

# Medics find proof

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Rohingya militants last October. Further attacks on Aug 25 provoked a renewed military offensive the United Nations has called "ethnic cleansing".

Reuters spoke with eight health and protection workers in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district who between them said they had treated more than 25 individual rape cases since late August.

It is rare for UN doctors and aid agencies to speak about rape allegedly committed by a state's armed forces, given the sensitivity of the matter.

## INHUMAN ATTACK

Doctors at a clinic run by the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) at the Leda makeshift refugee say they treated hundreds of women with injuries they said were from violent sexual assaults during the army operation in October and November.

There have been fewer rapes reported among the influx of refugees since August, said Dr Niranta Kumar, the clinic's health coordinator, but those they have seen have injuries suggesting "more aggressive" attacks on women.

Several health workers suggested that, whereas in October many women had initially remained in their villages believing the army sweeps were only targeting Rohingya men, this time most had fled at the first sign of military activity.

Doctors at the Leda clinic showed a Reuters reporter three case files, without divulging the identity of the patients. One said a 20-year-old woman was treated on Sept 10, seven days after she said she was raped by a soldier in Myanmar.

Handwritten notes say she said soldiers had "pulled her hair" and a "gun used to beat her" before raping her.

Examinations often find injuries suggesting forced penetration, beating and even what looked like intentional cutting of the genitals, doctors said.

"We found skin marks, it showed a

very forceful attack, an inhuman attack," said IOM medical officer Dr Tasnuba Nourin.

## FRACTION OF THE CASES

At Bangladesh government clinics supported by UN agencies in the Ukhia area, doctors reported treating 19 women who had been raped, said Dr Misbah Uddin Ahmed, head of the main health complex there, citing reports from female clinicians.

"The evidence included bite marks, tearing of the vagina, these sorts of things," he said.

In one day alone, Sept 14, six women showed up at one of the clinics, all saying they were sexually assaulted. "They all said Myanmar army had done this."

An IOM doctor who asked not to be identified, working at one of those clinics near the Kutapalong refugee camp, said a woman who crossed from Myanmar in late August said she was raped by at least seven soldiers.

## RAPE AS A WEAPON

Reuters first reported allegations of mass rape of Rohingya women within days of militant attacks in northern Rakhine in October.

The same reports were also heard by UN investigators who visited Bangladesh in January.

A report of the UN Secretary General in April said the sexual assaults were "apparently employed systematically to humiliate and terrorize their community".

Before her rise to power last year Suu Kyi had spoken of rape being used as a tool of division in the country's myriad ethnic conflicts.

"It is used as a weapon by armed forces to intimidate the ethnic nationalities and to divide our country, this is how I see it," she said in 2011 in a video message to a conference on sexual violence in conflict.

Her spokesman Zaw Htay said there was "nothing to say" when asked if her view had changed since then. "Everything should be according to the rule of law," he said. "The military leaders also have said they will take action."



As darkness falls on Rohingya settlements, they try to sleep wherever they can lie down. Some, however, run after relief trucks or collect water. The photos were taken in Ukhia and Teknaf on Saturday.

PHOTOS: RASHED SHUMON



# Night at a refugee camp

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After another hectic day of collecting relief and building homes, some retire to their beds. When darkness falls, there's nothing to do in the camps.

## 8:00pm

By now most families are done with their dinner of mostly dry food. A few have fashioned makeshift ovens to cook.

In a few minutes, a medical team from Darus Salam Mirpur arrives, packed with medicines. The last open shop, selling water, cold drinks, biscuits and cigarettes, also prepares to close for the night.

A few people, especially those who arrived yesterday or the day before, mill about on the roadside, waiting for relief. At night, people in luxury cars arrive to donate money.

Mehmudullah, a young farmer from Buthidaung sits on a bamboo stack beside the highway. As we approach him, he dives into his story. "We came yesterday morning. We do not have any tarpaulin for shade yet. We need money to buy materials to construct our tent," he says. He adds that his wife and children are sitting in their semi-constructed tent.

