

Sufferings staggering

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 "We call again on the Myanmar authorities to allow the full resumption of humanitarian action across all of Rakhine state, and will continue to advocate for conditions to be created that allow for people to safely, securely and voluntarily go home."

Mark Lowcock, Emergency Relief Coordinator and United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Anthony Lake, Executive Director of the UNICEF, issued the joint statement after concluding their visit to Rohingya settlements in Cox's Bazar on Wednesday.

Well over half a million displaced Myanmar nationals fled the ethnic cleansing in Rakhine State since Aug 25, making it the world's fastest developing refugee emergency.

"We leave Bangladesh moved by the stories of suffering that we heard from refugees fleeing the violence in Myanmar - and all the more determined that the United Nations do all it can to assist the Government of Bangladesh in coping with this crisis," said the top two UN officials.

They also went on to describe that the Rohingyas arrive in Bangladesh fearful, exhausted and hungry, and in desperate need of shelter, food, clean water sanitation and healthcare. They bring with them terrible accounts of what they have seen and suffered - stories of children being killed, women brutalised, and villages burned to the ground.

In their joint statement, the officials

lauded the government and people of Bangladesh for their "extraordinary spirit of generosity" and termed it "an inspiring example of humanity."

Lowcock and Lake were also impressed by the progress being made to assist the refugees at the camps and settlements they visited.

"We saw the difference that the Government, the Bangladesh Armed Forces, UN agencies and our national and international NGO partners are making. But the needs are growing at a faster pace than our ability to meet them."

Noting that the refugees are living in ramshackle shacks in sprawling, densely-crowded sites that have sprung up to accommodate them - with ever-growing risks of an outbreak of diseases - they underscored the urgency for funding to make sure all refugees have access to food, shelter, water, sanitation facilities and healthcare.

"Conditions in the temporary settlements are dire. Without a significant increase in assistance, the refugees, who have suffered so much already, could face another catastrophe on top of the tragedies that caused them to flee their homes."

An update to the UN response plan released yesterday sought \$430 million to scale up the relief operation in support of the refugees and the host communities urgently. An additional \$12 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund has been allocated to assist in the establishment of new sites for arriving refugees.

UNHCR
 The UNHCR, together with

Bangladesh government authorities and other partners, are working to contain an outbreak of diarrhoeal diseases, with nearly 4,800 cases reported last week, the UN said.

A diarrhoea treatment centre opened in the Kutupalong Refugee Camp and by the end of this week, there will be a total of 80 beds in the diarrhoea treatment centres in three locations. Two more centres are expected to open next week.

Meanwhile, the newly appointed Ambassador of Sweden to Bangladesh, Charlotta Schlyter, who presented credentials to President Abdul Hamid yesterday, lauded Bangladesh for its very substantial efforts in assisting nearly half a million people from Myanmar.

UK SENDS HUMANITARIAN AID
 The UK government's Department for International Development in collaboration with IOM, the UN Migration Agency, has organised a major airlift of relief items to help the Rohingyas in Bangladesh.

The provision of 10,000 shelter kits, 10,500 sleeping mats and 20,000 blankets will help improve the lives of thousands of people who are living in makeshift settlements around Kutupalong and Balukhali, according to a British High Commission press release.

Distribution of the aid began on Wednesday through IOM and will continue next week.

The British government announced £30 million to meet the urgent humanitarian needs, it added.

Tigers against the odds

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 Bangladesh's only match till now they were bundled out for 153 and 159 in a 2008 innings defeat.

The pitch here is likely to behave very differently from the flat track in Potchefstroom. There is grass on the wicket and according to Du Plessis, there will be much more bounce. That was proven during the practice session in the adjoining strip where Bangladesh's batsmen were missing almost as many balls as they were middling.

In the last game, Bangladesh's batting was most culpable as they threw away good starts. Mushfiqur said that the effort in this game will be to build partnerships. The bowling was poor too; Bangladesh managed just to pick up nine wickets in two innings and six of them were taken when South Africa were playing big shots and going for quick runs. Mushfiqur was harsh on his bowlers after the defeat.

