

# PM to raise Rohingya issue at UNGA

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

In an effort to find a long-term solution to the Rohingya crisis, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will make a formal proposal at the upcoming 72nd UN General Assembly session for an early implementation of recommendations by the Kofi Annan-led Commission.

Hasina, who will address the general debate on September 21, will highlight the root causes behind the Rohingya crisis and place specific proposals for early solution to the longstanding humanitarian crisis, said Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali while addressing a press conference on the PM's visit to UNGA from September 17-21 yesterday.

She will urge the world leaders to play an effective role in stopping the genocide of Rohingyas.

In her speech, the PM will also call on the global community to recognise the genocide in Bangladesh during 1971 Liberation War, the minister added.

At the briefing in State Guesthouse Padma, Mahmood termed this year's UNGA "very significant", saying that "the UNGA is being held at a time when several lakh of civilian Rohingyas are fleeing death in Myanmar and entering Bangladesh."

About the statement of the UN Security Council, which met at UN headquarters in New York on Wednesday, the foreign minister said Dhaka welcomed the statement that expressed concern and condemned excessive violence during Myanmar's security forces' operations in the Rakhine State which led to over 400,000 Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh.

"The statement is strong and very much timely," he said. "We welcome the timely statement of the UN Security Council wholeheartedly."

The 72nd Regular Session of the UNGA already began on September 12 at the UN headquarters. The general debate will open on September 19 with the theme, "Focusing on people:

striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet".

Mahmood added that over 400,000 Myanmar nationals sought a sanctuary within 40km inside Bangladesh territory in the face of atrocities by Myanmar security forces.

Besides the new arrivals of Rohingyas, another 400,000 Rohingyas have been staying illegally in makeshift camps in Bangladesh for decades.

"Bangladesh is now facing an unprecedented crisis to provide humanitarian aid to thousands of Rohingya refugees and send them back to their country," the foreign minister said, adding that, "This time the situation is more dreadful than any other time in the past."

Against this backdrop, Hasina in her speech will attach importance to implementation of recommendations of the Kofi Annan-led Commission for a long-term solution to the crisis, said Mahmood.

The PM, who will depart for New York tomorrow, will participate in a number of important events, including the high-level meeting on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse on September 18.

At the meeting, she will highlight Bangladesh's zero tolerance policy towards any sort of sexual violence and repression or harassment. Also on the same day, she will attend the follow-up meeting of Global Deal for Decent Work and Inclusive Growth.

Next day, Hasina will take part in a roundtable of the UN Secretary General's high-level panel on "Women's Economic Empowerment, Leaving No One Behind."

At the UN session, Bangladesh will sign the "Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons" adopted by the UNGA. It will be opened for signing on September 20, and Foreign Minister Mahmood will sign it on behalf of Bangladesh.

The PM will also hold bilateral meetings with world leaders on the sidelines of the UN session.



Rohingya woman Hamida mourns as she holds her 40-day-old son, who died after a boat capsized near the shore of Shah Porir Dwip, in Teknaf yesterday. **Bottom left**, frantic days of trying to get to safety leave these Rohingya men, women and children exhausted as their boat reaches the shore. **Bottom right**, boats with more refugees arrive as smoke billows from a village on the Myanmar side of the border.

PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP, AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Massacre, every day

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smoke, billowing from villages on the Myanmar side, clearly on fire.

On the roadside, I could see Rohingyas staring at the columns of smoke in the distance. Someone had set their homes alight; everything they had known and loved was going up in flames. Now, they were witnessing the loss of their homes with their feet planted on a land strange to them. I wondered if the mountains themselves, protecting Naypyidaw from the disapproving of glare of the world, knew whether they were Rohingyas or not.

Soon we reached Shahpori Dwip, the point where Bangladesh ends and the land of genocide begins. The first thing that hits you there is the long

lines of people pouring in. The second thing that shocks you is the silence. Heads bent low, the procession of pain, formed fresh off the boat, trudge along with nary a word spoken.

We often feel that we can talk our way out of things. These people had tried. They had failed. They had pleaded. They had failed. Words had failed them. Why should they give them another chance?

Searching the crowds for someone to talk to, all I see are eyes staring back; each eye is silently questioning my very conscience. It feels like they are poring deep into your soul, threatening to bare everything you hold inside as a cost for what they have been put through. Suddenly, I find a young girl in her father's arms. As our eyes meet, a

shy smile touches the corners of her lips. Her hair is golden, unexpected given where we are.

"Her name is Reshmi," her father, Abdullah, says, informing us that she is four. Reshmi escaped with her parents yesterday. "They burned our house. They were slaughtering people in front of us. We began to run," he says. Even in these trying times, I feel a sense of happiness. They had all made it. Except, any happiness you feel here comes from a lack of knowing. "My 5-year old son couldn't make it. I saw him get shot. He died in front of me," Abdullah adds. The words send a chill through my bones. A father seeing his son murdered in cold blood.

