

ROHINGYA CRISIS

Dhaka tackling it effectively

Says Indian envoy to Bangladesh; aid arrives from India, UK, China

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh is tackling the Rohingya crisis very effectively at the diplomatic level, Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Harsh Vardhan Shringla said yesterday.

"You [Bangladesh] are dealing with it diplomatically. The issue has been dealt with at various forums, both multilaterally and bilaterally," the diplomat said, pointing out that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina raised the issue at the United Nations General Assembly.

Shringla was addressing a programme on the occasion of handing over 700 tonnes of Indian relief materials for Rohingyas to the local administration in Chittagong, reports our correspondent there.

"We do recognise that the government of Bangladesh faces a challenge which is multi-dimensional. It is humanitarian, first and foremost, but also it is a crisis that is linked to other situations and other requirements," he said.

There is also a security dimension that needs to be looked into, and a number of countries have to come together to work on it constructively, Shringla added.

Indian Navy Ship Charak, carrying the relief assistance, arrived at Chittagong port at 7:00am yesterday.

Some 62,000 family packs of essential items, including rice, pulse, tea, sugar, salt, cooking oil, milk powder and mosquito nets, were handed over to

Chittagong Deputy Commissioner Zillur Rahman at a function on the vessel.

Speaking at the programme, Shringla said Bangladesh is dealing with a very big challenge, the influx of a large number of refugees estimated to be beyond four lakh which strained the resources of the country.

As a friend and neighbour, India has responded to the situation, said the high commissioner.

He also mentioned that on an emergency basis, India sent about 107 tonnes of relief materials for the Rohingyas on September 14 and 15. "We are very happy today that our second consignment of humanitarian relief assistance for Bangladesh to support the government of Bangladesh's efforts in dealing with the large influx of refugees from the Rakhine State in Myanmar has arrived.

Our endeavour is to provide one family pack of essential materials for each and every refugee family that has entered Bangladesh. Our calculation has been based on the number of refugees. Of course, the number has kept on increasing, but we have tried to ensure that each family should be given one pack."

Shringla said India was deeply distressed by the violence in the Rakhine State.

"We have felt that it is imperative that the violence is ended, and normalcy is restored as expeditiously as possible in keeping with respect for

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This aerial picture taken Wednesday shows burnt villages near Maungdaw in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State. Below, Rohingyas heading towards Teknaf after entering Bangladesh through Shah Porir Dwip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP, ANISUR RAHMAN

15TH DAY OF SPECIAL DRIVE: 23 vehicles fined

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

On the fifth day of the special drive against traffic rule violators, the traffic police penalised 23 vehicles. On Tuesday, Dhaka University bus for taking the wrong way on the city's Hare Road yesterday.

Apart from the DU bus, a jeep of a top official of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Ltd. Drivers, senior assistant commissioner of Ramna Zone Traffic Police, told The Daily Star that they carried out the drive amid rain and would continue the effort.

Like on previous days, a police team took position in front of the Dhaka University bus and started fining vehicles driving against the traffic.

At around 5:45pm, a driver of a red-coloured single-decker Dhaka University bus was fined for plying against the traffic.

Police Constable Ariful Islam of Protection Division of DMP was also caught violating traffic rules by his colleagues.

When signalled to stop at the check post, he first tried speeding away, but another team stationed further away caught him.

Ariful's motorcycle was also found to be not registered with BRTA. He claimed that it was an antique motorcycle he had gotten recently.

AC Alauddin said action will be taken against whoever violates traffic rules.

A traffic sergeant of the team on Hare Road, who was on duty during the drive has brought disciplining the Hare Road but today [yesterday] they might have driven on the wrong side thinking the police are not there during the rain."

Previously, cars carrying ministers, lawmakers, senior assisting civilians, military and police officials, ruling party leaders and journalists going against the flow of traffic while others remained stuck in tailbacks had become a common phenomenon on Hare Road.

The scenario has started to change gradually after police penalised a state minister, a lawmaker, several top bureaucrats, an army officer and several police officials during the drives that started on Sunday.

US senators call for sanction

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The senators said that response has been "extraordinarily disproportionate."

A copy of the letter was obtained by The Associated Press. It urges the Trump administration to hold perpetrators of atrocities in Myanmar's Rakhine State accountable under international law and US law that allows the president to impose sanctions on individuals responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture and other gross violations of human rights in any foreign country.

"Unless immediately addressed, this crisis will have profound long-term consequences for Burma, the region, and the world," the letter says, using the alternative name for Myanmar. Long-standing sectarian tensions between the Rohingya and majority Buddhists have bubbled to the surface as the country has opened up after decades of oppressive military rule.

