

Early harvest brings festivity to North after flood paddy

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Farmers of the flood-affected areas in Dinajpur and Rangpur have started harvesting of early variety high-yielding paddy amidst festivity although flood in August was a heavy blow to them.

The farmers are expecting more profit this year as the price of rice was soaring in the market.

Harvesting started on Sunday in full swing in Badarganj upazila of Rangpur and Khansama upazila of Dinajpur, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension.

In Badarganj around 2,700 hectares of land was brought under early varieties of high-yielding paddy cultivation.

Farmer Mazedur Rahman of Untapara village in Kalupura union said he had cultivated hybrid paddy on 1.20 acre of land. He added he started harvesting on Sunday.

"I got 30 maunds of paddy from my land," he said, adding that he had

spent Tk 9,000 for planting the paddy, which had around 100 days of life span.

He was now preparing his land for next crops like potato.

Abdus Salam of Mohidpur village said he got 40 maunds of paddy from his 60 decimals of land and got Tk 600 per maund from the sale.

Aswin in Khansama of Dinajpur, high-yielding early varieties of paddy were introduced to 500 hectares of land, according to DAE officials.

"The situation in mid-August was very bad during the flood," said Polish Roy, a farmer of Kachiniya village in the upazila. Now things were much better, he said, adding they would cultivate other crops like potato, garlic and onion along with winter vegetables after harvesting paddy.

Abinoy Chandra Roy of Prankrishnapur village said he had

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A farmer carries bundles of BRRI dhan-33, an early variety paddy, harvested from a field in Dinajpur's Khansama upazila on Monday. The area was hit by flood in mid-August. But luckily for farmers, the damage was minimal. They are now hoping to make a good profit as rice prices are high in local markets. PHOTO: STAR

Drug trade defies Rakhine crisis

Myanmar soldiers nabbed with 2m yaba pills

Two Myanmar soldiers are being questioned after they were caught with nearly two million yaba pills in restive Rakhine State, police said yesterday, as the drugs trade goes on despite communal violence.

The men were held after 1.88 million tablets said to be worth around \$2.8 million were found in a military vehicle in the town of Maungdaw on October 1, a senior anti-drug officer told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"We have kept our doors open for resolving the Rohingya problems both through bilateral and international means," said a senior foreign ministry official.

A press statement of Myanmar Self-Defence Force's Office yesterday read: "The union minister expressed his firm conviction that issues arising between two neighbours can be resolved bilaterally in an amicable manner, taking into consideration the national interests of both countries."

After the bilateral meeting in Dhaka on Monday, Foreign Minister

AH Mahmood Ali told reporters that Rohingya population would be verified by the IWC, but without the UN involvement.

"Bangladesh has proposed a bilateral agreement [with Myanmar] to help implement the repatriation," Mahmood added.

"But it remains unclear how could the verification be done.

"The Rohingyas are denied citizenship under the controversial 1982 law. When queried about identifying papers, a number of refugees in Teknaf told The Daily Star earlier that they could not either bring any documents while fleeing for life or those were burned in the fires set by the security forces.

Some even pointed out that they had never even received any such documents despite applying for those on several occasions.

Several foreign affairs experts, including serving and former diplomats, categorically said that it would not be wise to go ahead with the repatriation process without the UN involvement.

They said the IWC could be formed at the bilateral level but the bilateral agreement should be done in the

light of May 12, 1993 deal between Bangladesh and Myanmar which ensured involvement of UNHCR and UN bodies.

Former ambassador FA Shamim Ahmed said the Myanmar move is certainly intended to defuse the international momentum and to buy some time. "Since this is an evolving situation, so we have to wait and see the formation of IWC and its detailed plan on how to start the repatriation."

A senior official of the foreign ministry yesterday pointed to the statement, issued by the State Counselor's Office, that referred to the Molt of April 28, 1992, which was fully bilateral and had no involvement of UN bodies.

On Kyaw Tin Swe's return to Naypyidaw from Dhaka, the State Counselor's Office issued the press statement, also reading: "The union minister also reiterated the commitment made by Myanmar's State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on September 19, that Myanmar is ready to begin the verification and repatriation of refugees."

A foreign ministry official said Suu Kyi in her Sept 19 speech clearly mentioned about return of Rohingya

refugees in line with the 1993 Rohingya Repatriation Agreement between Myanmar, Bangladesh and UNHCR.

But yesterday's press statement did not mention the 1993 deal, creating confusion and showing Myanmar's lack of sincerity, the official added.

The statement completely ignored any role of UN or its concerned organisations, which seriously worried Dhaka as it believes safety, security and stability and freedom of movement of Rohingyas is essential for their return.

