

RELIEF DISTRIBUTION FOR ROHINGYAS

Chaotic scene in camp areas

PINAKI ROY and MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAT, from Cox's Bazar

Government efforts to bring order to relief distribution in Rohingya camp areas are largely overwhelmed by the huge number of refugees.

In Kutupalong camp area, the district administration has opened a centre beside Cox's Bazar-Teknaf road for individual relief donors to provide their names and the quantity of the goods they want to donate.

The individuals are then asked to go to designated places and distribute the relief.

"We have selected seven relief distribution points in Ukhiya and five in Teknaf. We are asking people to distribute certain goods at certain points. But the situation is not in order yet as our manpower is not enough to deal with so many refugees," said Mahidur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar.

The government is distributing relief materials received from India, Indonesia, Iran, Turkey and Morocco. Many NGOs have chipped in as well, he said.

About 1,000 private donors, including different organisations and businesses and religious bodies, have

already registered their names with the centre and distributed relief.

Raihanul Islam Mia, Ukhiya upazila secondary education officer who was on duty at the relief registration point yesterday, said, "We were supposed to send a government representative with the donors, but we could not do that due to manpower shortage."

As a result, many private donors went to the camps tossing relief materials to the refugees and ending up depriving the elderly and children.

Some people skipped the registration process altogether and distributed cash among the refugees. They sometimes ended up blocking the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf road in the process. The Daily Star correspondents saw four such incidents.

Women, children and elderly people stood beside roads and rushed towards any vehicle stopping near the shelters.

Rohingyas in makeshift camps away from the main road said they received relief, but it was inadequate.

Gura Mia, a Rohingya, said his young daughter died four days after arriving in Bangladesh as he could not find anything to feed her. It happened

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Rohingyas trying to get a hold of dry food tossed at them by volunteers in Ghumдум area of Naikkyangchari upazila. Inset, Rohingya women carry sacks of rice they had received at Kutupalong camp.

PHOTOS: AMRAN HOSSAIN

A friend in need

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of the Myanmar security forces lost their lives."

On the other hand, the Chinese statement said "we want to express our condolences to the innocent victims and sympathies to the innocent injured and the bereaved families. As a friendly neighbour, China supports Myanmar's efforts in maintaining peace and stability in the Rakhine State and sincerely wishes that Myanmar could maintain social stability, ethnic solidarity and economic development."

The Pennsylvania-based Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) has explained Modi's shyness to criticise Myanmar as "a careful calculation of India's perceived national security interests".

Indian Express explains India's concerns about the remnants of ULFA who may be reinvigorated by the new cold relation with China. India is also worried about the National Socialist Council of Nagaland manned mainly with Burmese Nagas.

FPRI also traces India's interest in limiting the influence of China. In earlier times, Aung San Suu Kyi and her democracy-loving people were flung against the junta that was supported by China. India had taken the side of Suu Kyi.

"However, after watching the PRC (China) make steady inroads into Myanmar in the early 1990s, India started to move away from its unstinted support for democratic reforms. Modi's muted reaction to the ongoing crisis amounts to a logical culmination of that strategy," FPRI noted.

Express has outlined India's main economic and strategic concerns in Myanmar as that of the Kaladan multimodal transport project and the Special Economic Zone in Sittwe.

"Both are in Rakhine state. In the meantime, the Chinese will in all probability get the 80 percent invest-

ment in Sittwe port. Sittwe is also the main gas pipeline gateway to Yunnan and beyond," express has written.

But beyond regional concerns, there seem to be domestic exigencies for India as well.

"The BJP regime, as is well known, has little or no regard for India's vast Muslim minority," the FPRI has pointed out. Consequently, it should come as little surprise that the regime has no particular regard for the Rohingyas who have sought refuge within India."

When emboldened by the two regional superpowers' posturing on the Rohingya issue, an undeterred Myanmar can go ahead in its purge on the Rohingyas. This is why the Myanmar army's commander in chief General Min Aung Hling can describe the ongoing crackdown against the Rohingya as "unfinished business" dating back to World War II, as reported in the Wall Street Journal.