## 9:00pm

The night now grows darker. The entirety of Shafiullah Kata Pahar is cloaked in tranquility. Only the sound of a tube well being pumped breaks the silence from time to time. It can be heard but not seen.

Mehmedullah picks up the sound and begins to walk towards it. He turns on his torch to light his path. "Turn it off. Women are bathing here," a voice from the darkness warns.

Why are they bathing so late, a question is asked to the black. The voice now introduces himself as Ebadullah. "We just got this tube well yesterday. Many women have not bathed for days and have finally gotten an opportunity," he says.

Ebadullah, too, is waiting to take a bath.

Suddenly, the stillness is disturbed again as a crowd of people rush towards the highway where a bus has stopped.

Mehmedullah says that they are donating money.

We head towards the bus and see some bearded men in white panjabis and kurtas giving out 100 tk notes to the people. They also give bags of rice, potatoes, flattened rice and gur. More people are drawn to the crowd.

Soon, the men are ready to leave. As the bus speeds off, some stick their necks out of the windows and shout, "Pray to Allah. Things are going to be okay."

Mehmedullah returns, having gotten nothing.

## 9:30pm

We move ahead and catch up with Mohammed Hossain, a youth from Buthidaung, who says he once had a fishing boat and a net. He used to catch fish along with other fishermen and earned around 10,000 Myanmar kyat every day.

We ask what his plans are now. Hossain is unsure.

"There are many people in Bangladesh. I do not know what to do here. It is hard for even the locals to get work," says Mohammad Hossain.

## 10:30pm

Mohammad Hossain and Mehmedullah ask us to go to the top of the hill with them. Mehmudullah informs that most people here are from Buthidaung.

On the way up, we see the forested areas now cleared and the fallen trees. Equipped with a torch, we do not see much more but there is movement in many of the tents. The mosquitoes and

the weather make sleep difficult to come.

On top of the hill, we find Md Rafiq's tent. He is currently engaged, talking over his mobile phone to someone in Myanmar. As Rafiq finishes his conversation, we ask who he was talking to.

"My sister in law. She is in Buthidaung. The roads there are now blocked and army patrol has increased so she cannot come," he says.

The mobile reception is better on top of the hill. Many people can be seen, ears glued to their phones, sometimes concern and sometimes a smile, on their face.

## 11:30pm

Walking downhill, people can be seen fanning themselves. The weather is sultry.

As we reach the bottom, a pickup stops in front of the approach of Shafiullah Kata Pahar. Around 20 people rush to the bus. They only throw a few packs of biscuits and go off.

## 12:01am

A young boy, Omar Sharif, is sleeping in an empty shop beside the road. He suddenly wakes up. We ask why he is here. He has come too far and lost his way, Omar says. He tries to go back to

his slumber.

## 12:51am

By now the entirety of Shafiullah Kata has fallen asleep. We decide to check out the Bhagghona camp on plain land. It is muddy everywhere. A few babies can be heard crying. In the distance, we hear someone's radio playing.

We follow the noise and come across an elderly Rohingya woman listening to the Waj Mahfil of one Maulvi Masud. "He was very popular in Arakan," she says when asked about him. We move on.

## 2:30am

A few feet away, at Palongkhali union parishad office, the light remains switched on. A bunch of local people inside the office are grinding spices to cook khichuri in the morning as the government has recently opened a mass kitchen there.

## 3:00am

A jeep is seen at Balukhali camp. A known government official is sitting in the car distributing money. Seeing us, his jeep quickly speeds up and goes away. Strange.

## 4:00am

Near Balukhali camp, some people are sitting in an open field. Speaking to

one Md Rafiq, he informs that they had come from Buthidaung a few days ago. Rafiq's wife Mamta is lying under a polythene sheet with their children while Rafiq sits on a tree stump.