Signatories of the letter include Ben Cardin, top-ranking Democrat

on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and John McCain, Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who recently nixed plans to expand military ties with Myanmar.

Also yesterday US Ambassador in Dhaka Marcia Bernick said the US has initiated talks with Bangladesh and Myanmar for resolving the crisis over Rohingyas who fled their homeland amid persecution, reports UNB.

Sending the Rohingyas back to their homeland is a long process and it is not possible to resolve the problem in a month, she told reporters after visiting a registered Rohingya camp in Kutupalong at around 12:30pm.

She said the US fully supports Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's five-point demand to end the crisis.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina placed a five-point proposal at the United Nations for a permanent solution to the crisis.

Bernick said they will urge the Myanmar government to implement

the Annan Commission's report.

She said the United States, through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), is providing an additional \$6 million to the UN World Food Program (WFP) to assist the Rohingyas refugees who fled to Bangladesh amid persecution in Myanmar. This funding is in addition to the \$1 million provided to WFP earlier this year.

Bernick also visited the offices and service centres of international agencies like IOM (International Organization for Migration), Unicef and UNHCR. "SUSPEND ARMS SUPPLY TO MYANMAR"

US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley yesterday called on countries to suspend providing weapons to Myanmar over violence against Rohingyas until the country's military puts sufficient accountability measures in place, reports Reuters.

"We cannot be afraid to call the actions of the Burmese authorities what

they appear to be - a brutal, sustained campaign to cleanse the country of an ethnic minority," Haley told the UN Security Council. "It should shame senior Burmese leaders who have sacrificed so much for an open democratic

"AS MUCH PRESSURE AS POSSIBLE"

US SENATORS are also calling for Myanmar to allow access to international humanitarian groups and for the US to provide more aid as Bangladesh struggles to cope with the massive and sudden influx of stricken people.

"We need to put as much pressure as possible on the Burmese government. They're responsible for what's happening, and they know that," Cardin told reporters Wednesday. He said the US needs to send a clear message that it could revert to its former policy of sanctions against Myanmar. Those restrictions were lifted as it shifted toward democracy.

At a House foreign affairs hearing

Wednesday, lawmakers strongly criticised not just the conduct of Myanmar's military but its civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a former political prisoner who took power last year after an election victory. She said last week the Rohingyas would be allowed to return from Bangladesh if they passed a "verification" process.

Democratic Rep. Brad Sherman said that amounted to a Catch-22. He said discriminatory Myanmar law makes it impossible for Rohingyas to prove their nationality. He said it was "outrageous" that Rohingyas who had lived in Myanmar for generations are denied citizenship. He also said the US needed to re-evaluate its policy of having lifelines sanctions.

Republican Rep. Ted Yoho called for \$63 million in planned US aid to Myanmar for fiscal 2018 to be suspended because of the crackdown in Rakhine. The administration has already announced \$32 million in assistance, bringing US funds committed to the crisis to \$95 million.

Myanmar govt cancels first UN trip to Rakhine

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Human Rights Watch came up with evidences that more than 200 Rohingya villages in Rakhine State have been destroyed by firemen and looted. It termed the violence crimes against humanity.

AN EXPERT on human rights situation on Myanmar said around 1,000 people, mostly Rohingyas, might have been killed in Rakhine.

The number of Rohingyas who have fled to Bangladesh since violence broke out in Myanmar's Rakhine state on August 25 has exceeded half a million, the United Nations said yesterday.

The new figure of 5,00,800 - up from around 480,000 - was due mainly to the counting of refugees not previously included in the tally rather than a dramatic increase in arrivals.

UN CONCERNED OVER SEXUAL VIOLENCE

UN Migration Agency Director General William Lacy Swing said he is worried that represents a small portion of actual cases. IOM doctors have treated dozens of women since August, who have suffered violent sexual assault.

Since October 2016, IOM has

am deeply shocked and concerned by reports we are receiving from new arrivals in Cox's Bazar," he said in a statement yesterday.

"Particularly women and girls, but also men and boys, have been targeted for and are at risk of further exploitation, violence and abuse simply because of their gender, age and status in society."

Gender-based violence has been recorded in needs assessments, fact finding missions and through the provision of life-saving services, says the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which is providing urgent medical and psychological support to survivors of sexual violence.

Rape, sexual assault, domestic violence and child marriage among other forms of gender-based violence, have been identified and require immediate responses from humanitarian actors, Lacy Swings said.

