

Stop Rohingya exodus

India tells Myanmar; EU postpones Myanmar investment agreement

STAR REPORT

India has asked Myanmar security forces to take steps to prevent further Rohingya exodus and encourage their safe and sustainable return from Bangladesh, reiterating its concern over the issue at the just concluded UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

"India remains deeply concerned at the situation in Rakhine State of Myanmar... It is important for the Myanmar security forces to handle the situation with restraint, focusing on the welfare of the civilian population," an Indian High Commission statement quoted the Indian representative as telling the council's 36th session on Friday.

The Indian envoy said Myanmar security forces' operations resulted in the exodus of a large number of people from Rakhine State, many of whom have sought shelter in neighbouring Bangladesh.

The Indian representative commended Bangladesh's role in extending humanitarian assistance to such a

large influx of people from Rakhine State, saying Bangladesh deserves both recognition and support from the international community.

"As a neighbour, friend and partner of Bangladesh, India has responded promptly to support the Government of Bangladesh in meeting the relief requirements posed by this large influx."

India, he said, was convinced that the only lasting solution to the situation in the Rakhine State is socio-economic and infrastructural development and a resolution of underlying issues of citizenship and residence in line with the recommendations of the Kofi Annan Commission.

"All efforts must be made to restore normalcy in the State through a solution based on respect for peace, communal harmony, justice, dignity and democratic values."

"Our effort within the framework of this body must be to help the Government of Myanmar meet its responsibilities towards its people,"

SEE PAGE 12 COL 2



Some of the several thousand Rohingyas who entered Bangladesh yesterday are gathered in Teknaf's Ulubunia. Top right, a baby is left unattended in a hammock as the mother and some other Rohingya women wait for relief in Ukhiya's Balukhali yesterday morning. Bottom right, a group of newly-arrived Rohingyas also waits for aid by the Cox's Bazar marine drive in Saplapur area on Sunday night.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN/STAR

Staring

FROM PAGE 1

Jashim cannot remember the date he left his home in Rakhine State. All he remembers is his father taking them out of their house one morning after the Myanmar military attacked their village.

They trekked through the hills for days, got on a boat and crossed the Naf river to Bangladesh. "My sister fell sick on the way."

The second of four siblings, Jashim has nothing much to do in the squalid, overcrowded camp, except wander around and collect food.

"I want to study," he said, adding that he never set foot in a school as he was denied the basic right in his country that now disowns him.

The boy is among the thousands of Rohingya children facing an uncertain future. They spend their days collecting relief goods, safe water or wandering around the shelters, asking for help whenever they see outsiders.

More than half a million Rohingyas have fled Myanmar and came to Bangladesh since August 25. They had to leave behind their family members, harvest, homes, clothes, utensils and cattle.

According to a Unicef estimate, almost 60 percent of the Rohingyas who fled Myanmar are children. As of September 20, Unicef and several other humanitarian organisations have identified as many as 1,400 unaccompanied children who crossed the border alone.

Most of the children are living in harsh and insanitary conditions at

the camps. Lack of safe water combined with a hot and humid weather and torrential rains is spreading waterborne diseases and infections among children.

At Balukhali camp, five-year-old Salma was playing with her younger sister Ashia in the dirt; their dresses were crumpled, untidy and smeared with mud.

The girl had just started learning Arabic at Bolly Bazar area of Maungdaw township. She too has no idea what it is like to be in a school.

She stares blankly when asked what she wanted to become. Perhaps she never thought about it. Perhaps her parents only thought about how to survive in a country that refused to acknowledge them.

"We lived in constant fear and despair. It was no life there," said her father Abul Hashem, who was a woodcutter.

"Our children did not have access to school. They mostly stayed around the homestead. Studying in a school is something unimaginable to us."

Eleven-year-old Mokabbar, however, was a bit lucky. He had gone to a school and studied up to class-II. But he dropped out five years ago when violence flared up in Myanmar.

When he was told about the 1,300 learning centres to be set up for Rohingya children by Unicef, Mokabbar smiled. "I love to study."

He then joined his fellow boys wandering about Kutupalong camp.

Children hit hard

FROM PAGE 1

spread across the district.

Quoting the United Nations, AFP reported more than 14,100 children are at risk of dying from malnutrition at the Rohingya camps.

"Desperate, traumatised children and their families are fleeing the violence in Myanmar every day... These children are being denied a childhood. They need our help now and they need our help to have a future," said Unicef Executive Director Anthony Lake, who is visiting the southern Bangladesh.

"We are scaling up our response as fast as we can, but the magnitude of need is immense and we must be able to do more to help them," he said.

Expanding the provision of safe water, sanitation and improved hygiene for Rohingya children is the overriding priority of the appeal amid concerns over a possible outbreak of diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases, Unicef said.

The majority of Rohingya children are not fully immunised against diseases such as polio. An oral cholera vaccination campaign targeting all children over 1 year is planned in October, and 900,000 doses of the vaccine are expected to arrive in Bangladesh by October 7.

An earlier Unicef appeal for \$7 million has been expanded to reflect the fast-growing scale of the crisis.

