

Three killed in refugee camp stampede: report

STAR REPORT

Two children and a woman were killed in a stampede for aid near a Bangladesh refugee camp, UN agencies said yesterday amid widespread fights among Rohingyas for food and clothing thrown from relief trucks, reports AFP.

The incident occurred on Friday at Balukhali in Cox's Bazar where tens of thousands of Rohingyas have camped for weeks after fleeing violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State.

"Two children and one woman were killed in a stampede during an unauthorised clothing distribution on the road in Balukhali Pan Bazar area," said a report prepared by a group of UN agencies and two charities, according to AFP.

The Daily Star, however, could not independently verify it.

The Inter Sector Coordination Group, which is led by the International Organisation for

Migration (IOM), in its updated report on Friday, said two children and one woman were injured during an unauthorised clothing distribution in Balukhali.

It did not say what happened to the injured people later.

Ukhia Police Station Inspector (investigation) Mohammad Kai Kislul said they have no reports of death due to stampede.

"This is propaganda," he told The Daily Star.

Quoting a UN agency, AFP reported: "Despite local regulations and the control room established, private distributions of relief items continue."

AFP correspondents have witnessed violent scrambles for aid at camps around Cox's Bazar. Refugee witnesses have also told of stampedes.

A local rights expert slammed the government for the chaotic relief management, saying fights were breaking

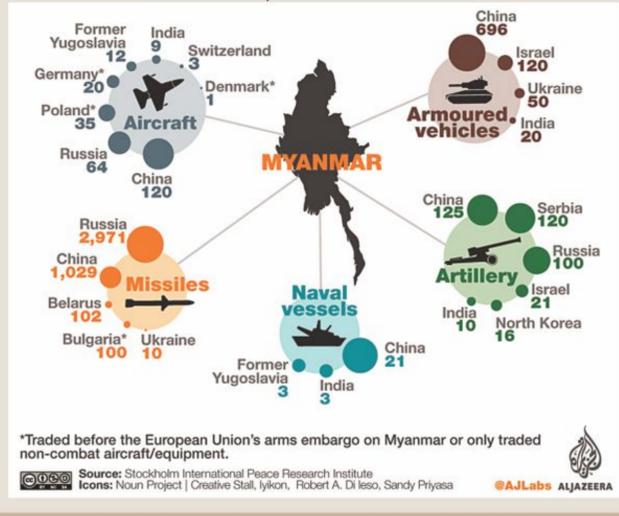
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WHO IS SELLING WEAPONS TO MYANMAR?

The Myanmar army has shaped the country's politics and external affairs since it gained independence from the British in 1948. For more than half a century the army ruled with an iron fist.

Since the early 1990s, it was subject to various embargoes and sanctions from the European Union and the US. In 2012, as the country underwent a so-called democratic transition some of these sanctions were eased, though an EU arms embargo is still in effect.

The following graphic shows which countries have provided weaponry to Myanmar since 1990, and identifies China, Russia, India, Israel and Ukraine as its major arms suppliers. Majority of Myanmar's fighter aircraft, armoured vehicles, guns and naval ships come from China, while Russia is the main provider of surface-to-air missiles.



One of the fastest

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Federation of Red Cross spokeswoman, Corinne Ambler, about conditions in the impromptu refugee settlements currently spreading ever deeper into the forests near the border with Myanmar, according to ABC News Australia.

"There's little clean water, we've seen people fighting over money, over food, it's undignified, and it's catastrophic really," she said.

British High Commissioner in Dhaka Alison Blake says there's now a global understanding that the decades-long crisis in Rakhine cannot be allowed to continue and the UK is active to find a lasting solution to the Rohingya situation.

"And this understanding is not just to stop violence, it's to come to a lasting solution," she said, referring to the statements of her government and the UN Security Council where the UK along with Sweden tabled the issue.

The Security Council at a meeting on September 13 agreed on the importance of a long-term solution to the situation in Rakhine and called for implementation of the recommendations of the Kofi Annan commission.

Talking to a select group of journalists including this correspondent at her residence yesterday, Blake said there is no "magic wand" to solve the crisis overnight, but there is a global understanding that this cannot be allowed to continue.

The British envoy also said that Bangladesh has set an example for the world with its response to the Rohingya crisis.

"For many people I speak to, it reminds them of 1971. They remembered how they were taken in. Many people know what it is like to be a refugee," said the high commissioner.

