

## ROHINGYA CRISIS

## PM seeks global support at UN

UNB, New York

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had talks with some dignitaries, including US President Donald Trump, attending the UN General Assembly here when they assured her that they were with Bangladesh over the Rohingya issue.

"On Myanmar issue, we're with you," Trump told the PM on the sidelines of a high-level meeting titled "Reforming the United Nations: Management, Security, and Development".

The US president hosted the programme at the ESCOS Chamber of the UN Headquarters on Monday.

Briefing reporters on Trump-Hasina talks, Foreign Secretary M Shahidul Haque said the US president told the PM that his country would see how the Rohingya refugee problem could be resolved.

This was the first time Trump made any remark on the Rohingya issue.

Enquired about Bangladesh's economic progress, Hasina said the country was doing well.

## UNHCR TO HELP BANGLADESH

During a meeting with Hasina, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Filippo Grandi expressed his willingness to help Bangladesh address the Rohingya refugee problem.

He also wanted to visit Bangladesh, Shahidul said.

Hasina said all the UN organisations would help Bangladesh, but the registration of the Rohingya refugees would be done by the Bangladesh Army.

The PM at a meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at hotel Grand Hyatt also discussed the Rohingya crisis.

PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said the Palestine president highly appreciated the Bangladesh PM for making a noble gesture to Rohingyas.

"Everybody everywhere is appreciating the Bangladesh prime minister for her humanitarian gesture," Ihsanul quoted Abbas as saying.

Hasina said some 700,000 Rohingya refugees were living in Bangladesh under makeshift arrangements. "But Myanmar must take back their nationals."

Abbas apprised the PM of the present situation in Palestine. Hasina reiterated Bangladesh's stance for the cause of the people of Palestine.

## 'MYANMAR MUST STOP ATROCITIES'

Leaders of major countries in a meeting in New York on Monday called upon Myanmar to immediately stop atrocities against its Rohingya people and take back its nationals from Bangladesh.

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, the organiser of the meeting,

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## Rains heap further woes on refugees

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"I have been standing all night holding my belongings and so have my children. We could not sleep at all," Nur Begum said, before breaking down.

In the area, many families began leaving as soon as daylight broke, taking their belongings and heading towards the hillocks to resettle.

Monsoon rains sweeping across Cox's Bazar and Teknaf have compounded the problems of the thousands of Rohingya refugees in the areas.

Many women, with children, still stand besides the roads braving the pouring rain in hopes of getting relief from passing cars.

Laila Moti, who just gave birth to a girl only yesterday, was found in the downpour out in the open. Her baby was nestled under the protective layers of a blanket which had also begun to get soaked. She sat in the mud, waiting in a queue in front of a newly established medical camp in Baghuna. Her eyes narrowed from the immense pain she was suffering.

"I brought my wife here with our newborn for medicine," Syed Azim, her husband said.

Apart from the refugees themselves, the rains have also added a further headache to the government's initiative to relocate the refugees to certain areas for a better relief distribution.

The resettlement drive has lessened the chaos in relief distribution but more needs to be done, aid workers said.

While the roadside camps have mostly been cleared, the refugees from there are now building homes on forested hillside areas seeking higher



Rohingya refugees cross a submerged footbridge across a canal at Balukhali in Ukhiya yesterday. They moved to a new place after their makeshift shelters were flooded due to rain and high tide.

PHOTO: PINAKI ROY

grounds. Those who have come as recently as ten days ago are now resettling in previously uninhabited areas of Balukhali and Baguna.

Around 150 meters away from the Cox's Bazar Highway, new homes were being set up in the forested areas, with refugees abandoning the old ones.

Furthermore, locals in Rezu Aamtoli para, Lomba Beel, Anjuman Para and Shah Pori Dwip said that while over a 100 people were crossing into Bangladesh every day even two days ago, the weather has meant almost no new entrants.

The rough conditions of the Naf river

and cautionary signal 3 have played a role in preventing the Rohingyas from Myanmar from crossing over.

Meanwhile, RAB detected and apprehended 210 Rohingyas from different points in Cox's Bazar. They were promptly sent back to a refugee camp in Balukhali.