"When you get nothing from the wicket, you have to go to the other options," he said yesterday during the pre-match press conference. "If you are not getting wickets, you have to cut down the run-rate. When the ball reverses or you get the second new ball, you can go back to the attacking options. Our bowlers couldn't do it in the first Test but I am hopeful that they can do it in Bloemfontein. There will be help for them on this wicket and I think they will learn from their previous mistakes. It'd be

better if they can do it quickly."

The only positive from Tamim's injury is that it simplifies the batting selection. Bangladesh have to go with the batsmen they have left, which means Soumya Sarkar will return in place of the injured Dale Steyn, and the two players whose places in the side have been most debated in recent times -- Soumya and Imrul Kayes -- will front up to South Africa's pacers armed with the new ball.

The bowling is not so straightforward. Off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz was wicketless in Potchefstroom, and expensive in the second innings. The only thing that might save him from being replaced by left-arm spinner Taijul Islam, who had an extended session in the nets yesterday, is Mehedi's batting ability down the order. Pacer Taskin Ahmed also went wicketless. Judging by the practice session and the time given to the bowlers, Subhasish Roy is in line to make a comeback into the side. Shafiqul Islam did not bowl much, less even than Taskin. So it is a toss-up between Rubel Hossain, Taskin and Shafiqul. And as Shafiqul took two wickets in the last Test, he may retain his place.

South Africa have injury worries too, but because of their current dominance, do not seem too bothered about it. Mome Morkel, who shot out Mominul Haque and Tamim Iqbal in the first over

of the second innings in Potchefstroom, will miss the Test with a side strain.

"The big thing is the loss of Mome. You want to make sure that the venom in your attack is still the same," said Du Plessis, who already has to do without the injured Dale Steyn, Vernon Philander and Chris Morris. "With Mome, Vernon and Dale there, there's an expectancy of what you're going to get. If you don't have those guys there you're not sure. It's important for us to look at how we can best balance the side but still have a strong attack."

"The challenge is, if Mome's out, do we still play three frontline seamers and an allrounder or do we look at four seamers and two allrounders? There's a lot to consider. But it's important to have a really strong attack because you want to put Bangladesh under pressure with pace."

Either debutant Dane Paterson or Wayne Parnell will take Morkel's place, and judging by the trouble third seamer Duanne Olivier caused the Tigers in the first Test, the hosts should not have many problems on a bouncy wicket with a firebrand like Kagiso Rabada in their ranks.

As for Bangladesh, despite Mushfiqur's insistence that it is an opportunity for others to prove themselves in the absence of their two stalwarts, a draw or a respectable defeat is probably the most that can be hoped for.

Hike proposal draws heavy flak

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 fixed at Tk 4.90 per unit in September 2015, it took into consideration Tk 4,300 crore as subsidies from the government.

But the subsidies never came and now the BPDB is running its operations by borrowing from the government at 3 percent interest. "That's why the BPDB has proposed the bulk tariff hike," the BPDB said in its argument.

The BPDB said if the BERC hikes bulk tariff by Tk 0.55 per unit and Tk 4,300 was made available as subsidies, it would be possible for it to supply power at a reduced rate.

In February this year, the BPDB submitted a proposal to increase bulk power tariff to Tk 5.59 a unit from Tk 4.87, which is a 14.78 percent hike.

Monowar Islam, chairman of the BERC, said appropriate decision on power tariff hike would be made after scrutinising all proposals and taking into account all arguments and logic.

He said there was no question that efficiency had to be increased and

proper management on the demand side was needed.

Monowar said the power sector had expanded massively all on a sudden and everything was being done on trial-and-error basis.

Syed Abul Maksud, noted columnist, said the commission had set an example by organising the special hearing and it was an expression of a state's democratic characteristics.

Architect Mubasshar Hussain said the BPDB had proved that it could supply electricity at a very low price.

He also questioned the logic behind charging the BPDB interest on subsidies given to it.

