

UN to work with Asean to resolve crisis

Wants the regional body to intensify its actions on Rohingya issue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The UN wants the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) to intensify actions to solve the Rohingya refugee crisis, in which, it says, it is ready to cooperate with the 10-member regional body.

"The time to act is now," said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres in a meeting with the foreign ministers of the association members on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York over the weekend.

The UN welcomes constructive approaches by the Asean as well as the provision of humanitarian assistance for the Rohingyas, reports Myanmar Times yesterday.

Antonio Guterres called for three immediate actions -- suspension of military and security operations, unfettered access for humanitarian agencies to affected communities, and allowing the safe return of those who fled the country facing attacks.

About 450,000 Rohingyas fled violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state into Bangladesh after Myanmar security forces began a crackdown on the community in response to August 25

Rohingya insurgents' attacks on Myanmar police posts and an army base.

Rights bodies said actions against the Rohingyas were disproportionate as Rohingya villages were burned down, men killed and women raped. The UN termed it a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing".

Last week, Myanmar's State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi claimed clearance operations had ended on September 5 and that humanitarian aid was delivered to the affected areas in Rakhine without discrimination.

However, fire was still seen on September 23 burning the Rohingya villages, Amnesty International said, while Doctors Without Borders said hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas internally displaced in Rakhine were facing shortages of life-saving assistance.

The issue was a major agenda in the UN meeting last week.

The UN secretary general said multilateralism and regional integration are absolutely vital in today's world, representing an opportunity to promote prosperity as well as advance

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Merkel faces

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Many Germans see the rise of the AfD as a similar rejection of the status quo as votes for Brexit and Donald Trump last year. But Germany's political centre held up better than in Britain and the United States as more voters have benefited from globalisation and most shun the country's extremist past.

Merkel's party remained the biggest parliamentary bloc and Europe's most powerful leader said her conservatives would set about building the next government. She said she was sure a coalition would be agreed by Christmas.

Martin Schulz, leader of the Social Democrats that have governed with Merkel since 2013, said his party had no choice but to go into opposition after dropping to a post-war low of 20.5 percent.

"We have understood our task -- to be a strong opposition in this country and to defend democracy against those who question it and attack it," Schulz told party members to applause.

Investors were unsettled by the prospect of a weaker Merkel at the head of a potentially unstable coalition with the pro-business Free Democrats (FDP) and Greens, dubbed "Jamaica" as the parties' black, yellow and green colours mirror its flag.

They are also worried that months of coalition talks could distract from negotiations with Britain over its divorce from the European Union and efforts to push further integration. The euro and European stocks slipped yesterday.

"The weak result could make Angela Merkel a lame duck much faster than international observers and financial markets think," ING economist Carsten Brzeski said.

Klaus Wohlrabe, economist at the Munich-based Ifo economic institute, said new elections could not be excluded and the result could stoke uncertainty as German business confidence deteriorated unexpectedly in the weeks before the election.

DIVISIONS

Many Germans were alarmed by the rise of a party likened by the foreign minister to Nazis. Protesters threw

stones and bottles at police outside the AfD's campaign party in Berlin on Sunday evening.

But just a day after the election, the AfD showed signs of fracturing as co-leader Frauke Petry, one its most prominent faces, said she would not sit in parliament with AfD members. It was not immediately clear why she was making such a move.

The election also exposed divisions in Merkel's conservatives, with her allies the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) demanding a shift to the right to win back voters lost to the AfD.

The CSU, which lost heavily to the AfD in Bavaria, faces regional elections next year.

"They will try their best to recover lost ground on the right side of the political spectrum. Going into a coalition in Berlin with the Greens and the FDP will make this more difficult," said Janis Emmanouilidis from the European Policy Centre.

CDU Saxony Anhalt premier Reiner Haseloff called for the party to do more to address voter fears over immigration policy, while other party members warned against shifting to the right.

Leading AfD candidate, Alexander Gauland, gave a foretaste of the hostile new tone expected in parliament, saying it would "hound" Merkel and "get our country and our people back".

