

## REFUGEE REPATRIATION

## 'Myanmar to set up a working group'

CHANNEL NEWSASIA, Yangon

Myanmar government will set up a working group to conduct a systematic verification process for "urgent repatriation" of refugees -- hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas who have fled Rakhine state to Bangladesh over the past few weeks, according to the office of the country's de facto leader and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

The repatriation will be carried out in accordance with the agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh in 1993, according to a statement posted on the office's Facebook page on Friday night (Sep 22).

The decision was reached at a meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and members of the Implementation Committee for the Recommendations on Rakhine State in the country's capital, Nay Pyi Taw.

She also highlighted the importance of the verification process, the designation of places to receive those who have fled Myanmar, the establishment of the Working Group for the verification process, and the rehabilitation and resettlement programmes not only for the Muslims but also for Rakhines, Mro, Daing-net and Mramgyi as well as the

Hindu minority, the statement said.

The Myanmar government will also organise a trip for foreign diplomats to Rakhine State next week. The decision came days after Aung San Suu Kyi's televised address, where she invited diplomats to visit the troubled state and speak to Muslim residents who have stayed amid the ongoing exodus of more than 420,000 Rohingyas.

The mass migration was prompted by a deadly attack on 30 Rakhine official posts by ARSA. Twelve people died in the incident, which triggered "clearance operations" by government security forces.

Their "counter-insurgency" offensive took place amid allegations of large-scale murder, mass rape, torture and arson attacks on Rohingyas and drew harsh criticism from the global community on Aung San Suu Kyi and her government, which won a landslide victory in a historic general election in 2015.

The Friday meeting also concluded that Myanmar will share lists of "terrorist attackers" with the Bangladeshi government, INTERPOL and the United Nations. It will also once again invite Bangladesh's Home Affairs Minister to discuss bilateral cooperation on border security.



Rohingya children sit in front of a roadside shop by Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Hunger, diseases plague infants

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the UN agencies, an estimate shared by other national and international NGOs working on the Rohingyas.

Despite efforts by the government, UN agencies and NGOs, the refugees have been suffering from acute shortage of food, drinking water, latrines and medicine owing to the sudden large influx in such a short period.

Apart from housing and food scarcity, diseases have become a common problem. Fever, cold, pneumonia, diarrhoea are widespread. Open defecation in the settlements is adding to the problem.

International humanitarian group, Doctors Without Borders, feared there might be a public health emergency under such circumstances. Physicians say that while the adults may withstand certain shocks, it will be very difficult for the children, especially infants.

Nutritionists and child specialists say the infants who are going through these adverse conditions in the

Rohingya settlements face serious risks of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and physical and mental impairment in the future.

Dr Tahmeed Ahmed, senior director of nutrition and clinical services at icddr, said the infants who are born in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar or in Rakhine before fleeing to Bangladesh will face serious malnutrition in a few months.

"There are high risks of mortality among these infants if they are affected by diseases like diarrhoea or pneumonia," he said. Even if they survive, their brains may not develop normally, as the lactating mothers are not having proper food and may not be filling the nutritional requirement of at least 2100 kilocalories, including enough proteins.

The early months are the most important period for brain development, Dr Tahmeed Ahmed noted. On the other hand, these infants will also not develop a strong immune system, which means any disease will affect

them very fast, he told The Daily Star.

In the absence of clean drinking water, sanitary latrines, adequate hygiene practices and good shelters, coupled with changing weather patterns, it is very likely that these infants will be affected by cold, fever, pneumonia and diarrhoea.

Another physician, who works for an international NGO and is visiting the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, said all the Rohingyas faced serious physical and mental trauma before fleeing their homes.

They saw their houses burning and relatives tortured or killed, he said, adding: "Imagine [the condition of] the children and pregnant women who witnessed those incidents. Then, they walked for days to reach Bangladesh, traversing through hills, jungles and rivers, all the while starving."

And, after arriving in Bangladesh, these pregnant or lactating mothers are experiencing a very adverse situation.

Under such circumstances, mothers are not going to give birth to a strong, healthy baby, he said.

"Lactating mothers need special food -- protein and rich in iron. Rohingya mothers are not getting that food," the physician said. Without that, their babies are also not getting enough nutrition.

If this continues for six more months, they will face acute malnutrition that will lead to physical and mental difficulties, he added.

Dr Tahmeed Ahmed of icddr, suggested arranging supplementary food and necessary vaccination for the infants and the lactating mothers.

