



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT ... Two BGB personnel prevent a group of Rohingyas from entering Bangladesh from Tumbru at no-man's land near Ghumdhum. A group of women approaching an unregistered camp in Ukhia. On the hills of Ghumdhum, some Rohingya refugees set up makeshift camps while waiting for permission to come down to the main camp. An hour after entering Bangladesh, a Rohingya family is seen on a rickshaw. A devastated and exhausted Rohingya woman rests her forehead against her hand.

PHOTO:
ANISUR RAHMAN

Shaken, they tell of horror they've fled

FROM PAGE 1
with umbrellas, polythene sheets, bamboo sticks and shocking tales of a persecution at the hands of their own government.

Visiting the Ghumdhum border area, where the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) has gathered around 2500 Rohingyas, our staff photographer Anisur Rahman saw a few hundred of them, from all walks

of life, waiting at the zero point, under tents they made using polythene sheets and bamboo.

"They killed my husband," said one of the women when asked about the situation in Myanmar.

"We have a two storied house there, but we had to run away to save our lives, leaving everything behind," said a middle aged woman who identified herself as Mamta Begum, who hails from a

nearby village. Mamta Begum is just one of many ill fated individuals who were seeking refuge from a horrifying fate.

On the other side of the border, a few thousands were waiting for the right moment to cross the border and enter Bangladesh. Around seven to eight hundred more people were waiting at the zero point. Most of them were women and children.

Of the ones that did make it across the border, some were seen carrying only the most basic essentials in plastic bags. Most of them though came empty handed.

Whoever this journalist asked about what happened in Myanmar, they gave horrifying accounts of their houses being burned and being shot at sight, of entire villages razed to the ground and whole neighbourhoods being pillaged.

On the way to Ghumdhum yesterday morning, this correspondent found many small groups of Rohingya women wearing muddied Burqas, waiting by the roadside, under the shade of trees. A glance upon them and anybody would understand that these people crossed the border the night before.

Speaking to local people, it came to light that some of the newly arrived Rohingyas wanted to enter the Balukhali

unregistered Rohingya camp. But residents of Balukhali camp did not allow them.

Now they did not know where to go.

Local Bangladeshi citizens feared that this time the situation would be worse than last year. They said that they had never seen so many people waiting so desperately to cross the border. Doing their part, the locals were helping them with food and water.

Rohingyas pouring in

FROM PAGE 1
Addressing a press conference at Ghumdhum Border Observation Post yesterday, BGB Director General Maj Gen Abul Hossain also said, "We are on high alert. We will not allow anyone from Myanmar to intrude into Bangladesh."

POPE FOR ROHINGYAS

Pope Francis yesterday appealed for an end to the violent persecution of the Rohingya population in Myanmar, the Vatican Radio wrote yesterday.

Speaking to pilgrims and tourists in St Peter's Square at the Vatican, he said, "Sad news has reached us of the persecution of our Rohingya brothers and sisters, a religious minority. I would like to express my full closeness to them -- and let all of us ask the Lord to save them, and to raise up men and women of good will to help them, who shall give them their full rights."

Quoting a senior Vatican source, Reuters earlier reported that Pope Francis will almost certainly visit Myanmar and Bangladesh, two coun-

tries caught up in a crisis over the Rohingyas, before the end of the year.

The trip is likely to take place between the end of November and the start of December but definitely before Christmas, the source added. The Vatican has so far officially said only that a trip to both countries is "under study".

A Vatican team is visiting both countries to sort out details and report back to the pope, who will make the final decision, Reuters wrote on August 23.

INDIA'S CONCERN

India has said it is "seriously concerned" by reports of renewed violence and attacks by terrorists in northern Rakhine province of Myanmar and hoped that perpetrators of the crimes will be brought to justice.

"We are deeply saddened at the loss of lives among members of the Myanmar security forces," said a statement of India's external affairs ministry issued late on Saturday evening.

Extending "strong support" to Myanmar government "at this chal-

lenging moment", it read, "Such attacks deserve to be condemned in the strongest possible terms. We hope that the perpetrators of these crimes will be brought to justice."