Amzad Hussain, a director of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said if the tariff was increased, it would raise the cost of production, hurt the country's competitiveness, and cause inflation.

Md Hasin Parvez, joint secretary-general of the Bangladesh CNG Filling Station & Conversion Workshop

Owners Association, extended full support to the CAB proposal.

Ruhin Hossain Prince, a central leader of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, said the demand for bulk tariff rise from the BPDB was uncalled-for.

Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Gono Shanghati Andolon, said any tariff hike would hurt the poor, the industries and the country's competitiveness.

He also said the BERC was supposed to set fuel prices. But the energy ministry was fixing the prices itself breaching the laws.

Yesterday was the last day of the hearing.

Distributors such as Dhaka Electricity Distribution Company, Dhaka Power Distribution Company, and Rural Electrification Board also proposed retail tariff hike.

The BERC would make public its decision regarding the matter within 90 working days.

lay in pools of blood.

"The suicide bomber struck outside the shrine at a time when it was packed with people attending anniversary celebrations of Syed Cheesal Shah," said senior local administration official Asad Kakar, referring to the local saint.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility but militants and separatists have repeatedly targeted minority Shiite Muslims at religious sites, as well as security officials.

Balochistan is afflicted by Islamist militancy, sectarian violence and a separatist insurgency.

Sectarian violence -- in particular by Sunni hardliners against Shias who make up roughly 20 percent of Pakistan's 200 million people -- has claimed thousands of lives in the country over the past decade.

Balochistan is the largest of

Pakistan's four provinces, but its roughly seven million inhabitants have long complained they do not receive a fair share of its gas and mineral wealth.

A greater push towards peace and development by Pakistani authorities has reduced violence considerably in recent years.

But the remnants of militant groups are still able to carry out periodic bloody attacks, particularly in the northwest.

Several million Muslims in Pakistan are still believed to follow Sufism, a mystical branch of Islam whose wandering holy men helped spread the religion throughout the Indian subcontinent in the 13th century.

However, it has been overtaken in recent decades by more conservative versions of the faith.

Child migrants suffer police violence on EU borders: MSF

AFP, Belgrade

Medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) accused the Bulgarian, Croatian and Hungarian police of resorting to violence against migrants, notably children, in their bid to stop them from slipping into Europe.

"For the children and young people trying to leave Serbia today, violence is a constant and the overwhelming majority is perpetrated by EU member states border police," the head of MSF in Serbia, Stephane Moissaing, said in a statement.

"For more than a year our doctors and nurses have continued to hear the same, repetitive story of young people being beaten, humiliated, and attacked with dogs for desperately trying to continue their journeys," the statement said.

In the first six months of 2017, 92 percent of children and teenagers attending MSF mental health clinics and reporting physical violence named the Bulgarian, Hungarian and Croatian police or border authorities as the perpetrators, he said.

Nearly half of the children singled out Bulgarian authorities, the statement said.

MSF said it was disgraceful that EU member states were intentionally using violence to deter children and young people from seeking asylum in the bloc.

Delhi pledges

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The two foreign secretaries agreed that Myanmar appeared to show signs of yielding to mounting international pressure and indicating its readiness to take back Rohingya refugees. But both stressed that fingers should be kept crossed unless meaningful and verifiable actions are taken on repatriation of refugees.

India too would like to send back an estimated 40,000 Rohingya refugees. The two secretaries agreed on the need for continuing their respective diplomatic initiatives so that Myanmar takes back the refugees.

The two top diplomats recognised that given the complexity of the Rohingya issue, there was a need for Dhaka and Delhi to have some kind of coordination to deal with it and assist efforts for a permanent solution, said the sources.

The meeting also discussed possible dates for the visit of Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to Dhaka for a meeting of the Joint Consultative Commission. The tentative dates for the meeting are October 22-23.

Saudi arrests 22 for 'inciting public feelings'

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia has arrested 22 people, including a Qatari national, for "inciting public feelings" on social media, authorities said Wednesday, following a crackdown on dissent.

Those detained had posted video clips online, the official Saudi Press Agency said citing a security source, adding that authorities were investigating their motives and connections.