"Why are you sitting here," we ask. Rafiq says that they could not make any tent. The locals were asking for money to set up a tent.

Rafiq's wife Rehana comes out, and shows a side of her head which is swollen. She says relief workers had given her a tarpaulin but a local woman had beaten her up and taken it from her.

As dawn breaks and our night ends, we begin to leave. A local youth on a motorcycle informs that there are many people taking shelter in Palongkhali Primary School.

We find nearly five hundred newcomers in the school.

In the classroom, in the veranda everywhere there are people, lying down. As we approach them and begin to take some pictures, some lift their heads and watch us. They do not say a word.

They seem almost relaxed, probably after having already seen too much cruelty in Myanmar. They knew perhaps that the Bangladeshi people meant no harm.

# World's most urgent crisis

FROM PAGE 1

enormous, he said, adding that the international community must step up financial and material aid to help Bangladesh deal with the refugee crisis.

The latest round of violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state erupted on August 25. Those fleeing have described indiscriminate attacks by security forces and Buddhist mobs. The Myanmar government has shrugged it off saying Rohingyas themselves set fire to their houses, but could not produce any proof to substantiate the claim.

The United Nations and others have described the violence as ethnic cleansing.

UN doctors based in makeshift clinics in Rohingya camps have reported symptoms of rape and horrific sexual abuse on women arriving from western Myanmar.

There are dozens of cases of violent sexual abuse, including the ones leveled against Myanmar's armed forces, reports Reuters.

The UN chief for refugees accompanied by UNHCR field staff and Bangladeshi officials yesterday toured a site recently assigned for the new arrivals. UNHCR staff there distributed cooking equipment, sleeping mats, solar lamps and other essential relief items to 3,500 families selected by community leaders.

Despite immense challenges at the beginning, there had been an "incredible outpouring of local generosity and support" but that now needed to be "beefed up by massive international assistance, financial and material,"

Grandi said.

International support is also being stepped up, under the leadership of the government, but these efforts must be accelerated and sustained, he added.

Grandi visited the massive refugee camps that had sprung up to accommodate new refugees. Cox's Bazar also has a large camp accommodating another 4 lakh Rohingyas who fled persecution over the decades.

The Bangladesh government has kept its borders open for the terrified Rohingyas "in a world that has often turned hostile to refugees", for which, the UN official said, he was thankful.

The Rohingyas need a long-term solution beyond measures to ease their immediate sufferings, and "just like the causes of the influx are in Myanmar, clearly the solution is in Myanmar as well."

Myanmar must end the violence that has caused such a vast number of people to flee their homes, and grant human rights organisations like the UN access to areas where violence has taken place, the UN refugee agency chief said.

Though the UNHCR and the World Food Programme have their presence in Rakhine, "our movement is still restricted".

"We know that there are people on the other side and under pressure and we know that there are people who are displaced internally in northern Rakhine."

Grandi also expressed the hope that the UN's role would give the registration of Rohingyas in Bangladesh "the necessary credibility, which is so urgent not

just for repatriation but for assistance."

## AID ARRIVING

Meanwhile, the first consignment of the Unicef emergency supplies for Rohingya children and their families arrived in Dhaka, Unicef says. A cargo plane arrived from Copenhagen with 100 tonnes of supplies comprising water purifying tablets, family hygiene kits, sanitary materials, plastic tarpaulins, recreational kits for children and other items.

The supplies will be given to around 250,000 Rohingya children. The next consignments of relief materials are also on the way to Bangladesh, according to a Unicef release.

Our New Delhi Correspondent reports that India is sending a fresh consignment of relief materials for the Rohingyas.

Nearly 700 tonnes of humanitarian relief materials were loaded onto Indian Navy ship Gharial at the Kakinada deep water port in southern state of Andhra Pradesh for transportation to Chittagong, a naval official said yesterday.

The relief materials will be handed over to the Bangladesh government for over 68,000 distressed families in customised family packets containing food, clothes and mosquito nets.