The statement came ahead of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposed visit to Myanmar on his way to China to attend the BRICS Summit in the first week of September, reported our New Delhi correspondent.

Meanwhile, Myanmar government has evacuated at least 4,000 non-Muslim villagers amid ongoing clashes in northwestern Rakhine state, the government said.

The death toll from the violence that erupted on Friday with coordinated attacks by Rohingya insurgents has climbed to 98, including some 80 insurgents and 12 members of the security forces, reports Reuters.

The clashes, the worst since at least October, have prompted the government to evacuate staff and thousands of non-Muslim villagers from the area.

Fighting involving the military and

hundreds of Rohingya across northwestern Rakhine continued on Saturday with the fiercest clashes taking place on the outskirts of the major town of Maungdaw, according to residents and the government.

The attacks marked a dramatic escalation of a conflict that has simmered in the region since last October, when a similar but much smaller Rohingya attack prompted a brutal military operation beset by allegations of serious human rights abuses.

As the latest violence in Rakhine triggered a fresh inflow of Rohingyas towards Bangladesh, about 2,000 to 2,500 of them entered Naikhyangchhari on Saturday evening.

They were condoned off by BGB members so that they cannot proceed further into the country. Locals, however, extended a helping hand to the refugees with food, water and other life-saving materials.

Panel Chairman of Ghumdhum Union Parishad Kamal Uddin said if not guarded, the refugees will take

shelter in nearby Balukhali and Kutupalong camps.

Quoting a BGB commander, AFP reported that 20 Rohingyas were caught yesterday and sent back.

The country has been hosting up to 5,00,000 Rohingyas for three decades. Around 33,000 of them are registered and live in two camps in Cox's Bazar. Others live in different areas of Cox's Bazar and Chittagong.

After Myanmar armed forces launched a counterinsurgency operation following attacks on security personnel in Rakhine State in October last year, more than 75,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh.

FOUR OTHER INJURED

AT CMCH

Four more injured Rohingyas were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) yesterday.

They are Ziabul, 27, son of Nuruzzaman; Md Elias, 20, son of Hamid Hossain; Md Toha, 16, son of Hossen Ahmed, and Mubarak Hossain, 25, son of Nabi Hossain, said Assistant

Sub-Inspector Allauddin, of CMCH Police Outpost.

All of them are bullet-hit and from Maungdaw town in Rakhine State, he added.

"Mubarak Hossain was admitted to CMCH around 3:30pm yesterday and the rest came in the early hours," the ASI added. "The condition of Elias is critical as he suffered bullet injuries in his shoulder and head."

They entered Bangladesh through several points of Bandarban border. They received primary treatment at Kutupalong before being shifted to CMCH.

With the four, the total number of injured Rohingyas admitted to CMCH stands at six.

Mohammad Musa, 23, who suffered bullet wounds while fleeing alleged police action in his village in Rakhine State, died at CMCH on Saturday morning.

Nobody's people

FROM PAGE 1
at least two events. In March this year, China, backed by Russia, blocked a UN Security Council statement on Myanmar. Just a month before, the UN human rights office had accused the country's military of mass killing and rape of Rohingya Muslims.

The short draft press statement was to stress the importance of humanitarian access to all affected areas in Myanmar.

And then in May, when Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's ruling party chief, met Chinese President Xi Jinping, she was assured that China would continue helping Myanmar achieve internal peace process. No concerns were raised, at least not publicly, about the Rohingyas, the continued violence on whom now shatters the country's "internal peace".

Today, China is truly a world power and holds the key to peaceful future of the region. It also has a big influence on Myanmar. When this mighty country shows such a lenient and supportive attitude towards Myanmar, the plights of the Rohingyas look bleak.

China today leads the world in many a good cause, from fighting climate change to saving endangered

species and implementing mega projects for building communication network to connect China and the world under the One Belt, One Road initiative. Therefore, its role in Myanmar looks puzzling.

The other Southeast Asian neighbours who had been sitting on the fence so far have also realised the danger that a rootless people pose. The Kofi Annan Commission has clearly highlighted that "the northern Rakhine state may provide fertile ground for radicalisation, as local communities may become increasingly vulnerable to recruitment by extremists".