Industry leaders urged Merkel to move fast to build a government.

"Our companies need clear signals. Now it's all about averting damage to Germany as a place of business," Dieter Kempf, president of the BDI industry association, said.

After the SPD ruled out another "grand coalition", Merkel's only other choice is to pursue a three-way partnership between her conservatives, the FDP and the Greens.

Such an alliance could be fragile due to deep differences on issues from migrants to tax, the environment and Europe.

In particular, the prospect of Merkel sharing power with the FDP is likely to create problems for deeper integration of the euro zone as proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron.

BPDB proposal

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The politician said lawmakers in parliament normally keep away from this type of topic. As a result, this issue is not discussed in the House. "This amounts to injustice to the people."

Junaid Saki, chief coordinator of Ganasanghati Andolan, said the proposal to raise power tariff was illogical.

"A power price hike is not merely a power price hike because it increases prices of goods, education and health services. It also comes as a burden on low-income people."

The power price increases time and again, but the earnings of the low-income people don't grow proportionately, he added.

Prof Shamsur Alam, energy adviser to the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, criticised attempts to produce more electricity from costly diesel-fired plants and expansion of rental and quick rental units.

Move to use least-cost fuel for gas-fired Meghnaghat power plant, to set up gas-fired plants instead of rental and quick rental units and rationalise capacity payment to private power plants running on extended tenures could help the government save Tk 6,342 crore, he said.

According to the expert, these measures would bring down power price to

Tk 3.58 per kWh unit from Tk 4.90 within next two years.

It is the responsibility of the Berc to fix and readjust the prices of liquid fuel and electricity. But the energy and mineral resources ministry fixes the price of liquid fuel, he added.

"So, adjusting power tariffs based on fuel price fixed by the ministry is unfair and illogical," said Shamsur.

Khondkar Saleque, a Bangladeshi energy expert based in Australia, said it was noted earlier that electricity price would go down after 2014. Now it is 2017 and a proposal has been put up to increase the tariff again.

He suggested the BPDB pay attention to combined cycle power plants as well as repowering of electricity plants to produce more power with less energy.

The Berc technical committee suggested raising the bulk tariff by Tk 0.57 a unit considering the BPDB's net revenue requirement.

In a paper distributed at the hearing yesterday, the committee said the government has waived all tax and VAT on import of furnace oil for all private and public power plants.

The power tariff would go down significantly even if the BPDB imports furnace oil through commercial importers and generate electricity from the fuel, it said.



Some Rohingya children return to their camps with relief food distributed in a playground at Balukhali of Ukhiya yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Solution lies with Myanmar

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Restoring humanitarian organisation like UNHCR's access to the Rakhine State is important. The Red Cross has been able to work there, but that is not enough, he said.

The UN high official said safety in Rakhine is a prerequisite for Rohingyas to go back there. Registering all the Rohingyas, who fled Myanmar and came to Bangladesh is also important.

Replying to a query, he said relocating Rohingyas in a place inside Bangladesh is important because they may not be able to go back to Myanmar very soon.

As the number of Rohingyas in Bangladesh doubled, looking at an interim solution for supporting them and the local communities in the right manner should be considered, he said.

However, technical discussions on the issue are needed before making any decision, which has to be acceptable to Rohingyas. They may not want to go back otherwise, he said.

Many families are not receiving enough food while shelters, water sources and sanitation conditions need improvement, he said, adding that the children need to be able to go to schools.

"Often we forget about education in emergencies. But it is as important as food and shelter for children," he said.

Grandi also called for more relief efforts.

DHAKA SEEKS \$250M FROM WB

The health ministry has sought \$250 million from the World Bank for providing healthcare to Rohingyas.

State minister for health Zahid Malik at a press briefing at his office said the ministry is providing health care services to around 5 lakh Rohingyas.

This is not a short-term issue, it may linger for long. The amount is required for building hospitals and purchasing medication, he said.