The influx began on August 25 following a major Myanmar military crackdown. According to a recent AFP report, the number of people coming into Bangladesh has decreased. "Almost all the people I know have arrived in Bangladesh," Yusuf Majihi, a Rohingya leader at a camp in Balukhal, near Cox's Bazar reportedly told AFP.

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According to witness accounts, independent reporting, and photos and video recordings, Myanmar soldiers have in recent weeks laid antipersonnel landmines at key crossing points on Burma's border with Bangladesh.

Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that Burmese military personnel also planted mines on roads inside northern Rakhine State prior to their attacks on predominantly Rohingya villages.

According to BGB officials, at least five people have been killed and 12 injured from landmine blasts.

The Landmine Monitor reported that Myanmar forces have consistently used antipersonnel mines in numerous locations along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border since 1999, but this use had been abating in recent years.

Myanmar's commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing however, in a Facebook post said Rohingya militants planted a "home-made mine" that exploded in between a mosque and madrasa Buthidaung township on Friday.

He accused the militants of trying to drive out the villagers who have remained in Mi Chaung Zay, an argument that analysts say makes little sense for a group whose power depends on the networks it has built across Rohingya communities.

No one was reported injured in the explosion.

**KAILASH SATYARTHI DISAPPOINTED** Meanwhile, Indian Nobel Peace laureate Kailash Satyarthi, said he is hugely disappointed with Suu Kyi's stand on the Rohingya issue, calling it among this "era's biggest humanitarian crises", reports AP.

Satyarthi said Myanmar government's handling of the crisis is "bad and unacceptable".

"Almost the entire Nobel Peace laureate community is hugely disappointed with our fellow Nobel laureate Suu Kyi. We have written to her," he said during his tour in Assam.

"The politics aside, it is a humanitarian crisis of gigantic proportions and Suu Kyi has to deal with that from that perspective."

Myanmar's de facto leader Suu Kyi has come under fire for downplaying the violence and failing to condemn the military crackdown against the Rohingyas, a marginalised group the government considers illegal "Bengali" immigrants.

**UNSC MEET SOUGHT NEXT WEEK**

France, Britain, the United States and four other countries have asked the UN Security Council to meet next week to discuss the ongoing violence in Myanmar, according to a request seen by AFP on Friday.

The seven countries, including Egypt, Kazakhstan, Senegal and Sweden, want UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to brief the council on Myanmar's military campaign.

The Ethiopian presidency of the council said it was holding consultations to set a time for the meeting, reports AFP.

**US FOR URGENT ACTION**

The United States wants Myanmar to take urgent action to end violence in

Rakhine, a US official said on Friday, reports Reuters.

"We think, urgently, actions need to be taken to stop this violence and facilitate humanitarian assistance, lower the rhetoric, lower the tension and ... start doing the hard work to solve the longer-standing problems," US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Patrick Murphy told reporters.

Murphy, who spent three days in Myanmar this week, said there were "many points of responsibility" and he wanted to see everyone follow through on commitments Suu Kyi made to uphold rights and the law in an address to the nation on Tuesday.

"There's the elected government, there are the security forces which have authorities that don't fall under the purview of the civilian elected government, there are local leaders and there is the broader population, among which there are many emotions and many tensions," he said.

"Significant responsibility sits with security authorities and local officials in Rakhine state and we are looking for their cooperation to make these commitments a reality," Murphy told reporters on a conference call from Bangkok.

The Trump Administration is considering limiting US ties with Myanmar's military in response to its recent violence against the country's Rohingya Muslims, Time magazine reported on Thursday quoting a White House official.

"Until Burma's security forces act in accordance with the rule of law and stop the violence and displacement, moving forward with such engagement will be difficult," a National Security Council spokesperson told the magazine.

In another development, Saudi Arabia yesterday condemned the government of Myanmar's "policy of repression" against minority Rohingya Muslims.

"My country is gravely concerned and condemns the policy of repression and forced displacement carried out by the government of Myanmar against the Rohingya minority," Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said in a speech at the United Nations General Assembly.

**'SEPARATE CRISIS'** Pierre Peron, spokesman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Myanmar, said a separate crisis is unfolding on multiple fronts, reports Reuters.

"Many ongoing humanitarian activities that existed before August 25 have still not resumed," said Peron. In northern Rakhine, tens of thousands of people, most of them Rohingya, are displaced but haven't crossed into Bangladesh.

Closer to Sittwe, 1,40,000 Rohingyas displaced by previous religious unrest are confined to squalid camps. They depend on foreign aid that has been severely restricted since August 25.

"For the sake of vulnerable people in all communities in Rakhine State, urgent measures must be taken to allow vital humanitarian activities to resume," Peron said.