I go up to Reshmi's mother, Sabekun Nur, and ask her what she

dreams for her daughter now. Draped in a burqa, only her eyes are visible. "What dreams? My son is dead," she adds with finality. I can say nothing more to her. Abdullah interjects saying he wants to send Reshmi to school. His son, Syedullah, loved school.

He then tells me he has to leave. Before I look for someone else to talk to, 35-year-old Azizul, from Rashidong approaches. His Bangla is pretty good, so our conversation is not difficult. "I came here with my four kids and wife. I was a madrasa teacher there," he says. The family has been surviving on dates and water for the last six days. As he becomes increasingly restless, I ask him about Al-Yaqin and he says he has never seen them.

I begin to walk towards where the

boats are docking. Shahanaz, a girl in a pink kameez crosses my path, tears streaming down her face. She seems alone. I ask her where everyone is. "My mother is dead. They killed her," she says, before running away. While no one speaks here, sudden cries interrupt the silence now and then. Now, it comes from Zahida Begum, 13, a resident of Rashidong, who has come here with her 10 brothers. I am almost afraid to ask her what's wrong. She sees me and sniffles. "They took my father," she cries out when I ask.

After a few minutes' walk I see two men carrying a woman, each of her arms around their shoulders. Meet 85 year old Sokina. Another resident of Rashidong, she has travelled seven days. She is being carried by her son Lal

Miah and his son, Ziaul Haque. I ask her how she is. "What will I say? I have lost three sons. They were all shot."

Before I can depart, a horrible sight greets me. A woman, drags herself across the rocky shoreline. Her two children watching her from a distance are delighted. This is Nur Nahar. Her leg was burnt when the military launched grenades. The eight months pregnant woman can walk no longer. "We were in the hills for days," she says. "The military threw us in to the river. Told us to swim across or die."

Today Myanmar's government talks about eliminating terrorists. I look at her children and anger overcomes everything. Myanmar is lying. A massacre is taking place in Myanmar every day. It cannot go unpunished.

## Who's calling

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be speaking out in defence of the Rohingya. No, you can't take away her Nobel Peace Prize; there is no mechanism for doing so. No one knows for sure why she has taken this attitude towards the Rohingya, so stop asking.

Having got that out of the way, let's focus on what's happening to the Rohingya right now, and what can be done about it.

The military in Myanmar, led by commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing, has launched a major military operation against Rohingya civilians using the pretext of hunting down militants who attacked government buildings, including police stations on August 25.

Horrific human rights violations have been committed -- executions, beatings, people being deliberately burned alive in their homes. Even children are being deliberately targeted by the military, security forces and armed militias and mobs.

But while the world focuses on Suu Kyi, the man responsible for these horrific abuses doesn't get mentioned in government statements or the vast majority of media articles. Min Aung Hlaing is calling the shots. Articles about Suu Kyi are exactly what he wants to see; with more focus on her and none on him, he has more freedom to carry out his ethnic cleansing campaign.

Under Myanmar's military-drafted constitution, Suu Kyi does not have control over the army. It is independent of her civilian-led government. The army controls the police, security services, prisons, border affairs and most of the civil service, and also appoints 25 percent of the members of parliament. Because 75 percent of MPs need to vote in favour of a constitutional change, Min Aung Hlaing effectively has a veto.

He leads a second government in Myanmar, one armed with guns.

Min Aung Hlaing should be well known and treated as a pariah by now.

He leads an army with one of the worst human rights records in the world. Even before this latest military offensive, it was under investigation by the UN for possible war crimes and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya and other ethnic groups in Myanmar. Even after reforms began, Min Aung Hlaing's army has been engaged in domestic conflicts, most recently in Kachin State and Shan State, where his soldiers killed civilians.

Min Aung Hlaing is guilty of ethnic cleansing, he is under investigation for war crimes and crimes against humanity and he is the biggest obstacle to democratic reform in Myanmar. Nevertheless, not only is he not facing international pressure, he is embraced by the international community.

Last October, US president Obama lifted most of the US sanctions specifically targeting Myanmar's military. In Europe, the British government provides the military with training at British taxpayers' expense. Earlier this year, Min Aung Hlaing was given red-carpet treatment by the governments of Germany and Austria. They discussed military training and took him on tours of factories supplying military equipment. He was also taken to visit suppliers of military equipment on his visit to Italy last year. The European Union even invited him to address their prestigious annual meeting of military heads of EU countries.

In Asia, Min Aung Hlaing has completed visits to India and Japan this year, even meeting prime ministers in those countries. As he began his campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya, he met military heads from Vietnam and Thailand to discuss closer military ties.

The international embrace of Min Aung Hlaing, despite his record on human rights, must have played a part in his calculation that he could carry out this campaign of ethnic cleansing and get away with it. So far, he appears to have calculated correctly.

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violence and terror; isolation and segregation; and systematic weakening of the Rohingya -- had been completed in Myanmar by 2015. The final two -- mass annihilation and finally symbolic enactment involving the removal of the victim group from the collective history -- is now being staged in the Rakhine State.

