

# \$200m needed in 6 months

## UN estimates on Rohingya crisis

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

As the number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh edges towards half a million, the United Nations estimates \$200 million will be needed over the next six months to help the Myanmar nationals.

Meanwhile, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi is expected to arrive here today on a four-day visit to get a firsthand experience of the Rohingya crisis and meet the refugees.

"Right now we're looking at \$200 million," Robert D Watkins, the UN resident coordinator in Bangladesh, told Reuters yesterday about the aid.

"It has not been confirmed, but it is a ballpark figure based on the estimates on the information we have," he said, adding, "we base these appeals on immediate needs, and right now we know they are going to be here for six months."

On September 9, the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh had appealed for \$77 million to assist the Rohingyas who arrived in Bangladesh after violence erupted in their homeland of Myanmar on August 25.

At that time, their population was 290,000, but now it is nearly half a

million, according to UN officials.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees is visiting Bangladesh for a second time in around two and a half months. Filippo Grandi was here during June 8-11 when he visited two Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar and urged the international community to continue supporting Bangladesh through resource mobilisation.

During this visit, UNHCR sources in Geneva and Dhaka told The Daily Star yesterday, the UN relief agency chief would hold talks with high government officials, UN agencies colleagues and visit the newly-arrived Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar. He is scheduled to leave on Tuesday.

UN officials in Dhaka and Cox's Bazar said Bangladesh government, UN agencies and humanitarian organisations were struggling to help the Rohingyas because of their huge number.

Robert D Watkins told Reuters that the exodus of Rohingyas since August 25 was much bigger than the flows sparked by ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

"It's different from that here because the numbers are so much bigger...massive numbers in such a short period of time," he said.

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A BGB official distributes ID cards among the newly registered Rohingya refugees in Kutupalong of Teknaf, Cox's Bazar, yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## PM urges quick, effective UN steps

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maintained a "zero tolerance" policy for terrorism.

She thanked the UN Security Council members and the UN secretary-general for their proactive attempts to denounce the atrocities against Rohingyas and call for bringing peace and stability in Rakhine.

"We don't want war. We want peace... we want people's wellbeing, not destruction of humanity. We want sustainable development. Let this be our collective goal."

The PM recalled Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's very first speech at the UNGA in 1974 in which he had expressed Bangalee nation's commitment to peace and justice.

"I know that the souls of our martyrs join us in pledging that the Bangalee nation fully commits itself to the building of a world order in which the aspirations of all men for peace and justice will be realised," she quoted Bangabandhu as telling the UNGA.

She stressed the need for resuming the Middle East peace process and called for ending all forms of hostilities and discriminations against the brotherly Palestinian people.

She said the UN had a potential role in developing a peace-building architecture while Bangladesh awaited "bold and innovative proposals" from the UN secretary-general on financing for "sustaining peace".

The PM renewed her call to stop the supply of weapons to terrorists and terror financing and settlement of all international disputes peacefully as terrorism and violent extremism posed

a major threat to peace, stability and development.

"Terrorists have no religion, belief or race... Having been a target of a number of terrorist attacks, I personally empathise with the victims of terrorism and appreciate their need for protection."

She also called upon the UN to address the growing threats emanated from the cyber space to prevent money laundering, terror financing and other transnational organised crimes.

Hasina criticised the use of religion to justify violent extremism saying families, women, youth, media and religious leaders at the community level should be involved to offset the spread of violent extremism.

She said as a major troop and police-contributing country to the UN, Bangladesh underscores the importance of upholding effectiveness and credibility of UN peacekeeping operations.

"We shall maintain our own capability and readiness, remain open to further pledges, enhance the scope of our peacekeeping training, and deploy more female peacekeepers," she added.

She reaffirmed the "zero tolerance" approach of her government towards any allegation of sexual exploitation and abuse against any member of the peacekeeping force.