## Rohingya child dies

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over to Anjuman Mufidul Islam, a charity organisation, for burial, said CMCH Police Outpost's Assistant Sub-inspector Alauddin Talukdar.

With the infant, three Rohingyas have died so far at the CMCH since August 25 when they started coming to

the hospital, he added.

In all, 135 Rohingyas have been admitted to the hospital since then. Of them, 55 have been discharged and sent to Teknaf Rohingya camps and the rest 80 are still being treated there, according to police and hospital sources.

## 2 Myanmar journalists released

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Barua, lawyer of the photojournalists, said they were trying to get passports and other belongings back from police after being released from Cox's Bazar jail.

They will have to get permission from the court to fly back home, he added.

"They [photojournalists] can leave Bangladesh once charges against them are dropped, and it depends on the

police investigation report."

Court Inspector Didarul Islam said the legal procedures against the two journalists were on and they must appear before the court whenever hearing on the charges would take place.

"They need to stay in Bangladesh as they will have to appear before court during hearing."

Meanwhile, the Committee to Protect Journalists has been demand-

ing immediate release of the Myanmar journalists and dropping of all the charges against them.

A New York-based non-profit, non-government organisation that works for press freedom, CPJ said the arrest of Minzayar Oo and Hkun Lat had been made when they were on an assignment for German magazine GEO.

The journalists travelled to Cox's Bazar to report on the influx of

Rohingyas from Myanmar, it said quoting Juergen Schaefer, deputy editor-in-chief of GEO.

Earlier, British photo agency Panos Pictures in a press release said Minzayar Oo is a member of Panos and an internationally renowned, award winning photojournalist, whose work has been published widely and recognised by some of the world's most important journalism awards.

## Terror funding thru' IT firm

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a software company owned by Bangladesh origin Islamic State militant Saiful Haque Sujjan, who is believed to have been killed in an air strike in Syria on December 10, 2015.

Sujjan was the chairman of the company which had branches in nine countries with its headquarters in the UK.

After Sujjan's death, his brother Ataul Haque Sabuj, who was living in the UK, took over the charge.

Sabuj set up Wahmi as operations of iBacs were shutdown in Bangladesh and the UK, said the Rab official.

Later, he went to Spain, where he now lives, and married a Spanish woman who converted to Islam.

"He formed another software firm, ISYNCTEL, to channel fund to Wahmi," said Mufti, claiming that Spain police recently arrested Sabuj following exchange of intelligence with them.

The documents seized from the office of Wahmi show Sabuj transacted huge amount of money through his Spain-based company to Wahmi Technologies on different dates, he added.

"Some 47 percent of the money was spent on office management and salary for its staff while the rest was used to fund militant activities," said Mufti Mahmud.

He said they would apply through proper channel to bring Sabuj back to the country if necessary for the investigation.

Officials of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police said they too had information about Sabuj's link with terror financing.

The 11 arrestees are Helal Uddin, 29, Al Amin, 23, Faizal alias Tuhin, 37,



Eleven alleged terror financiers with Rab members at the elite force's media centre in the capital's Karwan Bazar yesterday. They were arrested from Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna on Friday.

PHOTO: STAR

Al Mamun, 20, Al Amin, 23 (not to be confused with the previous one), Amjad Hossain, 34, Moin Khan, 33, Tajul Islam alias Shakil, 27, Mohammad Nahid, 30, Jahedullah, 29 and Toly Nath, 40.

Rab recovered 11 laptops, 12 mobile phones, seven card punching machines, a passport and some documents from their possession.

Nahid, Tajul and Toly were not directly employed by Wahmi Technologies.

In the past, Nahid and Tajul worked

for iBacs and were arrested in 2015. They were later freed on bail.

Rab later handed them over to Rupnagar police in a case filed under anti-terrorism act.

The latest findings came nearly two years after the detection of iBacs and how funds came through it for terror financing.

In late 2015, police arrested five people, including Sujjan's father Abul Hasnat and his younger brother Hasanul Haque alias Galib Mahmud for their alleged involvement in mili-

tancy and recovered Tk 38.86 lakh from their possession.

During interrogation, Abul Hasnat admitted to police that he gave Tk 6 lakh to Tamim Chowdhury, chief coordinator of the Gulshan cafe attack that left 20 hostages, mostly foreigners, police said. Abul Hasnat later died in jail.

The sum of Tk 38.86 lakh was also supposed to be given to Tamim by militant Basharuazzaman Chocolate, but law enforcers foiled the plan, Mufti said.