Now that Myanmar has won a diplomatic walkover after the Rakhine State has almost been emptied of its Rohingya population, the Myanmar general now wants imposition of martial law in the Rakhine State and asked its 'people' to reunite against the Rohingya.

Before Bangladesh, there remains only one option open -- to go all out on a diplomatic offensive to force Myanmar to take back its citizens. It has to make India and China understand that an uprooted Rohingya population in Bangladesh does not bode well for anybody's security concerns if that is the prime reason for India or China to turn a blind eye to the situation.

In its armoury, Bangladesh has a lot of weapons to launch diplomatic offensive. It has been chronicled in numerous documents that Rohingyas have systematically been subjected to cleansing. All it needs is to use the diplomatic armoury and pursue its friends to stand beside humanity.

Suu Kyi's last chance

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the Rohingyas should be allowed to return home.

He said it was clear that Myanmar's military "still have the upper hand" in the country, putting pressure "to do what is being done on the ground" in Rakhine.

Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate who spent many years under house arrest in the junta-run Myanmar, is now facing growing criticism over the Rohingya issue.

She will not attend the UN General Assembly in New York, and has claimed that the crisis is being distorted by a "huge iceberg of misinformation". She said tensions were being fanned by fake news promoting the interests of terrorists.

Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the latest attacks, Tatmadaw, the armed forces of Myanmar, has called for President U Htin Kyaw to convene a meeting of the 11-member National Defence and Security Council (NDSC).

Tatmadaw wants the NDSC, on which it controls six seats, to exercise its authority to declare a state of emergency in northern Rakhine and place the area under martial law, reported Frontier Myanmar yesterday.

The Tatmadaw's policy for Rakhine calls for the application of the 1982 Citizenship Law.

If the law was applied to Muslims living in northern Rakhine's Maungdaw Township, the vast majority could face the prospect of being declared illegal immigrants and sent to refugee camps, writes Sithu Aung Myint of Frontier Myanmar.

REFUGEE DEATH FEARED
Aid agency Save the Children expressed fear that refugee lives could be lost amid shortage of food, shelter, water and basic hygiene support in the makeshift camps of Cox's Bazar.

It said many people are arriving hungry, exhausted and with no food or water, having left their homes in fear of their lives.

"I'm particularly worried that the demand for food, shelter, water and basic hygiene support is not being met due to the sheer number of people in need. If

families can't meet their basic needs, the suffering will get even worse and lives could be lost," said Save the Children's Country Director in Bangladesh Mark Pierce.

In a statement issued yesterday, he said Bangladesh authorities, local communities and aid agencies are doing all they can to help the refugees.

"However, the humanitarian response needs to be rapidly scaled up, and that can only be done if the international community steps up funding."

Among the Rohingyas who fled Myanmar are more than 1,100 separated or unaccompanied children.

"This is a real concern as these children are in an especially vulnerable position, being at increased risk of exploitation and abuse, as well as things like child trafficking," Mark Pierce said.

Meanwhile, a vaccination campaign backed by the UN has been initiated to prevent the spread of potentially deadly diseases among refugee children.

According to a UNICEF news release, the agency and the World Health Organisation are supporting the health ministry-led campaign targeting measles, rubella and polio to inoculate some 1,50,000 Rohingya children below the age of fifteen in 68 refugee settlements near the border.

DHAKA'S ROLE LAUDED
Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland has commended the government of Bangladesh for setting aside land to receive hundreds of thousands of refugees from neighbouring Myanmar.

In a statement on Saturday, she said: "This is a major humanitarian crisis, and reports indicate that the majority fleeing are women and children. I am encouraged that Bangladesh has opened its borders to receive those who have felt they had no choice but to leave their homes."

"By providing immediate assistance -- food, shelter and clothing -- to hundreds of thousands of desperate people in this time of great need, the government and people of Bangladesh are acting with characteristic Commonwealth good-

will, and in accordance with our Commonwealth Charter."