The premier announced Bangladesh's token contribution of \$100,000 for the UN Peace Building Fund and contribution of another \$100,000 to the Victim Support Fund set up for the victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

She highlighted her government's position on different global issues, including safe migration, refugee crisis, climate change, SDGs and socio-economic development.

Recalling her experience abroad, she said: "I can feel their [refugee] pain as I along with my younger sister had been a refugee for six years after my father, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and almost all members of my family were assassinated in 1975."

About climate change, Hasina said the Paris Climate Agreement remains Bangladesh's bastion of hope for climate justice. "By recognising the climate vulnerability, we are building resilience against the grave impacts of climate change."

Bangladesh believes in the potentials of Green Economy in advancing the conservation and Blue Economy for sustainable use of the ocean and seas, she added.

About the country's socio-economic development, the PM said Bangladesh has achieved exemplary success in building resilience against flood and other natural disasters.

"Crop intensification and invention of water resistant crops have helped us achieve self sufficiency in food. We have efficiently responded to the massive flood that has stricken the entire south Asian region this year."

She said as a member of the High Level Panel on Water, she attached high priority to implement its comprehensive action plan.

"Bangladesh has ensured access to safe water for 87 percent of its population by 2015, and we aim full coverage

of our population by 2030," the PM told the UNGA.

The Bangladesh government was fully committed to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as those complement its vision to transform the country into a middle-income one by 2021 and a developed one by 2041, she added.

Hasina said Bangladesh's economy posted a GDP growth rate of over 7.24 percent in 2016-17 and its foreign currency reserve reached \$32.1 billion.

The level of poverty came down from 56.7 percent in 1991 to 23.2 percent today while the per capita income was projected to rise to \$1,602 by the end of the current fiscal year, which was \$543 in 2005-06 fiscal year, she said.

People's life expectancy increased to almost 72 years, said the PM, adding that these figures were indicative of Bangladesh's inclusive development.

"To ensure inclusive growth, promote investment and employment opportunities for all, we have taken an initiative to develop 100 special economic zones around the country," she said.

Mentioning that youngsters of Bangladesh were the main movers in realising her government's vision for a knowledge-based "Digital Bangladesh", she said the country would launch its first satellite -- Bangabandhu Statelitte-1 -- into the orbit in December.

The government was working towards creating an environment to allow the youths to pursue transformative education, find decent jobs and turn into truly global citizens, she said.

## Expecting mothers

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Three days before the Eid-ul-Azha, she along with her son Mojnur Alam, brother-in-law and parents-in-law fled their home at Fakirabazar in Mongdu as they saw their village go up in flames.

Walking through the hills for five days with occasional stopovers, they reached Baishbari border of Bandarban. All of them now live in a 15-feet-by-8-feet hut for Tk 2,000 a month at Pashchimpara of Kutupalong.

To date, the malnourished mother did not receive any relief.

"I'm relying on the food that my relatives can manage to get," she said, adding that Mojur was suffering from fever and diarrhoea.

Like her, Rashida Begum, 24, who lost her husband, is six months' pregnant. She too needs food and urgent medical attention, which she hardly gets.

The mother of three sons -- Safayat, Junayed and Aiyaz -- fled to Bangladesh about 15 days ago.

Aiyaz, her youngest son aged two and a half, is suffering from fever for the past few days. So keeping her two elder sons at the camp, she went to the Kutupalong Community Clinic to get some medicine for him yesterday. But the clinic was closed as it was weekend. She returned to the camp empty-handed.

Abdur Nur Bulbul, coordinator of the medical unit of the Relief and Rohingya Refugee Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), said there were medical camps at the registered Rohingya camps where thousands of

pregnant women were being treated.

But those are not enough to meet the demand of all the expecting mothers, he said.

Also, many of these women do not know the medical camps and, at the moment, they are more concerned about getting food than medical care.

Lutfu Aktar, a midwife at Kutupalong Primary Medical Camp, said they delivered 50 babies so far and that many women were expecting their babies any day.