She said the UK was not just active on the humanitarian ground. As a member of Security Council and friend of Bangladesh, they have been clear to say that people responsible for violence, the security forces of Myanmar, must stop it.

In reply to a question, Blake declined to speculate the consequences of the Security Council statement, but she said the Security Council "unanimously" sent a "powerful message".

"If you are able to tell a country to stop it and they stop it, the world would be a very different place," Blake said, adding, "There's patient and quiet diplomacy which is often important for that."

The UK government, earlier, called for violence to stop after hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes.

On Friday, it released an additional £25 million to deal with what it called the "unprecedented scale of the crisis in Bangladesh and Burma."

UK's International Development Secretary Priti Patel said a majority of the latest funding will be spent in Bangladesh.

UN Migration Agency, IOM, is also seeking a coordinated humanitarian response to the massive inflow of Rohingyas arriving in Cox's Bazar.

"A visit to the area this week by a UNHCR team, led by Assistant High Commissioner for Operations George Okoth-Obbo, found people suffering real hardship and some of the most difficult conditions seen in any current refugee situation," said UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic in Geneva on Friday.

An estimated 4,09,000 Rohingyas have arrived in Bangladesh until Friday, escaping the latest military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine State, says a UN report.

Of them, 22,900 Rohingyas are living in new makeshift settlements in Ukhia and Kutupalong, while 1,59,000 are living in makeshift camps set up by the Rohingyas prior to the

influx that began on August 25.

On the other hand, 21,000 Rohingyas are living with the local host communities, but they are moving to other sites, said the report prepared and updated by Inter Sector Coordination Group led by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

ENDLESS NEED
Challenges, however, are the greatest for children. According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), there are at least 2,40,000 children among the refugees, including about 36,000 who are less than a year old. There were also 52,000 pregnant and lactating women, the UN said.

"Conditions are ripe for the spread of disease," Marixie Mercado, a UNICEF spokesperson highlighted at the briefing, noting that refugees also lack drinking water.

"International response has so far been woefully inadequate, she said, adding, "Far, far more is needed, not only in funding but also in terms of hands on the ground to help scale up this relief operation."

"The needs are seemingly endless and suffering is deepening."

To help cope with this situation, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is stepping up its efforts. Yesterday, it was launching a polio and measles vaccination campaign to cover 1,50,000 newly arrived children aged six months to 15 years, said Tarik Jasarevic, a spokesperson for the UN agency.

Ikhtiyar Aslanov, the ICRC's head of delegation in Bangladesh, said: "People are fleeing their homes with very few belongings and we hope that we can relieve some of their suffering by providing much needed healthcare, water and food. However, addressing the needs of all people will not be possible without additional donor support."

'REMARKABLE GENEROSITY'
UNHCR Spokesperson Andrej Mahecic also noted that Bangladeshi communities have shown "remarkable generosity," welcoming refugees into their homes and sharing resources with them.

Among them, UNHCR has appealed for an initial amount of \$30 million for its emergency response in the country until the end of year.

Similarly, UNICEF made an initial appeal for \$7.3 million over three months, including almost \$3 million for water and sanitation alone, but that amount was calculated on the basis of 200,000 people and that number had now doubled.

Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey Bekir Bozdag also thanked the government of Bangladesh for hosting a big number of the Rohingya refugees. He reassured the Turkish support-both political and material-for Bangladesh on the issue.

During a meeting with Bangladesh Ambassador to Turkey Allama Siddiki in Ankara on Friday, the DPM inquired into the present status of the Rohingya crisis.

EP DELEGATION CANCELS MYANMAR VISIT

In the light of the recent developments in Myanmar, the European Parliament Committee on International Trade has decided to postpone its visit in the country, according to a post on Europarl.europa.eu.

Its chair, Bernd Lange, said: The EP's International Trade Committee decided to postpone the delegation to Myanmar to an unknown date as it was clear that the current political and human rights' situation in the country, as outlined in the resolution adopted on Thursday, does not allow for a fruitful discussion on a potential EU-Myanmar investment agreement.

It is clear that under these conditions, the ratification of an investment agreement with Myanmar is not possible."

Supplies stretched, challenges many

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Khalsa Aid, an Indian organisation based in London, had set up a bakery in Syria, which feeds 16,000 people a day. They, therefore, have the experience the task of setting up community kitchens would require. "If we set up two to five such kitchens, then each can go towards feeding up to 10,000 people a day," Amarpreet said.