The state minister also informed that they sent a letter to the Economic Relations Division (ERD) for assistance. The ERD would now negotiate with the WB in this regard.

WHO Representative to Bangladesh N Paranietharan, WB Adviser on Health, Population and Nutrition Mukesh Chawla and WB Senior Health Specialist Bushra Binte Alam were present at the event.

Mukesh Chawla said, WB will consider Bangladesh's request and commended the country for successfully providing shelter, food and healthcare to Rohingyas.

Dr Bushra Binte Alam said, WB has a Refugee Crisis Window fund and Bangladesh may get assistance from there. The important thing is 85 percent of the fund will be grant.

According to the WB document, it has allocated \$2 billion for those seeking refuge in different corners of

the world, of which any nation can get a maximum share of \$400 million.

The WB already communicated the fund's availability to Bangladesh. The government will now decide whether to ask for it upon considering the conditions attached.

"The purpose of the fund is to help refugee host communities to mitigate shocks, facilitate sustainable solutions, and strengthen preparedness," reads a WB document.

Zahid Malik also said Bangladesh will seek assistance from the WB's pandemic fund, which has been available since July.

The state minister said, to receive the fund Bangladesh would have to meet a number of preconditions.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) members started unloading and despatching relief goods arriving from different countries for Rohingyas at Shah Amanat International Airport in Chittagong.

BAF opened a Relief Management Centre (RMC), headed by Wing Commander Jahangir Hossain. The air force personnel also prepared necessary warehouses to keep the goods, said an ISPR press release.

Since September 9, a total of 467.66 tonnes of relief goods arrived in the country for Rohingyas from Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Iran and several other countries.

'MASS HINDU GRAVES' 17 more bodies found in Rakhine

AFP, Yangon

Searchers yesterday found 17 more bodies in mass graves in Myanmar's Rakhine state, the government said, a day after the bodies of 28 Hindu villagers were exhumed in what the army says is evidence of a massacre by Muslim Rohingya militants.

Northern Rakhine has been ravaged by communal violence since Rohingya insurgents staged deadly raids on police posts on August 25, unleashing an army crackdown that has displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians.

The vast majority -- more than 430,000 -- are Rohingya Muslims who have fled across the border to Bangladesh from a military campaign which the UN says likely amounts to ethnic cleansing.

But tens of thousands of ethnic Rakhine Buddhists, and the region's small population of Hindus, have also bolted from their homes, saying they were attacked by Rohingya militants.

On Sunday the army said it had discovered two mud pits filled with 28 Hindu corpses -- mostly women and children -- outside the village of Ye Baw Kyaw in northern Rakhine.

The military blamed the killings on

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Don't let Myanmar go Rwanda's way

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the UN had sounded alarms about the Rohingya issue long ago. The UN special adviser on the Prevention of Genocide had pressed the red button in early February after last year's October massacre of the Rohingyas.

The special adviser had categorically said "This must stop right now. There is no more time to wait."

Before him, the UN Human Rights Commission had reported "the devastating cruelty to which these Rohingya children have been subjected is unbearable. What kind of hatred could make a man stab a baby crying out for his

mother's milk. And for the mother to witness this murder while she is being gang-raped by the very security forces who should be protecting her."

Nothing could move the world. It did not have time to pay heed to the cries just as it was the case in Rwanda.

After this prolonged foot-dragging seven countries including the UK, USA and France three days ago called on the UN to convene another meeting. Meantime, a fresh exodus of whatever little Rohingya population remained has started from Myanmar. They are confined in small pockets in the style

of Nazi concentration camps. More tales of horrors are emerging.

So is Myanmar going the Rwandan way? Not really. Because in the end, the peacekeepers landed in Rwanda, albeit too late. The country has been reconciled and reconstructed. A Tutsi man whose tribe had been the subject of genocide became its president. The wrongs had been righted after so many lives were lost. A Tutsi woman whose husband and children had been killed by her Hutu neighbor married the very same killer in the process.