In May, Thailand hosted a regional conference to discuss the Rohingya issue that was participated by the foreign ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. However, a defiant Myanmar refused to send any representative.

Their main concern was the boatpeople from Myanmar who are fleeing persecution. They do not want these "stateless" people at their door. Violating international laws, they have warded off the boats from landing. Only the Philippines, despite being so far away from the epicenter of the genocide, has announced that it would allow the

Rohingyas in.

Before the Thailand meeting, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in an extraordinary conference of foreign ministers of its member countries in Kuala Lumpur in January urged Myanmar to ensure that the security forces act in accordance with the rule of law and that all perpetrators of acts of violence be held accountable.

It urged the Myanmar government to abide by its obligations under international laws, international humanitarian laws and human rights covenants and take all necessary measures to stop the violence and discrimination against Rohingyas.

So international actions stopped short of any effective steps to help the refugees and to give them shelters even as the persecution goes unabated.

And so Rohingya influx into Bangladesh continued, because we are their closest neighbour. Since the last macabre killings, rape and looting in October last year, nearly 100,000 Rohingyas have crossed the border. That has made the situation even more complex here with the Rohingya camps already overflowing with previous refugees, posing a great threat to internal security as well.

Why don't you leave the country?

Matia asks chief justice

UNB, Dhaka

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury yesterday slammed Chief Justice SK Sinha over some of the observations in the Supreme Court verdict on the 16th amendment case.

"Nothing in this country seems to please you, so why don't you leave the country? Who told you to stay in Bangladesh?" she said in a reference to the CJ.

Matia was speaking at a human chain programme organised in front of the Jatiya Press Club to protest some of the observations in the SC judgment.

Matia alleged that the CJ wrote to the Anti-Corruption Commission in favour of a corrupt judge in a bid to cover up misconduct.

On August 1, the apex court released the full text of its judgment upholding the High Court verdict that declared illegal the 16th amendment to the constitution empowering parliament to remove SC judges.

Since then, there have been criticism and debate over some of the observations in the verdict.

All likely to make it

FROM PAGE 18
will be left at the Hajj Camp. Everyone will be sent to Saudi Arabia."

A top official of the central control of Biman told this correspondent that they operated four out of eight additional hajj flights yesterday.

Seeking anonymity, the Biman official added as of last night, Biman carried 64,443 pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

"Biman is scheduled to fly three more hajj flights tomorrow [today]," he said, adding, "I think one or two flights are enough to carry the rest of the pilgrims."

Omar Khayyam, acting manager of marketing and sales, Saudi Arabian Airlines, yesterday told The Daily Star that they have already carried most of 62,300 pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

"The remaining pilgrims will fly to Saudi Arabia tomorrow [today]," he said.

Since the hajj flights began on July 24, there was uncertainty over sending every pilgrim to Saudi Arabia due to various reasons including irresponsibility and neglect of private hajj tour operators in completing visa process and additional charges for repeat pilgrims imposed by the Saudi authorities.

Biman was forced to cancel 24 hajj flights, while Saudi Airlines had to cancel three as the hajj agencies failed to bring the pilgrims scheduled to fly. Those 27

flights could have carried more than 12,000 pilgrims.

Frequent cancellation of flights created utter uncertainty over sending all the pilgrims to Saudi Arabia by the August 26 deadline.

Biman later got permission to operate 20 additional flights in two phases. The Saudi authorities also extended the deadline from August 26 to August 28 paving the way for sending all the pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

Hajj is likely to start on September 1.

HAAB BRIEFING

The HAAB at an emergency briefing yesterday called upon the government to stop the reign of brokers and middlemen in the hajj process for good.

"The pilgrims had to suffer or be cheated this year due to fraudulence of the brokers and middlemen in most cases. We want to stop their activities once and for all," HAAB Secretary General Shahadat Hossain Taslim told the briefing at the Hajj Camp.

"If the government cannot stop their activities, they should be brought under legal obligations to ensure their accountability," he added.

He also called upon the government to take stern legal action against the hajj agencies responsible for the pilgrims' sufferings due to their neglect.