Khalsa Aid have already set up a langar (community kitchen) to help feed the refugees in Teknaf and fed over 30,000 refugees.

Rayhan Sultana Toma, communications officer of International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC), who had been working at the no man's land near Bandarban, revealed some more challenges.

"During assessment, we found a need for medical treatment and care

which isn't available there. There is also the unavailability of clean water and sanitation.

"We went there with food for 500 families, but once there saw the number had risen to 700 families and it is constantly increasing," she told The Daily Star over phone.

The situation was quite dire at the no man's land she said, adding that some of the Rohingyas were getting food from locals and sometimes were allowed to go to the local bazaar to buy necessities, but not a lot of them have money.

"One of the biggest challenges for us has been getting all the components needed for proper distribution of relief. We have to source food, trucks and labour all from here and the resources are getting stretched," she said.

Rohingyas fan out

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fled Myanmar in just three weeks.

This is despite government and police orders banning the Rohingya refugees from leaving the areas and camps designated for them in the border district.

"They should stay in the designated camps until they return to their country," AFP quoted Sahely Ferdous, assistant inspector general at the Police Headquarters, as saying. "They cannot travel from one place to another by roads, railways or waterways."

Rohingyas have been asked not to take shelter in the homes of their friends or acquaintances, while locals have been asked not to rent houses to the refugees.

At least 27 security checkpoints have also been set up in key transit points to stop refugees travelling to other parts of the country.

At several checkpoints on Friday, law enforcers intercepted a number of "Rohingya and Bangladeshi middlemen" who were taking some young Rohingya girls to Cox's Bazar town by CNG-run auto-rickshaws and buses.

"Today [Friday], we found four such groups. The middlemen, identifying the girls as their relatives, were trying to take them to Cox's Bazar. So we are warning these middlemen and sending them back to the refugee camps in Ukhia," said an official at Marichchya Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB)-police joint checkpoint.

These correspondents saw one such middleman with two girls at the camp.

One girl identified herself as Saima from Patia in Chittagong, saying she had been living in a rented house there for two years. She claimed to have gone to visit a Rohingya camp at Ghumdum of Naikhanchhari in Bandarban where her parents took shelter to avoid the ongoing atrocities.

But the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said it was a cooked up story. "She is saying what the middlemen instructed her to."

At Sonarpara Marine Drive police checkpoint at Ukhia, police intercepted a CNG-run three wheeler taking a young girl to Cox's Bazar town yesterday.

She told the police she was going to a Cox's Bazar hotel where she worked.

"One of my uncles from Kutupalong camp gave me the contact," she told the police.

Assistant Sub-inspector Chhoton, in-charge of the checkpoint, said they were checking every transport for Rohingyas as ordered by the higher authorities.

"But the Rohingyas and the locals speak almost the same language. It is difficult for us to determine their nationality. So we are requesting Bangladeshi citizens to carry their

Police move

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Talking to The Daily Star, Md Moniruzzaman, additional inspector general of police, said they issued the directives alerting police to avoid any communal incident. "We don't want to see any incident like that of Ramu in Cox's Bazar in 2012."

Mobs carried out a series of attacks on Buddhist monasteries, shrines, and houses in September 2012 in reaction to tagging of an image depicting the desecration of the Quran on the wall of a fake Facebook account under the name of a Buddhist male.

Sahely Ferdous, assistant inspector general at the Police Headquarters, said they sent directives to all Buddhist temples, calling upon Buddhists to stay alert and move carefully.

Security has been beefed up in all temples across the country over the Rohingya issue, and the upcoming Durga Puja beginning on September 26.

Besides, the headquarters asked law enforcers to ensure that the movement of Rohingyas is kept limited inside the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. Police were asked to step up security in all the camps to make sure that Rohingyas cannot go elsewhere.

The letter also directed the district police chiefs to increase vigilance at the tempo stands, bus stops, railway stations and river routes.

Rohingyas have already gone to some other areas in the country. Police last week detained 20 Rohingyas in Manikganj and sent them to refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, while eight more were picked up from Benapole.

Police were also asked to ensure that women refugees are not subjected to sexual harassments or other types of torture during their stay in Bangladesh.

The Police Headquarters asked the SPs to strengthen vigilance to stop smuggling of drugs, arms and human trafficking by the Rohingyas and they cannot get passport, national ID card, voter ID card or any other government document illegally.

It has to be ensured that no vested quarter can carry out an activity against the country's interest, said the letter.