Most of these women are suffering from acidity and stomach cramps, she said, adding that they were struggling to provide service to all the women due to manpower shortage.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation has set up a control room to monitor health issues affecting the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar.

"The Control Room will help strengthen disease surveillance system and daily reporting of morbidity and mortality," said Dr N Paranietharan, WHO representative to Bangladesh, while inaugurating the control room along with the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

"We need to scale up quickly. If we don't drastically improve water and sanitation we will face water-borne diseases including cholera," he warned.

The control room will help in the management of health situation, as the population is very mobile, dispersed in 68 camps, and undocumented. Also, there is very limited information about their health needs.

It will also coordinate the medical care efforts by various government and nongovernment actors.

## Flood-hit people's plight not over

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raising allegations of inadequate rehabilitation support from the government.

In Lalmonirhat, 102,750 families were hit hard by flood. Of them, 12,000 became homeless, and the district administration has so far provided 1,200 families with corrugated iron sheets and money as rehabilitation support.

Rezaul Alam Sarker, acting deputy commissioner (general) of the district, said each of the families got one bundle of iron sheets and Tk 3,000.

"We would continue the rehabilitation support for the homeless flood victims," he added.

A number of the affected people said they are surviving on relief support from some non-governmental organisations and individuals.

"I along with my five family members still depend on relief as I became jobless after the flood," said Nazu Mia of Basuriya village in Lalmonirhat Sadar.

The 55-year-old labourer said he got 25 kg of rice, 10 kg of wheat, five kg of pulse, four litres of edible oil, dry food and Tk 2,000 from different NGOs, clubs and kind-hearted persons.

He said they got support from the government initially, but that stopped recently.

ADC Rezaul Alam Sarker, however, said flood victims in the district have been getting sufficient relief support from the government and NGOs.

District Relief and Rehabilitation officials said 620 tonnes of rice and Tk 20 lakh were distributed among the flood-hit families.

Maidul Islam, project manager of non-governmental organisation RDRS

Bangladesh, said his organisation provided rice, edible oil, pulse, salt, dry food to 10,000 flood affected families over the last seven days.

The picture is similar in Dinajpur, which was also hit hard by flood. Many families in the district remain homeless for failing to rebuild their houses due to lack of rehabilitation support from the government.

Hazrat Ali of Bolorampur village in Kaharol upazila said he was yet to get any government support for rebuilding his house.

"We need at least Tk 40,000 for reconstructing the house which was washed away on August 13. So far we have been able to install only the roof with the help of my relatives," he said.

However, some people in Kasba and Ishwargram areas said they received corrugated iron sheets and money for rebuilding houses.

According to district relief and rehabilitation officials, around 59,000 houses were damaged by flood in eight upazilas of the district.

In six upazilas of Sirajganj, around four lakh flood victims are still suffering due to lack of rehabilitation support.

Floodwater damaged 5,548 houses completely and 34,053 houses partially, said the district relief and rehabilitation office.

"We have already prepared a list of damaged houses. We have sought a fund of Tk 101.94 crore for rehabilitation of the homeless but it is yet to be sanctioned," said Md Abdur Rahim, district rehabilitation officer.

In Tangail, floodwater is yet to recede in some parts of Bhuapur upazila where many people are still staying in makeshift structures on embankments and at the roadside.

"Our house is still under water," said day labourer Motaleb Mia of Matikata village.

He along with his wife and three children now lives on Pingna-Jokarchar embankment.

According to the district relief and rehabilitation office, 5.26 lakh people of 771 villages in eight upazilas were affected by flood.

Reports on the flood damage have already been sent to the ministry concerned, said one of the officials there.

Tangail DC Khan Mohammad Nurul Amin said the rehabilitation work would start soon.

[Our correspondents from Lalmonirhat, Dinajpur, Pabna and Tangail contributed to the report]

## Army to help

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administration, donors and NGOs have built 26,000 sheds in 12 slums in Ukhia and Teknaf.