BRITISH ASSISTANCE TO GO UP

Visiting British lawmaker Rushanara Ali has said the role of Myanmar government towards its ethnic minorities is not acceptable.

During a meeting with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam yesterday, she also pointed out the humanitarian crisis caused by Myanmar armed forces by inflicting violence against Rohingyas.

Rushanara, UK prime minister's trade envoy for Bangladesh, mentioned that Bangladesh is gaining moral high ground by giving room to the Rohingya minorities and by giving access to the NGOs in Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh-origin UK lawmaker, who is leading a trade delegation of nine UK rail companies, arrived in Dhaka on Saturday for a week-long visit.

She assured that the aids and investments from the UK will certainly increase in this backdrop.

Meanwhile, Rohingyas living in the UK have called on the British government to help stop "ethnic cleansing" of the minority group in their home country.

They fled to Britain as part of a UN rescue effort following what they describe as cruelty and persecution. They say close relatives have been raped and slaughtered by military forces in Myanmar.

According to Sky News, the Rohingya people once took to the streets of Bradford to demand Aung San Suu Kyi's release, but now they feel betrayed.

A group of 300, who followed a similar route in previous years, have now settled in Bradford. They spoke about the pain of seeing the crisis "explode" on television and social media.

In another development, British MP Anne Main, who is now leading a delegation to Bangladesh, said she will soon visit Rohingya camps to see their situation on the ground.

The delegation includes MPs and members of the Conservative Friends of Bangladesh (CFOB) who will visit camps along the Bangladesh border.

Anne said, "As chair of the APPG on Bangladesh, I have been monitoring the situation for some time. We included visits to the camps in CFOB's itinerary as a priority following concerns that were being expressed to me some months ago."

SOLUTIONS THROUGH UN
Bangladesh wants to rely on the UN to find a solution to the problem it is facing now following the persecution of Rohingyas in Rakhine resulting in the influx.

"The Kofi Annan Commission's report is the basis. We'll be happy if it's implemented," State Minister Shahriar told reporters at the foreign ministry yesterday.

After a meeting with outgoing UN Resident Coordinator in Dhaka Robert Watkins, he said Bangladesh is hoping to get proper and time-befitting steps through the UN.

He added Bangladesh will look for solutions through the UN while it will ensure quick delivery of humanitarian services to Rohingyas who took shelter in Bangladesh.

Watkins said there is only one long-term solution that is to make sure that refugees return to their homeland.

He said this issue has already been discussed in the UN Security Council and it will be discussed in the UNGA.

"I'm sure all kinds of options will be on the table to try to bring about the kind of changes stopping destructions and killings that have been taking place in Myanmar," he told reporters.

IRANIAN TEAM VISITS SHELTERS
An Iranian diplomatic delegation, led by Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Pacific Affairs Ebrahim Rahimpour, visited Rohingya refugee camps in the border area of Bangladesh on Saturday.

The team also met a group of residents of these camps and became aware of their latest situation, according to a report of Iran Front Page.

Moreover, the distribution of Iran's humanitarian aid for the refugees, which had been handed over to Bangladeshi authorities yesterday, began in presence of the Iranian delegation.

allow the free elections in 2015 that swept Suu Kyi into office.

The army still plays a powerful role in politics, with control over key ministries like borders and defence, plus a quarter of parliament.

Suu Kyi's supporters inside the country, where she still enjoys saint-like status for her democracy struggle, have balked at the global criticism heaped on their leader and argued she must tread carefully around a military that still looms large in the fragile democracy.

Rohingya was never ethnic group

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Facebook page Saturday.

"They have demanded recognition as Rohingya, which has never been an ethnic group in Myanmar. (The) Bengali issue is a national cause and we need to be united in establishing the truth," the post said.

The defence of his army's operations comes amid strident global condemnation of the violence, which has left Bangladesh with the overwhelming task of providing shelter and food to a rising tide of desperate

refugees.

Myanmar's civilian leader, former democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi, has no power to control the army, which retains sweeping powers from its years of junta rule.

But she has been castigated for failing to voice sympathy for the Rohingya -- a group she has asked her government to refer to only as "Muslims of Rakhine State".

