 'forced repatriation' without

ensuring 'safety and security of their lives, according to sources in the police camp'.

Last month's attack on the WFP staffer had been an outburst of their anger, sources added.

Since happening of the unpleasant incident, they enforced strikes in eight schools and closed down a sewing camp for women refugees in the camp.

A powerful group of young refugees reportedly held clandestine meetings and provoked refugees to go for agitation for implementation of their 'various demands.' Previously young Rohingyas became violent and attacked government officials,' a police officer in the nearby police camp told The Daily Star.

Some refugees, however, declined happening of any such incidents in recent past. They also denied brewing up of any agitation in the camp. 'We want peace in our homeland before returning there,' said Nurul Haque Imam of a makeshift mosque in the camp.

'We urge the government of Bangladesh and the UN (United Nations) not to push back us to our homeland without ensuring security and safety of our lives,' he said.

Another young refugee Mohammad Amin told The Daily Star there had been misunderstandings over the repatriation issue between young and old groups in the camp.

Most often old groups created

pressure on us for repatriation without ensuring security and safety of our lives, he alleged. 'You know, young Rohingyas are the main target of the Myanmar authorities as they revolved against their injustice.'

'We would never go back home without ensuring peace over there,' Amin said.

They described horrific stories of torture, murder and rape by the Myanmar military rulers in Arakan to newsmen.

Police cautioned a group of visiting journalists here last week to restrain themselves from going deep inside the camp.

'We came here because they (NASAKA) killed our sons, brothers and raped our girls,' Jalal Ahmed, 50, told the journalists. He had been living in a makeshift house outside the camp along with his eight-member family for last eight years.

Jalal and his family members are not registered refugees, camp officials told media men.

Hundreds of illegal migrants are living beside the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf Road. There are many unofficial Rohingya camps in the area where hundreds of illegal migrants are living for years together, officials disclosed.

Insecurity, fear of torture by NASAKA forces are the main reason of their staying back, told another migrant Amin.

However, local people and district administrations are very annoyed

with the refugees. While talking to this correspondent, acting deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar blamed the refugees for deterioration of the law and order in the district.

A section of Rohingyas, particularly illegal migrants, have been involved with theft, robbery and other crimes, alleged an official of the district administration.

The number of Rohingyas here would be not less than a lakh, although there are about 20,000 registered refugees in two camps, Kutupalong in Ukhia and Nayapara in Teknaf,' superintendent of police (SP) Syed Ashfaq Uddin Ahmed disclosed to reporters.

He alleged that illegal migrants had been responsible for deforestation, hill cutting and ecological imbalance in the district.

The repatriation process came to a halt during the last one year due to unwillingness of refugees to return home, according to government officials. The last group of 905 Rohingya refugees repatriated in August last year.

About 2.5 lakh Rohingya refugees took shelter in Bangladesh in 1991 following crackdown on them by Myanmar military junta in Arakan.

Many of them repatriated after an accord signed between the two countries in 1992. But a good number of them are still staying back in Bangladesh.



PHOTO: STAR

A procession was brought out by the hungry people in Nilphamari on Thursday. After the procession they laid a siege to the Deputy Commissioner's office and demanded of the government to declare the entire district a 'Monga' affected area. Awami League organised the programme.

Sanitation: Social mobilisation on Big meeting followed by colourful procession at Rajbari

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Social mobilisation is going on in full swing to achieve cent per cent sanitation coverage by the year 2010.

As part of the move, a big colourful procession was brought out in Rajbari town on Tuesday. The procession also marked the National Sanitation Month October 2004.

It was jointly organised by Rajbari UP (Union Parishad) and Dishari, a Decentralised Total Sanitation Project being implemented in collaboration with Water and Sanitation Programme of World Bank, Dhaka Ahsania Mission and Plan Bangladesh, according to a press release.

Representatives of local government bodies, Gram Sarkar, teachers, students of schools and madrassas, representatives of government, development organisations and people of all walks of life took part in the procession.

Earlier, a big meeting was held at Rajbari High School where Gazipur deputy commissioner (DC) M Fazle Rabbi addressed as chief guest.

Unocal distributed 3,301 uniforms among students of 12 primary schools in Moulvibazar. The schools are Rushtumpur Primary School, Kakiabazar Primary School, Digapara Madhu Mia Primary School, West Baraura Primary School, Alisharkul Primary School, Satgaon Primary School, Laikui Primary School, Kashimpur Primary School and Garoline Primary School. The schools are situated along the pipeline route of Unocal's Moulvibazar Natural Gas Project.

HSC talents honoured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Prothom Alo, a major national daily, on Wednesday accorded a reception to meritorious students for scoring GPA-5 in the last HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) examination at a ceremony held at Rajshahi District Council auditorium.

Former vice chancellor of Rajshahi University Dr Saidur Rahman Khan

attended the ceremony as chief guest where students' guardians and college teachers were present.

Prothom Alo Bandhu Shava president Hasib Panna chaired the occasion while former principal of New Government Degree College Zobdul Haque, social worker Zamat Khan, cultural personality Sukhen Mukhopadhyay, PA official Saiful Azim and students Rokonuzzaman and Marufa Khatun addressed, among others.



A colourful procession aiming at mobilising people to help implement cent per cent sanitation coverage was brought out in Rajbari town on Tuesday. Rajbari UP (Union Parishad) and Dishari, a Decentralised Total Sanitation Project being implemented by Water and sanitation Programme of World Bank, Plan Bangladesh and Dhaka Ahsania Mission, jointly organised it.

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