Meanwhile, the headquarters in a press statement yesterday said people cannot rent out their houses to Rohingyas and the refugees cannot take shelter or stay at the houses of their relatives and acquaintances outside the camps.

The supply lines are blocked as roads are often congested and the rain makes things worse. "Right now we are providing them supplies for 11 days, consisting of rice, pulse, sugar and salt but we know that even that is not enough."

Action Contre La Faim's (ACF) has set up emergency operations (emop) center at Kutupalong to serve various needs of the refugees. For example, they have set up a dining hall for the refugees. With mobile centres, which go from place to place, spread around Ukhia and Teknaf, ACF is currently feeding around 35,000 people a day. "We have prepared a nutritional meal for them and are providing them food every day. We plan to feed over 85,000 people soon," Md. Motaher Hossain, Deputy Program Manager-EMOP Nutrition and Health said, admitting

that even that number may not be enough but is a start.

Tariq Syed Harun, assistant director of Coast Trust, which has been distributing food, also said the relief efforts were inadequate. "We are giving 3000 packs of kichuri everyday, but while a pack is for one person, we have seen entire families sharing it. There are 20,000 families in Kutupalong alone, so it is a challenge."

He also mentioned that the refugees are being provided fresh water, but many of them have no means of carrying it. "Some of the women have not been able to shower in eight or ten days and they are still covered in mud."

He also feared an outbreak of diseases like cholera and pneumonia in near future. "There is still a lot of work left to be done," he concluded.



A member of Chittagong Metropolitan Police questions passengers on a bus coming to the city from Teknaf to stop Rohingyas refugees from moving out of the camps. Buses are being stopped at different check points on Teknaf-Chittagong Road. The photo was taken yesterday at Patia area of the port city.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

national identity cards," he told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the home ministry has issued an order barring travel of Rohingya people to other parts of the country from the camps. But transport workers in Cox's Bazar said many of the refugees already travelled to Chittagong and other parts of the country in the last few days.

Since September 9, police found at least 174 Rohingyas in different parts of the port city. Of them, 150 were found in Hathazari, Lohagara, Banshkhal and Sitakunda upazilas and the rest 24 in the port city's Chandgaon, EPZ and Bakalia areas.

However, the number of refugees going towards Chittagong came down after police set up the checkpoint a couple of days ago, said Md Shahidul, an employee at a bus counter there.

Meanwhile, Cox's Bazar police superintendent yesterday instructed the transport owners' association to check nationality of passengers before issuing tickets for any destinations from Cox's Bazar.

The home ministry directed the SPs of all the 64 districts to increase vigilance to prevent movement of Rohingya people through their districts.

ROHINGYAS LIVING IN VILLAGES

The Daily Star found a number of

Rohingya families living in different villages under Ukhia upazila.

Zamila Khatun, for example, has been living with her family at the house of Salimuddin in Uttar Sonarpara village for the last 10 days.

She has nine children -- five daughters and four sons. She fled to Bangladesh with her one son, one daughter and her husband and two grandchildren.

"I don't know the whereabouts of my other children. I don't even know if they are alive," said Zamila, aged around 60. "Burmese people have taken our land and cattle. They burned our house in Maungdaw."

She claimed to have a Bangladeshi passport which she got through a broker years ago. Now she wants to make a national ID card.

"I performed hajj twice and Umrah five times with Bangladeshi passport," he said.

Replying to a query, she said she did not rent the house of Salimuddin; she only took shelter there.

Abdul Hamid, in-charge of Sonarpara Community Clinic, said 48 patients came to his clinic yesterday. Twenty-three of them were Rohingyas.

"Many Rohingyas are living in this village. People also help them as they are helpless now," he said.

Many of them have also taken shel-

ter in Jhilangza union of Cox's Bazar sadar upazila.

Two more Rohingya families are living in a house near Buddha Bhabna Sangha, a temple, beside the Cox's Bazar jail gate.

Locals said the owner of the house came from Myanmar long ago and obtained various Bangladeshi papers over the years.

Dinajpur mayor suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

The local government ministry has suspended the mayor of Dinajpur Municipality on allegations of corruption, officials at the municipality said yesterday.

The suspension letter was issued on Thursday.

Syed Jahangir Alam, a BNP candidate, was elected to the post for a second term in 2015.

Alam, when contacted, said he heard about the suspension but was yet to receive any letter in this regard.

He said he was unaware of such allegations against him.

Alam is an assistant Organisational Secretary of Rangpur region BNP.