All eyes will be on the Nobel laureate as she addresses the nation on the crisis for the first time tomorrow, a

high stakes speech that many outside the country hope will explain her near silence on the human tragedy that is unfolding.

Suu Kyi's televised address -- likely at least in part to be in English -- comes ahead of a meeting at the UN General Assembly in which Myanmar is expected to be hammered over the crisis.

But analysts say her power to stay the military is limited, and her response thus far indicates she is choosing the lesser of two evils.

"She's signalling that her chief priority is the relationship between the government and military and that the pogrom is secondary to that," Francis Wade, author of Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of the Muslim 'Other', told AFP.

"This obviously raises questions about the quality of leadership she seeks to bring, but also that the political game in Myanmar is worth the sacrifice of entire communities."

The US has dispatched an envoy to

Myanmar to express its "grave concern" with the violence in Rakhine, a US State Department official told AFP.

Patrick Murphy, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asia, will meet with government leaders and travel to the state capital of Rakhine but not the conflict zone further north, the official said.

The US was a key partner in pushing along Myanmar's democratic transition, which saw the army step down from 50 years of brutal junta rule and

Cheaper Atap or pricey Shiddho?

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to an OMS point in the capital's Mugda along with his wife. But when he saw only white rice was on offer, though at Tk 20 less per kg than the retail price, he didn't buy it.

He told The Daily Star that his family always eats parboiled rice.

The couple were, however, happy purchasing 10 kg flour at only Tk 17 per kg against Tk 30 in the retail shops from the OMS dealer selling subsidised foodgrains from a truck.

"The flour that we have purchased will be enough for one month," Tofayel said.

Standing in a queue before another OMS point at Green Road, a few women of lower-income bracket were curiously inspecting the white rice being sold. Three of them immediately bought flour but were hesitant to buy rice.

The OMS dealer and some other customers then suggested that white rice should not be any less rice than the parboiled one.

Finally, the women from Tejkuinpara neighborhood were convinced that they should grab the opportunity to get Tk 20 price benefit by purchasing white rice at Tk 30 a kg.

About to leave, one of them said she never tasted white rice but bought it since it was cheaper there than the retail price.

The government launched OMS operation yesterday across the country. In Dhaka, as many as 109 dealers were appointed, most of whom received only white rice from the food department.

Officials told The Daily Star that an overwhelming large portion of 3.39 lakh tonnes of the rice stock that the government now has is white rice. And out of 2.5 lakh tonnes of rice imported recently from Vietnam, only 50,000 tonnes are parboiled while the rest are white rice.

Giant QR code

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Xilinshui was named 'the most beautiful village in Hebei' back in 2015. The village was granted 1.1 million yuan (\$168,000) by the government for development and renovation purposes.

Will this promotional tactic help bring in more tourists, only time will tell.

Chinese shoppers are increasingly using QR codes in their everyday lives, and especially for making quick payments. The little codes, made from a pattern of black-and-white squares, can store information - for example, the cost of an item, or cooking instructions for a

food.

Waiters can sometimes be seen with QR badges pinned to their shirts, so happy customers can scan them to leave a tip.

Even beggars have been pictured displaying the codes to encourage donations.

Mammoth QR codes have been used to drum up business before. In 2013, Chinese developer Vanke built a striking 6,400 sq metre (20,000 sq ft) code near a housing construction site in Hefei, Anhui province. When scanned, it played sights and sounds designed to entice would-be homeowners.

Making money

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"ACC could freeze only Tk 1,74,48,317," Pranab said, adding that Tk 4,12,51,000 was already taken off the banks.

Besides moveable property, he has a car worth Tk 37,33,000, the report said.

ACC has also decided to file a case against an inspector of police and his wife for amassing wealth illegally and laundering over Tk 3.09 crore.

The ACC, in an inquiry, found the inspector and wife owning four flats worth Tk 83.98 lakh, a car and having over Tk 1 crore in bank accounts.

According to the report, they have laundered a big chunk of the money.