

Global community steps up relief efforts

US commits about \$32m to meet urgent needs of the Rohingya refugees

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations and the international community are ramping up relief operations for the Rohingya refugees.

The US is providing an additional nearly \$32 million in humanitarian assistance to address the urgent needs of Rohingya as well as internally displaced people in Rakhine and host communities in Bangladesh.

"We applaud the Government of Bangladesh's generosity in responding to this severe humanitarian crisis and appreciate their continued efforts to ensure assistance reaches people in need," Office of the Spokesperson of US Department of State in Washington said yesterday.

Also, Saudi King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz yesterday allocated \$15 million for the Rohingya refugees fleeing a military crackdown in Rakhine.

Saudi Arabia said it would deploy a humanitarian relief team to

Bangladesh to help the refugees urgent in need of aid.

South Korea also yesterday announced humanitarian aid of \$1.5 million for emergency relief operations for a large number of Rohingyas.

The US said the rapid influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees has strained resources and overwhelmed humanitarian agencies and local authorities.

Through this support, the US will help provide emergency support to more than 400,000 displaced people in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

"The US calls upon all parties to allow for unhindered humanitarian access to people in Rakhine State, Burma, and we also encourage other donors to join us in providing additional humanitarian assistance for those affected by the crisis," according to a statement of the spokesperson's office.

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Finding no other means of taking her to the medics, an ailing Rohingya woman's son and grandson put her inside a lungi and carry her on a muddy path in Kutupalong.

PHOTO: PINAKI ROY

Unite, act now

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"The state-sponsored propaganda to identify Rohingyas as Bengalis must stop and the Muslim brotherly countries should help Bangladesh with urgent humanitarian assistance till they return to Myanmar."

She said military operations by the Myanmar authorities have created havoc in Rakhine State and has caused the largest exodus of Rohingyas of all time.

Over 400,000 Rohingyas have entered Bangladesh since August 25 and 60 percent of them are August. It's an unbearable human catastrophe. I myself have visited them and listened to the stories of their grave sufferings, particularly of women and children."

Bangladesh invited OIC leaders to visit Rakhine to hear from Rohingyas how they fled the persecution in Myanmar.

She said Bangladesh had already been hosting another 400,000 Rohingyas for the last three decades. "So, altogether we're hosting about 800,000 Rohingyas in Bangladesh. Despite space and resource constraints, we're providing them with shelter, food and other emergency services."

The PM said although Myanmar claims that the Rohingyas are "illegal immigrants from Bangladesh", all the historical records suggest that they have been living in Rakhine for centuries. "Myanmar is forcing them to leave the Rohingya Muslims through a planned and organised process. First, they have been excluded from the list of recognized ethnic groups of Myanmar. Then in 1982, they were denied their right to citizenship. Later, they were sent to IDP camps in their own country."

Hasina said the OIC members might have also seen in the media that Myanmar is planting landmines along their stretch of the border to stop return of Rohingyas to their homeland.

TAKE BACK ROHINGYAS: OIC

The OIC has urged the Myanmar government to take urgent steps for the sustainable return of Rohingya refugees and internally and externally displaced Rohingya Muslims to their homeland, in safety, security and dignity and with ensured livelihood.

The heads of state and government of

the OIC member states recently held a meeting to discuss the current situation in Myanmar's Rakhine.

The meeting was held on the sidelines of the 1st OIC Summit of Science and Technology in Astana, Kazakhstan, on Saturday, which is also Turkey's National Day.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the chair of the OIC Summit, the Bangladesh foreign minister said yesterday in Dhaka.

The OIC expressed grave concern over the recent systematic brutal acts perpetrated by security forces against the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, which constitute a serious and blatant

dispersion and discriminatory practices against Rohingya Muslims, as well as the continuous attempts to obliterate their Islamic culture and identity, including defiling them from household lists.

The OIC leaders stressed that the Myanmar government should eliminate the root causes, including the denial of citizenship based on the 1982 Citizenship Act which has led to statelessness and deprival of the rights of the Rohingya Muslims and to continued suppression and discrimination against them.

The organisation urged its member states to extend necessary support to Bangladesh to enable it to face the flow of refugees into its territories.

The OIC welcomed the recommendations of the Rakhine advisory commission and urged the Myanmar government to take concrete steps towards their earliest implementation.