## She breaks silence yet remains silent

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groups and the Myanmar government itself have issued reports detailing the causes behind the inter-ethnic bloodshed.

It was an address timed to preempt likely censure of Myanmar at the UN General Assembly in New York -- delivered entirely in English and aimed squarely at an international audience. She had cancelled a planned appearance at the UNGA.

Suu Kyi, whose official title is state counsellor, called for patience and understanding of the unfurling crisis in her "fragile democracy".

"We condemn all human rights violations and unlawful violence. We are committed to the restoration of peace and stability and rule of law throughout the state," Suu Kyi said.

"Action will be taken against all people, regardless of their religion, race and political position, who go against the law of the land and violate human rights."

Suu Kyi vowed to resettle some refugees but offered no solutions to halt the army-led campaign against Rohingyas in Rakhine, where soldiers are accused of burning down villages and shooting fleeing civilians.

Myanmar stood ready, she said, to repatriate refugees in accordance with a "verification" process agreed with Bangladesh in the early 1990s. It was not immediately clear how many would qualify to return.

Long feted in the West as a champion of democracy in the Buddhist-majority country during years of military rule and house arrest, Suu Kyi has faced growing criticism for saying little about abuses faced by the Rohingyas.

Suu Kyi said "the great majority of Muslims in Rakhine State have not joined the exodus" and invited international officials to visit the state to "learn more from the Muslims who have integrated successfully".

She did not use the word "Rohingya" in her speech to describe Muslims living in Rakhine, so it is difficult to ascertain whether she is referring to the state's entire population, or specifically the Rohingya population.

The only time she said the word during her speech was when she referred to the ARSA militant group -- the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army.

Western diplomats and aid officials welcomed the tone of her message, but some doubted if she had done enough to deflect global criticism.

Amnesty International described

her speech as "little more than a mix of untruths and victim-blaming", saying she and her government were "burying their heads in the sand" for ignoring the army's role in the violence.

"There is overwhelming evidence that security forces are engaged in a campaign of ethnic cleansing. While it was positive to hear Aung San Suu Kyi condemn human rights violations in Rakhine state, she is still silent about the role of the security forces in this," said James Gomez, Amnesty International's Regional Director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Supporters and observers say the 72-year-old lacks the authority to rein in the military, which ran the country for 50 years and only recently ceded limited powers to her civilian government.

"She is trying to claw back some degree of credibility with the international community, without saying too much that will get her in trouble with the [military] and Burmese people who don't like the Rohingya in the first place," said Phil Robertson of Human Rights Watch.

Myanmar's generals remain in full charge of security and Suu Kyi did not comment on the military or its operation, except to say there had been "no armed clashes and there have been no clearance operations" since September 5.

However, her domestic audience was happy.

Thousands of supporters cheered and let balloons float into the sky in Yangon as they watched her speech on a big screen. Social media saw a blizzard of posts with the message: "We stand with Aung San Suu Kyi".

The military spokesman was not available for comment. One official familiar with the military's thinking said it would have no objection to her speech.

Suu Kyi said her government had been promoting harmony between the Muslim and largely Buddhist ethnic Rakhine communities. But a government official there did not share her optimism.

"They have no trust for each other," the state's secretary, Tin Maung Swe, told Reuters, adding tension was high.

"The situation is ready to explode."

Suu Kyi said she was committed to recommendations made by an advisory team led by Kofi Annan, which last month suggested a review of a law that links citizenship and ethnicity and leaves most Rohingya stateless.

## REPATRIATION PLEDGE

"Those who have been verified as

refugees from this country will be accepted without any problems," Suu Kyi said.

In less than a month just under half of Rakhine's one-million-strong Rohingyas has poured into Bangladesh, where they languish in overcrowded refugee camps.

The subject of their claims to live in Myanmar is at the heart of a toxic debate about the minority group, who are denied citizenship by the state and considered to be illegal immigrants.

Suu Kyi's repatriation pledge "is new and significant", said Richard Horsey, an independent analyst

based in Myanmar, explaining it would in principle allow for the return of those who can prove residence in Myanmar -- rather than citizenship.

But in Bangladesh, there was anguish among refugees over how they would meet any requirements.