For Myanmar there is no reconciliation. No end to hatred. No mercy and

no possibility for a happy ending. The six decades of systematic killings and ethnic cleansing find no solution in the devious posturing of Myanmar de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi who blamed "terrorists" for "a huge iceberg of misinformation" about the violence. And her repeated denial of the atrocities by the military is an indication of how Myanmar is dealing with the humanitarian crisis.

In the end history may have to repeat and we might see another UN Secretary General apologise as Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan had for the world's failure in Rwanda.

Beijing to play 'constructive role'

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appreciated Bangladesh's humanitarian assistance to the Rohingyas. "We extend our heartfelt sympathy to the large number of refugees in Cox's Bazar."

He said Bangladesh and China are developing countries with large populations and the two countries have many things in common.

Industries Minister Amir Hossain Amu attended the function as the chief guest. He stressed the need for further strengthening Bangladesh-China relations.

Cabinet members, prime minister's advisers, diplomats, political leaders, senior journalists and civil society members were present.

AL, CPC DISCUSS ROHINGYA ISSUE The Communist Party of China (CPC) yesterday assured Bangladesh of convincing the Myanmar government to resolve the Rohingya problem permanently, reports BSS.

The assurance came during a meeting in Beijing between the CPC and visiting 18-member Awami League delegation, led by presidium member Faruk Khan.

"China will convince the Myanmar government to hold talks with Bangladesh as we think a permanent solution to the Rohingya problem is a must for ensuring peace in the region," said Li Jun, vice-minister of the International Liaison Department of the CPC.

AL Deputy Office Secretary Biplab Barua, also a delegation member, informed the BSS about the meeting over the phone.

AL Joint General Secretary Dipu Moni described the torture inflicted on Rohingyas and sought an effective role of the Chinese government in solving the Rohingya problem.

In reply, Lee June said, "We are well aware of the Rohingya crisis and we have already talked with the Myanmar government about the matter to find a peaceful and permanent solution to the problem."

The CPC leader said his country would play a positive role in the international arena to ensure repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar.

"We are respectful to the Awami League government's humanitarian gesture towards the Rohingyas. We will send relief, including blankets and tents, on September 27 in response to the initiative of the prime minister of Bangladesh [for Rohingyas]."

The AL delegation included Cultural Affairs Secretary Ashim Kumar Ukil, Information and Research Secretary Afzal Hossain, Legal Affairs Secretary SM Rezaul Karim, Forest and Environment Affairs Secretary Delwar Hossain, International Affairs Secretary Shammi Ahmed, Remon Areng, lawmaker Habibe Millat and central committee members Nazibullah Hiru, Riazul Kabir Kawsar and Dipankar Talukder.

Giza Pyramid mystery solved

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constructed system of canals to an inland port just yards from the base of the pyramid.

A scroll of ancient papyrus has also been found in the seaport Wadi Al-Jarf which has given a new insight into the role boats played in the pyramid's construction.

Written by Merer, an overseer in charge of a team of 40 elite workmen, it is the only first-hand account of the

construction of the Great Pyramid, and describes in detail how limestone casing stones were shipped downstream from Tura to Giza.

In his diary, Merer also describes how his crew were involved in the transformation of the landscape, opening giant dykes to divert water from the Nile and channel it to the pyramid through man-made canals.

Although it has long been known that the granite from the

pyramid's internal chambers was quarried in Aswan, 533 miles south of Giza, and the limestone casing stones came from Tura, eight miles away, archaeologists disagreed over how they were transported.

Now archaeologist Mark Lehner, a leading expert in the field, has uncovered evidence of a lost waterway beneath the dusty Giza plateau. "We've outlined the central canal basin which

we think was the primary delivery area to the foot of the Giza Plateau," he said.

The new discoveries were revealed in Channel 4 documentary Egypt's Great Pyramid: The New Evidence, which also includes another team of archaeologists who have unearthed a ceremonial boat designed for Khufu to command in the afterlife, which gives new insights into the construction of vessels at the time.