The meeting called on the OIC members to provide support for the implementation of the recommendations.

It invited OIC member states to join the efforts of the international community towards lifting all restrictions on freedom of movement in Rakhine and ensuring an inclusive and transparent citizenship verification process that leaves no individual unregistered nor hinders their access to essential social services, including education and health care.

MALAYSIA WARNS OF REGIONAL INSTABILITY

Malaysia and its neighbouring Asean countries would bear the brunt of serious regional instability if the grave situation in Rakhine was not addressed.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman, reports Malaysian Digest.

He was addressing the meeting of the OIC Contact Group in New York.

The precarious situation provides a fertile breeding ground for recruitment of extremists," he said, adding it is a well-known fact that the Islamic State is now seeking to make South East Asia and South Asia as its next and bedrock.

He stressed that the Myanmar government must ensure the return of internally displaced people and restore the status of the Rohingyas.

"We must move now. We must move more often. We must save lives. We must ensure that the ancestor land of the Rohingyas is restored."

The meeting urged the Myanmar government to honour its obligations under the international law and human rights covenants, and to take all measures to immediately halt acts of violation of international laws.

It called upon the Myanmar government to accept the UN Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission to conduct a thorough and independent investigation into all the alleged violations of international human rights law and bring the perpetrators to justice.

The OIC leaders said Myanmar should take all necessary measures to restore peace and inter-community

PM Sheikh Hasina at a meeting of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on Rohingya crisis at the UN headquarters on Tuesday.

of the international law.

The organisation reiterated its call to the Myanmar government to revive the agreement to open an OIC office for humanitarian affairs in Yangon after signing a Memorandum of Cooperation with the OIC to that effect.

The purpose of the OIC office was to provide pure humanitarian assistance without distinction between the victims of violence.

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"We are trying our best to ensure the provision of the best healthcare for the refugees," the Directorate General of Health, Dr Mohammad Abul Kalam, said.

"We want to increase our services but we do not have enough doctors. Doctors don't want to leave their posts and come here," said Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, executive director of Coast Trust.

In Cox's Bazar Sadar Upazila Hospital, the condition is worsening.

"We have 250 bed capacity but there are more than 500 patients. Of that, we have 100 beds reserved for Rohingya patients in two blocks bearing serious injuries such as bullet, bullet wounds, broken legs etc; one block is for males and another for females. But we are steadily getting overburdened," the Superintendent of the hospital, Dr Puwson was.

He added that the serious nature of the injuries mean they need a lot of attention.

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Medical facilities stretched to limit

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become difficult to negotiate, accumulating to two to ten days.

With a government directive ordering all roads to be dredged directly to camps, oncoming trucks, along with the thousands of people walking on it all day, are breaking the roads even further.

Nasima, though not the only survivor, there are many others like her. The growing number of people needing medical care is growing every day.

Dr Jamshed Haque, an aid worker at Cox's Bazar Civil Surgeon office said that camps and medical teams are working around the clock to deal with the ongoing crisis.

In Ukhaia we have 21 medical teams and 15 more in Teknaf. They are made up by both government and non-government organisations," he said.

In Ukhaia, eight of the teams are formed by the government and six in Teknaf.

The main targets of these medical teams are children from the ages 0-15. They plan on providing Vitamin A capsules, polio and rubella vaccines to 12,000 babies have been born in no-man's land. Alarming, an aid worker said for the organisation added that many women are opting for home birth over visiting distant medical centres.

In a local upazila complex, 78 children have already been born.

But health may not a priority for the refugees. An aid worker said that the rain and the mud has made many refugees

lose their shelter and now looking for a home and food, forcing them back to Bangladesh.

Macron assured him of doing his best to find a solution.

Pro Yunus also told Macron about the upcoming Global Social Business.

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ROHINGYA CRISIS Int'l people's tribunal reveals horrific details of atrocities

NEW STRAITS TIMES, Kuala Lumpur

A woman from Laung Don village fled her house when Myanmar soldiers came into the village, leaving behind her sister who had just given birth and her newborn baby.

Later, upon her return to the village, she found their bodies, said Razia Sultan, a human rights activist and Chittagong-based lawyer who visited the Kutupalong Refugee Camp on December 21-24 last year and interviewed the woman along with 20 other female refugees.

The woman told her that altogether 16 of their children had been killed, injured or declared missing.