The administration has been distributing cooked food among one lakh refugees for the last two days, he said.

In Balukhali area of Ukhia, 2,000 acres of land have been allocated for building 14,000 sheds for 85,000 Rohingya families.

Mobile courts have, meanwhile, arrested and punished 212 for extorting and swindling the refugees, he added.

Twenty-two special police teams are working on maintaining law and order in the Rohingya settlements.

Eleven check posts run by police and border guards are preventing the refugees from spreading across the country. The check posts have intercepted 5,119 Rohingyas and sent them back to the camps in Ukhia and Teknaf, he added.

## Fresh fires

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Chaung Zay village in nearby Buthidaung township, according to the government.

The statement said "terrorists" were to blame for the blast, without specifying if they were linked to the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) -- the Rohingya militant group behind the ambushes on police posts.

No deaths or injuries were reported in either incident.

Myanmar's government admits that scores of villages have been burned down over the past month.

But it has previously accused Rohingya militants of setting the fires and driving the communal violence that has also displaced some 30,000 Buddhists and Hindus.

The government has blocked independent media access to the conflict zone

in northern Rakhine, making it difficult to verify the swirl of claims and counter-claims that has amplified Myanmar's already bitter ethnic divides.

Suu Kyi, who lacks control over the army in a delicate power-sharing agreement, broke her silence on the crisis Tuesday in a televised address pitched to an international community baffled by her failure to speak up for the Rohingya.

The minority is denied citizenship by the state and has been the target of festering Islamophobia in mainly Buddhist Myanmar for years.

The Nobel laureate expressed sympathy for the "suffering of all people" swept up in the violence.

But she also tried to paint a glass-half-full picture of the situation in Rakhine, announcing that "more than 50 percent of the villages of Muslims are intact."

## Festival cost

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held between September 27 and September 30.

As many as 30,077 mandaps (make-shift temples) will be set up across the country, 231 of those in Dhaka city, he said.

Last year, the number was 29,395.

Pointing at the rise, Hindu leaders lamented that though the number of mandaps has increased, their population is shrinking in the country for what they said was repression on the minority group.

Saying that communal and militant attacks shadowed last year's celebrations, the Parishad leaders said they are aware of the incidents of dismantling

idols of the goddesses in Gazipur, Manikganj, Dinajpur, Satkhira, Magura and Kushtia.

They urged the local Hindu community leaders to be more vigilant to avert any untoward situation during the festival.

The Parishad demanded that the government facilitate uninterrupted supply of power and drinking water at the mandaps during the Puja.

The government should declare a three-day public holiday during the Puja to be celebrated on September 27-30, they said.

The leaders added they have given special instruction to all of their wing organisations to uphold the sanctity of both the Durga Puja and Muharram.

## Correction

In one of our reports published in The Daily Star yesterday with the headline "Take Back Rohingyas", the US ambassador was quoted as saying that his country was considering "45 million US dollars more in food assistance". The ambassador actually said "4 to 5 million US dollars more in food assistance." We regret the error.

## Recognise

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an extreme form of genocide during the nine-month Liberation War against Pakistan in 1971 when three million innocent people were killed and more than 200,000 women were violated.

Hasina said the Pakistan military had launched the heinous "Operation Searchlight" on March 25, 1971, which was the beginning of the genocide featured by targeted elimination of individuals on the ground of religion, race and political belief.

"Intellectuals were also killed brutally. To pay homage to the victims of the genocide, our parliament has recently declared March 25 as the Genocide Day."

The premier said recognition to March 25 and past tragedies was expected to guide the world to a situation where such atrocities would never take place again.

In this regard, she pointed out her government's daunting task of bringing the perpetrators of the genocide to justice through Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal.

The Jatiya Sangsad on March 11 unanimously adopted a resolution to observe March 25 as the Genocide Day.

Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee and different other organisations have long been demanding that March 25 be declared as the Genocide Day.