The World Food Program (WFP), meanwhile, appealed for \$75 million in emergency aid to help reduce the suffering of Rohingyas over the next six months.

"I have heard heart-breaking stories

today, speaking to people who ran for their lives and saw loved ones being killed before their eyes. These horrors must stop," WFP Executive Director David Beasley said after visiting Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar.

Noting that many of those people were receiving WFP food assistance in Myanmar, he stressed that they would continue to get that in Bangladesh as well until they are able to return home safely.

"I say we can end world hunger with a few billion dollars. I tell donors, if you can't give us the money, stop the wars," added Beasley.

UN OFFICIALS TAKEN TO RAKHINE

AP reported Myanmar authorities yesterday took three groups of foreign diplomats and UN representatives on a tour of the conflict-torn Rakhine State.

Ye Htut, district administrator of Maungdaw in Rakhine, said this, but did not provide details on the diplomats' nationalities.

Myanmar has come under international criticism for barring aid groups, journalists and other outsiders from independently travelling to the region to see the situation there. A previous guided visit for diplomats scheduled for last week was abruptly cancelled.

Local officials in Rakhine told AP yesterday's tour includes meetings with relatives of victims allegedly killed by militants during the violence against Hindu, Mro and Daignets minority communities in Maungdaw township.

In the morning, the diplomats were

taken to Anaut Pyin village of Rathedaung township, a community of Rohingyas who have not fled, said local police officer Moe Zaw.

SWITZERLAND FOR POLITICAL, LONG-TERM SOLUTION

Delegate of the Swiss Government for Humanitarian Aid and deputy director general of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) Ambassador Manuel Bessler expressed deep concern over the humanitarian crisis, saying "the challenges in Rohingya camps are unprecedented."

"Therefore, it is very important to devise a well-coordinated response by all actors and extend their support to all those in need, including the local communities," he said while visiting a Rohingya settlement of new arrivals in Palangkhali, says a statement of Swiss embassy in Dhaka.

It says Switzerland encourages national, regional and international efforts towards a political solution to the Rohingya refugee crisis and stands ready to offer its good services for a long term solution to the crisis in Rakhine.

Switzerland has committed to contribute 1.8 million Swiss Francs (approximately BDT 150.5 million) in emergency humanitarian assistance for the Rohingya arrivals through the Humanitarian Aid Unit of SDC.

A Swiss foundation named Swiss Solidarity has initiated a collection call to raise money to help the displaced Rohingyas. It is expected that several million Swiss francs will be collected amongst Swiss population, the statement says.

We stand

FROM PAGE 1

PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters after the meeting.

"Though we're not rich, we've a big heart... they are human beings, and we can't throw them into the Bay of Bengal," Ihsanul quoted the PM as saying.

Hasina, who visited Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar before flying to New York last month, narrated the horrifying stories she heard from the women and children fleeing violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State.

The premier said Rohingyas would be relocated to "Bhasan Char" from Cox's Bazar. The civil administration, army, navy, Air Force, BGB, police and AL volunteers were working hard to ease the sufferings of Rohingyas, she told the meeting.

"Without waiting for any external assistance, we've made arrangements for their accommodation, food, and medicine," she said, adding that she already gave Tk 5 crore as an initial funding in this regard.

The PM said the international community was amazed to see the generosity of accepting such a huge number of people by the Bangladesh government.

About terrorism and extremism, she said her government launched a vigorous campaign against terrorism, militancy, and abuse of drugs.

Law enforcers and intelligence agencies were working in close cooperation to eradicate these menaces, she mentioned.

Speaking on a different note, the PM said the government was setting up 100 economic zones across the country and the expatriate Bangladeshis could invest there.

"WE'VE PROVED, WE CAN" Hasina has expressed happiness at the installation of the first span of the Padma Bridge.

"Yes, we've proved, we can... I'm very happy.... We, the Bangalee nation fought and liberated the country... We can do whatever we want to do as we have honest will and determination."

The PM recalled her government's decision to finance the mega project from state fund after the World Bank had withdrawn its loan on a "false and fictitious corruption charge".

"It was a big challenge, a big decision for Bangladesh [to finance the project with its own fund] as it was linked with the country's image."

She congratulated all Bangladeshis at home and abroad for extending their support to help complete the dream bridge that would connect the country's southern region with the capital.

Later, Hasina unveiled a bust of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington DC through video conferencing.

Famous sculptor Stephen Weitzman built the bust made of bronze.

Mohammad Ziauddin, Bangladesh ambassador to the USA, and senior officials of the embassy were present.

Padma Bridge became visible on Saturday with the installation of the first span at the Janjira point of Shariatpur. The 3,200-tonne first span was installed between pier-37 and pier-38 of the bridge.

The PM went to Washington from New York on September 22 after attending the 72nd United Nations General Assembly.

She flew to New York from Dhaka on September 17 to join the annual UN event.

Girl found

FROM PAGE 1

Tangail, was brought to the capital on Thursday. Later, she ended up being robbed and raped, said police.

She was bleeding when she was rescued around 8:30pm on Friday, said locals who took her to the hospital.