Razia revealed the details in her evidence presentation on the second day of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal held at the Law Faculty of Universiti Mataya today.

"Two of their babies were burned alive, one had his throat cut while

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Suu Kyi denies

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forces, drawing cool international responses.

"We've never changed our stand,"

Suu Kyi said in an interview with Radio Free Asia, when asked if she had softened her stance on the military, which she challenged for years in her campaign for democracy.

"Our goal has been national reconciliation from the very beginning. We have never criticised the military itself, but only their actions. We may disagree on these types of actions."

She cited her unsuccessful bid in parliament to change a military-drafted constitution, which bars her from the presidency and gives the military a veto over charter reforms.

"We'll continue to bring changes within the parliament. I've stood firm with the military before and still do now," she told Radio Free Asia.

She again did not refer to the accusations that the military is engaged in ethnic cleansing.

Suu Kyi, the daughter of Myanmar's independence leader who founded the army, has for years been feted in the West as a champion of democracy during years of military rule and house arrest.

But the Nobel Peace laureate has faced growing criticism for saying little about abuses faced by the Rohingya.

Rights monitors and fleeing Rohingya say the military and Rakhine Buddhists are behind a campaign of ethnic cleansing aimed at driving out the mostly stateless Muslim population.

They were addressing the meeting of the OIC Contact Group in New York.

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DESTROYING REPUTATION

Suu Kyi condemned all rights violations

and said she was committed to the restoration of peace and the rule of law.

On the return of refugees, she said Myanmar is trying to stop a verification process under a 1992 agreement with Bangladesh and "refugees from this country will be accepted without any problem".

She also said diplomats could visit the conflict zone.

In a phone call to Suu Kyi, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson welcomed Myanmar's commitment to allow the return of refugees, but urged it to facilitate aid to those affected by the violence and to address "deeply troubling" rights abuses allegations, the State Department said.

US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Patrick Murphy is in Myanmar this week. He will travel to Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State, to meet government officials and representatives of different communities but is not seeking to travel to the conflict zone.

China, which has close economic and diplomatic ties with Myanmar, has called for understanding of the government's efforts to protect stability.

Britain said it had suspended its military training programme in Myanmar and French President Emmanuel Macron condemned "unacceptable ethnic cleansing".

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the General Assembly: "The authorities in Myanmar must end the military operations, allow unhindered humanitarian access and recognize the right of refugees to return in safety and dignity."

Twenty-two members of the US Congress wrote to Tillerson calling for a "strong, meaningful" response and the head of the influential Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Bob Corker, said Suu Kyi risked "destroying" her reputation as a force for positive change.

"She had yet another opportunity today to stand up for the Rohingya minority ... but instead refused to acknowledge the military's role in the ongoing atrocities," he said.

Western governments that backed Suu Kyi's campaign against military rule still see her as the best hope for Myanmar's political and economic transition.

UK trade union suspends Suu Kyi's award

BRISTOL UNIVERSITY ALSO REVIEWING ITS AWARD

STAR REPORT

Amid growing criticism over Aung San Suu Kyi's inaction to the Rohingya crisis, Unison, one of Britain's largest trade unions, has suspended an award given to her while she was a political prisoner.

Besides Unison, a number of British institutions have said they are either reviewing or suspending honours bestowed on Suu Kyi during her campaign for democracy under Myanmar's oppressive military junta. The Guardian reported yesterday.

The move comes hours after the UK's suspension of an educational training course for Myanmar military which is accused of burning Rohingya villages and killing the Muslim minority in Myanmar.

"The situation facing the Rohingya of Myanmar is appalling," Margaret McKee, president of Unison, told The Guardian.

"Aung San Suu Kyi's honorary membership of Unison has been suspended, and we hope that she responds to international pressure."

Bristol University, one of a string of British universities that awarded honorary degrees to Suu Kyi during her time in opposition, also said it was

stripping Suu Kyi of her honorary presidency.

"We will be actively removing Aung San Suu Kyi's honorary presidency as a symbol of our opposition to her inaction in the face of genocide," said its General Secretary Mahatir Pasha.

Over the last three decades Suu Kyi has been awarded with honorary degrees from several UK universities, including Glasgow, Bath and Cambridge. She also received other honours from different UK organisations.

ASEAN LAWMAKERS SHELVE RESOLUTION ON ROHINGYA

Lawmakers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) failed to adopt a unified stand on the

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