ROHINGYAS SCEPTICAL

Rohingyas in Bangladesh were sceptical yesterday about their repatriation, even though the government there has given an assurance it would accept people verified as refugees.

"Everything was burned, even people were burned," said a man who identified himself as Abdullah, a dismissed Chanda that people would have documents to prove a right to stay in Myanmar.

A government spokesman of Myanmar said under the 1993 pact, even a hospital record was enough to

prove residency, but it was only Myanmar, not Bangladesh, that could verify citizenship.

"We have a policy for the repatriation process and we will go along with that," the spokesman, Zaw Hay, told Reuters.

But even if refugees have documents, many are wary about returning without an assurance of full citizenship, which they fear could leave them vulnerable to the persecution and curbs they have endured for years.

Amina, 60, laughed at the thought of returning.

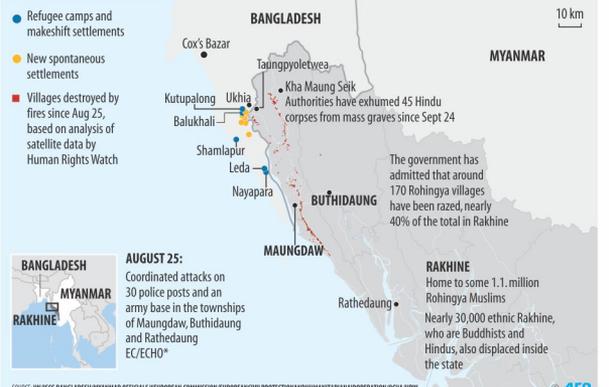
"If we go there, we'll just have to come back here," she said. "If they give us our rights, we will go, but people did this before and they had to return."

Last month, Anwar Begum told Reuters she had fled from Myanmar three times. The first time was to escape a 1978 crackdown, and she returned the following year. She fled again in 1991 and returned in 1994.

"I don't want to go back," the 55-year-old added. "I don't believe the government. Every time the government agrees we can go back, then we're there and they break their promise."

REFUGEE CAMPS IN BANGLADESH

More than half a million Rohingyas have fled into Bangladesh since violence started on August 25



All that glitters is not gold

citizens or naturalised citizens. More than 100,000 more Rohingyas got national verification cards considered as a preparatory step towards citizenship.

So Myanmar's proposal basically means that they are not willing to take back more than 14,000 registered Rohingyas. The rest will remain with us. Around one million Rohingyas have already taken shelter in Bangladesh – five lakh based on this time and another five lakh in the previous years. They will remain a stateless people and multiply with countless children.

The hollowness of the Myanmar union minister's proposal is also reflected in the simple fact that while he was holding talks with the Bangladesh foreign minister, more than 5,000 Rohingyas crossed into Myanmar.

Bangladesh has done nothing to stop genocide. It has not restrained its military. It has not stopped the extremist Buddhists who are at the forefront

of the ethnic violence. Its only aim was to shift the international community's focus and make the issue a matter of bilateral action.

There has been no reconciliation process in Myanmar that would make the refugees feel safe to return. Rather, their vacated lands and burned houses have been acquired by the Myanmar government.

The sad fact is that when Suu Kyi, who now says only the "verified citizens" would be allowed to return, has forgotten that while she was in prison, her party in 2005 had sought UN Security Council action against Myanmar for human rights violation and violence against ethnic communities after a commission headed by Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu and Czech President Vaclav Havel prepared a report on Myanmar.

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Move fast for safe return of Rohingyas

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first since violence erupted late August, they look forward to strengthening trust and cooperation with all communities and Myanmar government.

"This will be critical in addressing the root causes and setting a sustainable path towards peace and prosperity for all people in Rakhine State, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or citizenship status," said Farhan Haq, deputy spokesman for the UN secretary-general, at a press briefing in Geneva on Monday.

According to the UN, over 5.09 million Rohingyas crossed to Bangladesh until September 30 fleeing Myanmar army crackdown launched in response to insurgent attacks on police posts and an army base on August 25.

The Human Rights Watch said more than 200 Rohingya villages were burned down, hundreds of Rohingya men killed and women raped.

"These bodies remind the atrocity crimes against humanity," while the UN denounced it as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing."

Blocking access of humanitarian organisations, diplomats and journalists to Rakhine State also brought widespread criticism. Myanmar authorities had cancelled a planned trip of the diplomats and UN officials to Maungdaw Township on September 28.

Monday's trip is seen by the diplomats as a positive step.