In addition to the already installed 196 tube-wells, 224 latrines and 35 bathing cubicles, BRAC said that by October 15, it will form 60 medical teams, install 15,000 latrines and 1,120 tube-wells and set up 10 maternity centres to provide services to three lakh Rohingyas.

# Influx, again

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The number would be higher if those who entered through other borders are taken into account, he added.

The UNHCR yesterday revised the total number of refugees to 4,36,000 from 4,29,000 on Friday.

According to Gofur, some brokers are helping Rohingyas to settle in Bangladesh in exchange for money.

"Also, Rohingyas already living here are encouraging their relatives to cross the border for safety and better treatment," he added.

A family of seven – five women, one man and two babies – arrived in Anjuman Para after a 20 days' journey through hills and jungles from Buthidaung. One of them was too sick to be carried, and so they made several stopovers before crossing the border. "I had standing crops in my field. There were around 1,000 kgs of rice in my house. They came and looted my house three days after Eid-ul-Azha. So we fled to Bangladesh with our lives," said Amir Hakim, who is from Gopipara in Buthidaung.

He said some 20,000 people were waiting on the Myanmar side to cross the border.

Many Rohingyas are coming through Chakdhala border point as well.

Asked about the fresh influx, an official of an international aid agency dealing with refugees said those who lived far from the border are reaching Bangladesh now.

Many of them were waiting for opportunities to enter Bangladesh. "They are now crossing the border as Myanmar military left the area," he said, asking not to be named.

# 18 transactions

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Sabuj was arrested in Spain on Friday. Bangladeshi law enforcers are planning to visit Spain to interrogate him there.

Sabuj is the brother of suspected Islamic State militant Saiful Haque Sujjan, who is believed to have been killed in an air strike in Syria on December 10, 2015.

Wahmi was formed months after police unearthed iBacs Ltd, owned by Sujjan, in December 2015 and found evidence of terror funding in Bangladesh by the company.

"Wahmi [staffers] could not give proper answer about the expenditure of the money. Moreover, they [the arrestees] admitted that they spent the money for strengthening militant activities, operative recruitment and training," the case statement read, adding that the arrestees are operatives of banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh.

"Some 47 percent of the money was spent on office management and salary for its staffers while the rest was used to fund militant activities," Mufti Mahmud Khan, Rab's legal and Media wing director told reporters in Saturday's briefing on the arrests.

Eight of them were arrested at the office Wahmi in the capital's Rupnagar Eastern Housing area. Two others were arrested in Khulna and another in Rajshahi.

Inspector Akhtaruzzaman Ilias of Rupnagar Police Station, who is investigating the case, produced the 11

arrestees before a Dhaka Court yesterday and sought 10-days remand for each.

Metropolitan Magistrate Golam Nabi sent the accused to jail and fixed today for hearing the remand prayer.

Mufti Mahmud told The Daily Star that they would write to the home ministry seeking permission to investigate the case.

The Wahmi office on the fourth floor a five storey-building was found locked yesterday. There was no signboard of the office outside either.

Abdul Hye, owner of the house, told The Daily Star that two persons—Helal Uddin and Al Amin, who are among the 11 arrestees, rented the flat for a monthly rent of Tk 28,000.

Four men used to stay there at night and four others worked there from 11:00am to 8:00pm. Helal lived on the third-floor with his parents.

Except the nine persons, the owner did not see anyone ever visiting the office. Locals said Rab teams picked up eight persons from the office on Thursday night.

In late 2015 while raiding iBacs, police arrested five persons, including Sujjan's father Abul Hasnat and his younger brother Hasanul Haque alias Galib Mahmud for their alleged involvement in militancy. Police recovered Tk 38.86 lakh from their possession at the time.

A counterterrorism official, who is investigating the iBacs case, said they may go to Spain to interrogate Sabuj, who is wanted in the case.