"We don't have any papers," said 55-year-old Abdur Razzak.

"If the government is honestly speaking to resolve our crisis then we are ready to go back now," he added. "Nobody wants to live in such squalid conditions as a refugee."

When queried about identification papers, a number of refugees in a camp in Teknaf told The Daily Star

that they could not either bring any documents while fleeing for life or those were burned in the fires set by the security forces.

Some even pointed out that they had never even received any such documents despite applying for them on several occasions.

## WELCOMED BY INDIA, CHINA AND RUSSIA

"It was an encouraging address and contained a very positive message," India's Ambassador to Myanmar Vikram Misri told the media.

"I think we all appreciate the problems and complex challenges that Myanmar faces," he said.

"The situation that has come about in Rakhine State in recent days is something that has caused a lot of concern to not only people within the country but its neighbours, including us, too."

In his remarks to the media, Misri said India has shared its concerns over the issue at various levels.

He added that while India recognised the right of the authorities to provide security and defend themselves from violent attacks, it was also important to prevent violence against innocent bystanders and civilians.

Hong Liang, Chinese ambassador to Myanmar, said Suu Kyi's speech would improve understanding.

"China's position is very clear. We support the Myanmar government's effort to restore the peace and stability in Rakhine," said the envoy.

"I think this is a very good speech. It will help the international community have a better understanding of the situation here in Myanmar and in Rakhine and help the international community have a better understanding of the position held by the Myanmar government."

Nikolay A Listopadov, Russian ambassador to Myanmar said there was no evidence of ethnic cleansing.

"There are not reliable proofs, evidence to make such a condemnation, genocide and ethnic cleansing, no evidence," said the ambassador.

"As a first step I think it was a good speech, a good message to the international community. I am sure further steps will follow because the message is quite clear that Myanmar is ready to cooperate with the international community, [and] is ready just to pay attention to all the concerns and worries of the international community."

'CATEGORICALLY UNTRUE' Suu Kyi began the address by underscoring the delicate nature of Myanmarese democracy and how little time her own party had been in power.

She claimed that all people living

in Rakhine have access to education and health care services "without discrimination".

But CNN correspondent Ivan Watson, who has travelled to Rakhine and visited Rohingya settlements, said the claim was "categorically untrue".

Suu Kyi claimed government efforts to resolve the conflict have been complicated by what she termed "allegations and counter-allegations."

"We have to listen to all of them. We have to make sure those allegations are based on solid evidence before we take action," she said.

"We want to find out why this exodus is happening. We'd like to talk to those who have fled, as well as those who have stayed."

Watson, who covered the speech, tried to question Suu Kyi about the allegations of ethnic cleansing as she left the auditorium, but was ignored by the state counsellor.

Suu Kyi twice claimed that September 5 was the date of the last reported armed conflict, while simultaneously underscoring that more than "60% of the Muslim villages" remained intact.

Refugee testimonies, however, appear to contradict this, with many claiming that clearance operations are ongoing. The spike in refugee numbers between September 5 and 18 also suggest the conflict is far from over.

Analysts also say Suu Kyi had made a political calculation that speaking out more strongly on the Rohingya would have cost her support within the country.

Rohingya families have lived in Rakhine for decades.

The government does not use the term "Rohingya" and does not recognise the people as an official ethnicity.

Penny Green, a professor of law at Queen Mary University, called out Suu Kyi's connection of the Rohingya to the ARSA militant group as behaviour common among those targeting an ethnic group.

"She chooses to use the word in relation to a terrorist group, that means that is the only identity that Rohingya will be attached to, from her perspective and she hopes from the international perspective."

Green said Suu Kyi's speech was "disingenuous" and "filled with underlying denials" that she said was "typical of the way in which state criminals behave."

[From CNN, Reuters, AFP, New York Times and IANS]

## WHO SAID WHAT

### on Suu Kyi's speech

**VIKRAM MISRI**  
*India's Ambassador to Myanmar*  
"It was an encouraging address and contained a very positive message. I think we all appreciate the problems and complex challenges that Myanmar faces."

**HONG LIANG**  
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"China's position is very clear. We support the Myanmar government's effort to restore the peace and stability in Rakhine."