The ISCI also documented how these genocide processes have been orchestrated at the highest levels of state and local Rakhine government. The actions were led by state officials, Rakhine politicians, Buddhist monks and Rakhine civil society activists.

"The State's persistent and intensified 'othering' of the Rohingya as outsiders, illegal Bengali immigrants and potential terrorists has given a green light to Rakhine nationalists and Islamophobic monks to orchestrate invidious campaigns of race and religious hatred reminiscent of those witnessed in Germany in the 1930s and Rwanda in the early 1990s," the report said.

ISCI discovered a leaked document apparently adopted by the Myanmar regime in 1988 which reveals the country's State Peace and Development Council's commitment to eliminating the Rohingya from Myanmar.

These include reducing the population growth of the Rohingyas by gradual imposition of restrictions on their marriages and by application of all possible methods of oppression and suppression against them, denying them higher studies, government jobs, ownership of lands, shops and buildings.

The council's plan is literally to stop all their economic activities and secretly convert the Muslims into Buddhists.

ISCI also showed how the Arakan National Party (ANP), the majority Buddhist political party in Rakhine,

## ROAD TO ROHINGYA CLEANSING

- 1785:** Last Rakhine Kingdom annexed by Burmese King Bodawpaya.
- 1824-26:** First Anglo-Burmese war; Arakan (Rakhine) state is annexed to British India.
- 1942-3:** Pro-British Muslims and pro-Japanese Rakhine clash; massacres on both sides. Muslims flee north and Rakhine people move south, contributing to segregation.
- 1948:** Burma gains independence from Britain, U Nu becomes first Prime Minister.
- 1959:** Burma's first President, Sao Shwe Thaik, declares, "Muslims of Arakan certainly belong to the indigenous races of Burma".
- 1960:** Rohingya vote in elections.
- 1962:** Ne Win leads military coup; leads to increasing discrimination of ethnic minorities.
- 1974:** Rakhine granted statehood.
- 1977-78:** Nationwide crackdown on 'illegal immigration'; 200,000 Rohingyas flee to Bangladesh. Most return to Burma the following year.
- 1982:** Citizenship Law excludes Rohingyas from country's list of 135 national races and strips Rohingyas of citizenship.
- 1989:** Burma renamed Myanmar; Arakan state renamed Rakhine state; new citizenship scrutiny cards issued to Myanmar nationals, excluding most Rohingyas.
- 1990:** Elections held, Rohingyas and Kaman parties run; several Rohingyas representatives elected.
- 1991-2:** Military operation Pyi Thaya in northern Rakhine state; 250,000 people flee to Bangladesh.
- 1992:** NaSaKa military/border security force established in northern Rakhine state, notorious for abuses.
- 1993-95:** Rohingyas who fled during operation Pyi Thaya repatriated under UNHCR's watch.
- 1993:** Border Region Immigration Control restricts marriages of Rohingyas in Maungdaw township.
- 1994:** Myanmar stops issuing birth certificates to Rohingyas children.

- 1997:** Head of Sittwe Immigration Office restricts Rohingya travelling outside their township.
- 2001:** Twenty-eight mosques and Islamic schools destroyed in and around Maungdaw township.
- 2005:** Maungdaw Township Peace and Development Council restricts Rohingya marriages and birth rate.
- 2008:** Rohingyas granted temporary registration cards and permitted to vote in widely discredited Myanmar Constitution referendum.
- 2008-9:** Government 'spot-checks' Rohingya homes and restricts movement.
- 2010:** Myanmar elections, Rohingyas allowed to vote.
- 2012:** Violence erupts in Rakhine state between Buddhists and Muslims.
- 2014:** March: Rakhine nationalists attack international NGO offices in Sittwe; April: Rohingyas excluded from April nationwide census.
- 2015:** February: parliament grants temporary white card holders (mostly Rohingyas) the right to vote in planned constitutional amendment. Days later the president reverses the decision and declares white cards invalid.
- May, 2015:** Boat crisis in Andaman Sea reported in the international press.
- June, 2015:** UNHCR estimates over 150,000 people have fled from the Myanmar/Bangladesh border area since January 2012.
- August, 2015:** Rohingyas representative in northern Rakhine state, U Shwe Maung, is barred from re-election.
- 2016:** Around 87, 000 Rohingyas fled from Rakhine state and entered Bangladesh following violence against them.
- 2017:** Nearly 4 lakh Rohingyas entered Bangladesh fleeing from violence in Rakhine state since August.

SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL STATE CRIME INITIATIVE

has adopted Nazi ideology in its documents. ANP mouthpiece magazine The Progress in its November

2012 editorial after the June violence on the Rohingya wrote: "Hitler and Eichmann were the enemy of the

Now that the UN human rights chief has termed the situation "a textbook case of ethnic cleansing" the demand for more actions can be heard louder.