"Their number is 22 people, one of them Qatari, and the rest are Saudis. Their motives and links are being verified," SPA said.

They were arrested for "circulation of video clips on social networking sites inciting public feelings", SPA added without any further details.

Saudi Arabia last month launched a crackdown on dissenters, detaining prominent clerics and activists ahead of a historic government decision to allow women to drive.

The action was seen as a show of force by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has styled himself as a reformer who will set the country on the road to modernity and civil liberty.

Separately, SPA quoted the interior ministry as saying that 24 people were arrested in the northwestern province of Hail for "exploiting social networking sites to promote lies and exaggerations" with the aim of provoking "sedition and tribal tensions".

It was not clear whether the two sets of arrests were connected.

SPA also did not offer details on the arrested Qatari national.

Saudi Arabia as well as Egypt, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates cut ties with Qatar in June, in the worst diplomatic crisis to roil the Gulf for years.

The four countries accuse Qatar of backing extremism and fostering ties with Iran, their Shia Muslim rival, charges that Doha denies.

Joint panel for fast execution

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arrived in Dhaka on Tuesday and left for New Delhi yesterday morning.

During his visit, the third Indian LoC was signed. So far, India has committed \$7.5 billion to Bangladesh in the three phases since 2010.

Bangladesh Finance Minister AMA Muhith raised the issue with his Indian counterpart and said the commitment was increasing but disbursement was not going up accordingly.

He urged India to take some measures for increasing implementation of the projects.

The finance ministry official said Arun Jaitley told them that they would take steps so that there was no delay in any approval process and the Exim Bank office in Dhaka would expedite project approval and the monitoring process.

Under the third LoC, 17 projects have already been identified. The meeting on Wednesday decided that India would soon send a high level representative from Exim Bank. The representative would evaluate the overall conditions of every project.

On the basis of the official's observations, Exim Bank would quickly approve relevant proposals.

As per Indian rules after signing of the loan agreement Exim Bank would approve each project separately with the DPP (development project proposal).

Following the approval, Bangladesh would have the project approved by Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecne). Later, preparations would be taken for preparing tender documents and the project implementation. Exim Bank's approval is required for preparing the papers.

The finance ministry official said they would hold a meeting with the ministries, which are involved with the implementation of the 17 projects, at the end of this month.

The meeting would review the project approval process by the Ecne and other issues so that the implementation of the projects begins quickly.

The rate of interest on Indian loan is 1 percent and 0.5 percent is the commitment charge.

Bangladesh in the meeting with Jaitley proposed waiver of the commitment charge. It also urged the Indian finance minister to turn a part of the credit into grant. India, however, did not make any specific assurance in this regard.

The first LoC of \$1 billion was signed on August 7, 2010 and the second LoC of \$2 billion in March last year.

At Wednesday's signing ceremony, Muhith said, "The progress on the implementation of the projects under the first and second credits has not been too good. But initial teething troubles are now over. We believe that implementation of this agreement would be pretty fast. Let's hope that it will be fast."

The Indian minister pointed out that there was some delay in the past, as it took time to select the projects. But this time, 17 projects have been identified in advance.

"One of the reasons for delays for some of these projects in any country is also land acquisition. There are local issues which all governments face because they have to do it in a very tactful manner."

Jaitley further said, "We do hope the earlier credit also gets executed expeditiously."

Muggers in action wearing

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two of his officials to National Bank at Shaheb Bazar in the city at 10:30am to withdraw Tk 17.50 lakh for paying the weekly wages of labourers.

They withdrew the money at 11:30am and started for the jute mill, Fazlur said, quoting his staff.

Suddenly, six people in three motorcycles, waylaid their pickup van near a brick kiln in Harian area, he said.

They identified themselves as members of the DB and asked the officials -- accountant Mominul Islam Naya, field officer Aninda Kumar Chowdhury Punam, and their driver, Taybur Islam Dulal -- to step out.

When the officials tried to contact their head office, the muggers seized their mobile phones. They took the key of their vehicle and began searching it.