"Our colleagues in Myanmar believe it could help in our efforts to explore how the UN could cooperate with the Myanmar authorities to alleviate the dire situation in northern Rakhine," Farhan Haq told reporters.

WHAT THEY SAW IN RAKHINE

The diplomats in a statement said they went to a number of villages in Maungdaw and Rathedaung and met a mixture of local communities. Many people of all communities in northern Rakhine have suffered and still feel great insecurity.

We saw villages which had been burned down to the ground and emptied of inhabitants. The violence must stop. The security forces have an obligation to protect all people in Rakhine without discrimination and to take measures to prevent acts of arson, says statement.

Twenty foreign diplomats from the US, the UK, France, European Union, Turkey, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Denmark, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Finland issued the statement.

UN Resident Coordinator Renata Lok-Dessalines in Myanmar, World Food Programme Representative and Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator Domenico Scalpelli and senior UNHCR official Cecile Fradet were also in the tour.

UN officials did not issue any statement, but UN Secretary-General's Deputy Spokesman Farhan Haq briefed reporters in Geneva on the visit.

The diplomats said they saw dire humanitarian need of people in Rakhine.

"We call once more for unimpeded humanitarian access to northern Rakhine and resumption of life-saving services without discrimination throughout the state," the statement read.

They emphasised that the people must not be subject to, and should be protected from, any reprisals, such as physical attacks or arbitrary arrest.

They also called on Myanmar authorities to fully investigate allegations of human rights violations, prosecute those responsible, and allow the UN Fact-Finding Mission to visit Rakhine.

INFLUX CONTINUES

Meanwhile, more than 10,000 Rohingyas have massed in Myanmar near a crossing point into Bangladesh, Myanmar media said yesterday, apparently poised to join an exodus across the border due to food shortages and fear of attacks in their homeland.

They have arrived "between Lethpyaw and Kwunthpin village to emigrate to the neighbouring country," the state-backed Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper reported.

After a brief lull in arrivals, the Bangladesh Border Guard says 4,500 Rohingyas are now crossing each day.

"They're not want to stay [in Myanmar]. They want to come here, they're being told to leave," Lieutenant-Colonel SM Anifil Islam told AFP.

UNHCR spokesman Diarrhoea

TREATMENT CENTRE

UNHCR in cooperation with Bangladesh public health authorities, opened a 20-bed diarrhoea treatment camp on Monday in Kutupalong refugee camp.

It is working to arrange 80 beds by the end of the week in three locations as cases of diarrhoea see an increasing trend amid lack of sanitary latrines and clean drinking water.

UNHCR this week also plans to open medical consultation centres with attached oral rehydration "corners" throughout the huge Kutupalong

Extension Site where many of the refugees have arrived since August 25.

"This is a move to bring medical care closer to those in need," said a UNHCR statement.

To speed up delivery of aid, UNHCR in collaboration with Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC) will begin a family count to collect data on newly-arrived refugees and their needs.

Each family will receive a card bearing the RRRC logo, which will enable the government, UNHCR and other agencies to target aid to the right people, including pregnant and lactating women, people with disabilities or elderly people.

60% OF THEM CHILDREN

Sixty percent of the Rohingyas, who have fled Myanmar to Bangladesh since August 25, are children under 18, including hundreds without family members, says Save the Children.

"They need extra support to ensure their emotional wellbeing and also to avert the risks they are exposed to, according to a press release of the global charity, reports UN.

Many of the unaccompanied children are highly distressed or traumatised as they have been through a dreadful experience while fleeing Myanmar and travelling long distances to Bangladesh through rain and mud.

Many became orphans when their parents were killed, often in front of their own eyes. These children are the most vulnerable and at high risk of trafficking, child labour, sexual abuse and other threats, said Save the Children.

UK, IOM ARRANGE AIRLIFT

The UK, in collaboration with the UN Migration Agency, has organised a major airlift of relief items for the newly arrived Rohingyas.

The aid, flown into Chittagong by the UK's DFID on September 28 and 29, included 20,000 blankets, 10,500 sleeping mats, and 10,000 shelter kits. Each shelter kit contains two tarpaulins and the rope necessary to fix them.

"This airlift will supply 10,000 families – 50,000 people – with potentially life-saving shelter, mats and bedding to protect them during the monsoon season's torrential wind and rain," said Mohammed Abdiker, IOM Director of Operations and Emergencies.

SOURCE: UNHCR BANGLADESH/Myanmar OFFICIALS* EUROPEAN COMMISSION/EUROPEAN POLICE COOPERATION UNIT/HUMANITARIAN OPERATION/OC/HR