**NIKOLAY A. LISTOPADOV**  
*Russian ambassador to Myanmar*  
"There are not reliable proofs, evidence to make such a condemnation, genocide and ethnic cleansing, no evidence."

**SEIN WIN**  
*Myanmar defence minister*  
"We will protect the ones who are in line with the law... There are still many Muslim villages. We are taking good care of them," he said, as he arrived for Suu Kyi's speech.

**IN MAUNG SWE**  
*Secretary, Rakhine State govt*  
He praised Suu Kyi for her "transparency" but was not optimistic about her pledge to promote harmony between Muslims and the largely Buddhist ethnic Rakhine communities in the state.  
"The situation is ready to explode. It just needs a single spark."

**PHIL ROBERTSON**  
*Human Rights Watch deputy director, Asia Division*  
In response to Suu Kyi's statement that army clearance operations have ceased since Sept 5 - "If that is true, then who is burning all the villages we've seen in the past two weeks?"

**PAUL EDWARDS**  
*Unicef deputy representative in Myanmar*  
"We have to take at face value what she said about there being no further military operation since Sept 5. But of course none of us really know what's happening there if we're not there."

**MARZUKI DARUSMAN**  
*Chair of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar*  
"Two main issues emerge... the categorical readiness of the government of Myanmar to receive back returnees at any time on the basis of a procedure that will have to be discussed at some point. And secondly, the readiness of the government to undertake to be globally scrutinised by the international community. These two points bode well."

**ANDREW KIRKWOOD**  
*UN Office for Project Services director and representative in Myanmar*  
He welcomed Suu Kyi's announcement that diplomats could travel to Rakhine state to see the situation for themselves.  
"I think that that is a positive statement and we wait to see what follow-up there is."

SOURCE: REUTERS, IANS

## India 'deeply concerned over violence in Rakhine'

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support it in meeting the needs of the refugees.

"We take note that this violence was triggered off by a series of terrorist attacks which led to loss of lives amongst the security forces as well as the civilian population," he said during the interactive dialogue session with Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar.

Subsequent operations by the Myanmar security forces in the State resulted in a large outflow of people. It is imperative that violence is ended and normalcy in the State is restored expeditiously through a solution based on respect for peace, communal harmony, justice, dignity and democratic values.

"We urge that the situation in Rakhine State be handled with restraint, focusing on the welfare of the civilian population," he added.

In the past, Myanmar has been tabling regular reports on internal developments at various UN bodies.

After the submission of the final Report of the Kofi Annan-led UN Special Advisory Commission for Rakhine State on August 24, 2017, the Myanmar government welcomed the "meaningful and long term solutions"

proposed in the report and assured that it will give full consideration to its recommendations with a view to carrying them out to the fullest extent, and within the shortest time, Rajiv said.

Myanmar has also agreed to set out a roadmap for implementation of the recommendations, including immediate establishment of a new Ministerial led committee that would be assisted by an Advisory Board on Rakhine that will include Myanmar and international experts for implementation of the recommendations. The international community must extend full support to the Myanmar government

in its efforts.

"There is a serious problem emerging in Bangladesh which is reportedly hosting over 300,000 refugees [latest estimate puts the figure at 421,000]. India has extended humanitarian relief to Government of Bangladesh to support it in meeting the needs of refugees. The role being played by Bangladesh in extending humanitarian assistance to the refugees deserves recognition," said the Indian diplomat.

It is apparent that the only long-term solution to the situation in Rakhine State is socio-economic and infrastructure development of the

State. Such development would generate employment opportunities and economic activity that should have a positive impact on all the communities living in the State, he noted.

"It is with this understanding that we have recently agreed with Myanmar to provide financial and technical assistance for identified projects to be undertaken in Rakhine State in conjunction with the local authorities."

Specifically, there was agreement to undertake both infrastructure and socio-economic projects, particularly in the spheres of education, health,

agriculture and allied activities, agro-processing, community development, construction of small bridges, upgradation of roads, small power projects, livelihood activity, setting up of training centres, promotion of household crafts, conservation of environment and cultural heritage.

"We are of the firm belief that the international community, including UN agencies, need to continue to engage constructively with the people and Government of Myanmar," Rajiv said.