At one stage, two of the criminals took the bag with the money and sped away in a motorcycle. The oth-

ers followed them.

"My men could not understand what to do in that situation," said Fazlur.

Police picked up the two mill officials and the driver and took them to Motihar Police Station for questioning, said Mehedi Hasan, OC of Motihar Police Station.

The mill authority was yet to file a case regarding the incident. Police have begun investigation into the matter, said the OC.

On October 2, two people identifying themselves as members of the same law enforcement agency took away Tk 4.60 lakh from a woman at the city's Ranibazar area.

Police gathered CCTV footage of the mugging but they are yet to ascertain the identities of those involved.

Al Amin, assistant commissioner of DB in Rajshahi city, said they were also investigating the incident. "We captured some faces from the footage; we are working to identify them," he said.

Beasts unleashed

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The victim's husband filed a case against eight men with Puthia Police Station. Police arrested seven of the accused, reports our staff correspondent in Rajshahi.

The arrestees are Mizanur Rahman, 28, Nabir Hossain, 28, Saiful Islam, 40, Nizam Uddin, 35, Moslem Uddin, 42, Amirul Islam, 37, and Zahedul Islam, 33, of Kajupara and Gopalpara in the upazila. Police seized a number of machetes and knives from their possession.

According to the couple's account, the eight men waylaid them on Taherpur-Puthia road around 7:30pm on Wednesday when they were going to their Bilmaria village home from their rented house at Taherpur by a rickshawvan.

They abducted the couple threatening them with sharp weapons and took them to Mizanur's rest house beside a pond in the village. The victim's husband was then tied to a tree before the gang-rape.

Later, the perpetrators threatened to kill them.

"They were talking about killing us," the victim's husband told reporters and police at the police station. They released the couple around 1:00am on condition that they would not disclose the matter.

On information, police led by the OC raided the house and caught Mizanur.

As per Mizanur's statement, police later arrested six others. Another accused managed to escape.

All the accused are well-known drug and arms peddlers. They had been engaged in different criminal activities in the area, said Sayedur, OC of Puthia police.

Meanwhile, a union parishad chairman allegedly raped and tortured a woman on Wednesday night at his office in Charbata of Noakhali, reports our correspondent there.

The victim, a mother of a two-and-a-half-year old child, is undergoing treatment at Noakhali General Hospital.

Talking to this correspondent, the victim of Subarnachar upazila said after her husband abandoned her a couple of years ago, she had a relationship with Robiul Hossain, who hid the information of his marital status. When she learnt

that Robiul was married, she broke it off.

But Robiul went to her house on Wednesday night and the victim and her family then informed the chairman of the matter.

Charbata UP Chairman Mozammel Hossain then called her, Robiul and her family members to his office around 10:00pm.

Hearing their statements, he started hurling abuse at her and even beat up Robiul. Later, he drove everyone out of his office, alleged the victim.

The chairman then raped her, she said, adding that he beat her up when she threatened to disclose the matter.

Contacted, the chairman denied the allegation of rape and tried to malign her character.

The victim first went to file a complaint with Char Jabbar Police Station against the chairman yesterday but police did not record it, she said. Later, following persuasion by journalists and locals, police recorded her complaint, she added.

Iqbal Hossain, officer-in-charge (investigation) of the police station, said the woman filed a complaint of rape against the UP chairman. After medical examinations, it would be confirmed whether it was a rape incident, he said.

Making fences

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they said. Indeed in a village where going to school was once something of a luxury, nowadays it is usual for children to pursue education.

"A nine-foot by fifteen-foot stretch of fence costs around Tk 1,100 to make," says wholesale producer Ujjal Kumar Rajbangshi. "We sell it for up to Tk 1,300. Buyers come to our door."

Bamboo fences made locally are sold across fourteen districts including Dhaka, Pabna, Mymensingh, Gopalganj and Satkhira.

Baniajuri union council chairman Abul Quasem Chotu says the industry could expand further with some financial assistance and availability of interest-free loans. "The industry has the potential to create many more jobs," he says.