Quoting the victim, Dr Bilkis said the girl began a relationship with a youth, who introduced himself as one Sajib, over the phone two months ago.

As the youth promised to marry her, the girl went to Gazipur with Tk 30,000 and some gold ornaments she had stolen from her home. However, the youth took away the money and ornaments from her and fled leaving her in Mirpur.

There, she met another youth, who took her to a hotel and raped her, Dr Bilkis said, adding, the victim, who was in shock, could only say the name of the youth -- Shakil.

Meanwhile, police recovered the body of a six-year-old girl from a house in Jatrabari's Matuail area on Sunday evening.

Police suspect the girl, Jakia Akter, was raped and strangled.

Tofael Ahmed, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Jatrabari Police Station, said she had gone missing after she went out of her home to answer to the call of nature around 6:00am that day.

Her parents searched for her in the area and found the body, wrapped in a blanket, at one of their neighbour's house, which was locked from outside.

Later, police recovered the body and sent it to Sir Salimullah Medical College for autopsy.

A person who lives in that house was detained for questioning, said the OC without giving any more details immediately.

Myanmar proposes taking them back

FROM PAGE 1

solution to the crisis," Mahmood said, adding that the working group will be formed soon. "I am hopeful."

The talks came at a time when Bangladesh is struggling to cope with an unprecedented influx, termed by the UN one of the fastest growing refugee crises in recent times.

Already 5,07,000 of the Myanmarese minorities crossed over into Bangladesh since late August to escape a military crackdown in Rakhine State.

The UN has denounced the brutal army campaign as a "textbook case of ethnic cleansing".

Myanmar denies atrocities, saying security forces are fighting Rohingya "terrorists" who triggered the latest wave of violence with coordinated attacks on August 25.

"Myanmar has made a proposal to take back the Rohingya refugees," the foreign minister told reporters. "The two sides have agreed to a proposal to set up a joint working group to coordinate the repatriation process."

In reply to a question, he said the composition of the working group will be finalised soon, after both the countries submit names for it.

The group will chalk out detailed repatriation plan through discussions.

Asked about a possible timeframe for the working group's formation, he said, "We need to wait but let's start the discussion."

Kyaw Tint Swe did not talk to the media and left the state guesthouse around 1:30pm after luncheon.

The Myanmar minister, who arrived here early yesterday, had no other engagement after the meeting. He was scheduled to leave early today by Thai Airways.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahril Alaam, PM's Principal Secretary Kamal Abdul Naser,

Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque and other high officials were present during the meeting.

Foreign Minister Mahmood said he held "very cordial and friendly" talks with the representative of Myanmar's de facto leader and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

"We have handed over a draft of the proposed deal to the Myanmar minister at the meeting," he said without going into details.

Diplomatic sources said the four-page document contained a detailed plan on how Myanmar can start repatriation of its displaced nationals now staying in Bangladesh.

In its note, Dhaka asked Myanmar to begin the repatriation within the next one month. It also suggested starting the repatriation with the registered refugees, who are already verified by the UNCHR, Myanmar and Bangladesh, and staying at Nayapara and Kutupalong camps under the 1993 agreement.

The three sides have unanimously cleared some 2,415 Rohingyas. Dhaka mentioned this at yesterday's meeting, suggesting that the repatriation should start with these people first.

Before the latest influx beginning late August, Bangladesh was already hosting over three lakh Rohingyas.

The foreign minister in his six-minute briefing also said Home Minister Asaduzzaman will soon make a trip to Myanmar, which will help take forward the negotiations with that country.

"There has been a fruitful discussion over border and security issues," he said, adding that some instruments on better border management are ready to get final shape during the visit.

Asked if the Myanmar minister was sincere about resolving the crisis, a senior official at the foreign ministry said he appeared fully aware of the situation and did not go for any arguments or countering the allegations.

Foreign affairs experts in Dhaka saw yesterday's meeting as a positive development, but noted that Myanmar broke their promises in the past and showed non-cooperative attitude to Bangladesh.

Meeting sources said Dhaka called for an end to the current influx and persecutions of Rohingyas and implementation of Annan Commission's recommendations.

In response, the Myanmar minister claimed there has been no military operation in Rakhine since September 5 and local administration has taken adequate measures to provide safety and security to the Rohingya population.

About the ongoing influx, Kyaw Tint Swe admitted that he heard a few incidents about threats made by ethnic Rakhine community to Rohingyas to leave the country.

He said that the deputy commissioner at Rakhine is visiting the affected areas and giving assurance about the security in place and urging the Rohingyas not to leave the country. But the Myanmar minister complained that the Rohingyas who have crossed the border are making phone calls to Rakhine and encouraging fellow community members to come to Bangladesh.

He asked the Bangladesh side to look into the matters seriously, meeting sources said.

It may be mentioned that over 6,000 Rohingya people reportedly entered Bangladesh through Ulubunia point in Teknaf yesterday fearing fresh persecutions in Rakhine.

At the meeting, Dhaka also reiterated its zero tolerance position against terrorism, Minister Mahmood said, adding that he put emphasis on complete implementation of Annan Commission's recommendations.

The Annan Commission presented