Although the known number most likely underestimates the true number of actual cases, IOM doctors have treated dozens of women since August, who have suffered violent sexual assault.

Since October 2016, IOM has

treated or received reports from hundreds of women and some men.

"IOM is supporting survivors but I cannot emphasize enough that attempting to understand the scale of gender-based violence through known case numbers alone is impossible."

UN clinicians treating the Rohingyas in recent weeks said they have seen dozens of women with injuries consistent with violent sexual assault.

The medics' accounts, backed in some cases by medical notes reviewed by Reuters, led weight to repeated allegations, ranging from molestation to gang rape, levelled by women from the stateless minority group against Myanmar's armed forces.

RACE ROW HAMPERS ROHINGYA REGISTRATION

MEANWHILE, many Rohingyas in Bangladesh are now refusing to register with authorities as repatriation talks grow louder, saying their identity as an ethnic group is not recognised in the country.

The Bangladesh military began registering the new arrivals more than two weeks ago, but has so far only completed the process for around 24,000.

Major Kabir Kibria, coordinator for the registration centres, said the refugees were objecting to the language on the form, which refers to them simply as Myanmar nationals.

"According to our information, they want to have the name 'Rohingyas' in their cards beside their citizenship status," he told AFP.

"The government decision is to term them as only Myanmar citizen."

On official said the government's decision not to include the refugees' ethnicity was in line with international norms.

"Many of our community leaders are spreading false information that the card wouldn't work without 'proper' identification," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"NEED A LONG-TERM PLAN"

The Rohingyas who have entered Bangladesh since August are not likely to leave soon, said UN refugee agency Chief Filippo Grandi, calling for longer-term plans to manage the influx.

He said current makeshift camps set up "a recipe for disaster", with overcrowding and unhygienic conditions creating a breeding ground for "possible epidemics."

"The important thing is to get peo-

ple in places where they can be assisted more easily," Grandi told reporters in Geneva on Wednesday.

"It is most likely that the return will take time, if it happens, if the violence stops. It will be important also to find in the medium term suitable solutions for the people that are in Bangladesh."

"The first challenge is to get people out of the mud and the despair which they are finding themselves in," he added.

Grandi said he was in talks with Dhaka about forming a "technical committee" with the UN to look at options for longer-term Rohingya settlements.

"There are in reality many different options that the Bangladesh government is studying, and understandably they are not easy," he said.

NAVY TO BUILD CAMP

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said the Bangladesh Navy was given the responsibility to develop a Rohingya refugee camp with education, health and social facilities at Bhasan Char of Noakhali.

He, however, said everything was at the planning stage.

The minister was talking to reporters while visiting Bhasan Char.

They pour in, through rain, rough water

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"Our home was torched and my husband was killed 12 days ago. I could not bring anything except this bag," Setara told The Daily Star correspondents pointing to a small bag Senawara was carrying.

Senawara's wet and flimsy dress was sticking to her body and her lips were trembling the cold.

"My elderly mother and brother will come here soon," Setara said.

500 new arrivals in three hours at 9:30am yesterday. But as the day progressed, more Rohingyas showed up on boats. The local union chairman put the figure at 3,000 yesterday.

The famished, scared and exhausted Rohingyas were assembled at the camp in Hariakhalai Gort Primary School so that they could be sent to the designated Rohingya camps in Ukhiya upazila of Cox's Bazar.

They endured a treacherous journey through the rain and the rainier journey which only made things worse. Fifteen Rohingyas died yesterday when their boat sank in the Bay.

"We fled with the clothes we were wearing. Now we are all drenched in the rain. I extremely worried about my children," said Munshi Mia, who along with her five children arrived in Teknaf yesterday.

At the temporary shelter set up on the hill slopes of Ukhiya, rain brought unthinkable misery.

Water got into the shacks the Rohingyas built making the floors muddy.

Pointing to the floor in a shack, Mohammad Jabbar, a refugee at the Balukhali camp, said, "You see the place is all muddy. Rainwater rolls down from

the hills. This is where we have to sleep at night."

Yards away, Nur Begum was trying to get her six-year-old son dry. He was wet from there with his father to get relief and got wet," she said.

A huge number of Rohingyas were crammed into the designated place for relief distribution. The place was fenced and they were all soaking wet.

Many of the women in the queue had children in their arms.

Rain disrupted relief distribution too.

A relief material distributor said delivering relief in a disciplined manner was a challenging job given the huge number

of people and the rain made their job more difficult.

Eighty-year-old Badir Rahman said he could not even go to collect relief materials because of the rain.