

## 2002 GUJARAT RIOTS Death penalty of 11 people commuted to life in prison

AGENCIES

An Indian court yesterday commuted the death sentences of 11 men convicted of causing a 2002 train fire that sparked anti-Muslim riots in which more than 1,000 people were killed.

The 11 men, all Muslims, will instead face life in jail for causing the fire that killed 59 Hindu passengers and set off some of the worst religious violence to hit India since independence.

They were among 31 men convicted in 2011 who lodged an appeal at the High Court in the western state of Gujarat, where the fire and subsequent violence occurred, according to AFP.

"The court has commuted the death sentences for 11 convicted to life imprisonment," public prosecutor Eknath Ahuja told AFP after the appeal hearing.

The court upheld life imprisonment for 20 others convicted in the case, he said.

The court observed that the state government and railways had failed to maintain law and order, which resulted in the 59 deaths. It ordered the state and the railways to pay Rs 10 lakh to the nearest kin of the victims of the carnage within six weeks. The court junked appeals challenging the acquittal of 63, including "mastermind" Maulana Hussain Umarji. He died in 2011 after being acquitted by the trial court, reports The Times of India.

Yusuf Hoka, a relative of one of the convicts who had their sentence commuted, expressed relief following the court order.

"But we will have to see the order for details," Hoka said. "Most of the death convicts have already spent over 15 years in jail."

Hindu mobs hungry for revenge over the fire rampaged through Muslim neighbourhoods in towns and villages across the state of Gujarat during a week of bloodshed in 2002.

Gujarat's Hindu nationalist government was accused of tacitly supporting the revenge attacks, which survivors said could have been avoided if police had arrived on time.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was the state's chief minister at the time, was accused of turning a blind eye to the violence.

He was cleared of any wrongdoing in 2012 by a Supreme Court-ordered investigation.



Hundreds of Rohingya refugees streaming into Bangladesh at Anjumanpara of Palongkhali in Cox's Bazar yesterday. They were stopped by the Border Guard Bangladesh personnel (not in frame), frisked and then allowed to march ahead.

PHOTO:  
AMRAN HOSSAIN

## UN needs reform

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power to overrule the Security Council," he said.

Stressing the need for reforms in the world forum, Rizvi said, "Rohingya crisis is a clear manifestation of where the world stands today."

The UN permanent members are more concerned about their own national interests despite rising conflicts in various parts of the world, he added.

The observations came when over 5 lakh Rohingyas fled violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state to Bangladesh as Myanmar's security forces began a crackdown on Rohingyas after Rohingya insurgents attacked 30 police posts and an army base on August 25.

Rights bodies found evidence that Myanmar army burnt down over 200 Rohingya villages and killed hundreds of Rohingya men, raped women and forced them to flee to Bangladesh.

The UN termed it "textbook example of ethnic cleansing", while rights bodies accused Myanmar of genocide and crimes against humanity.

The UN Security Council, which could impose sanctions or authorise the use of force for peace failed to take any action because of opposition from China and Russia in a meeting in late September.

Such actions required unanimous passage of a resolution with no negative vote by any of its permanent members -- US, Britain, France, China and Russia.

Gowher Rizvi, who has worked in Oxford, Williams College in Massachusetts, Asia Society in New York, Ford Foundation and Harvard Kennedy School, said the UN had contributed a lot to make the world a better place, but it was still threatened by the dangers of wars, displacement, poverty and injustice.

"Therefore, reform in UN is absolutely necessary," said Rizvi at a seminar on the occasion of International Day of Peace jointly organised by Rotary International District 3281 Bangladesh and Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) at the latter's auditorium.

The UN is supposed to reflect united conscience of the world, but today's reality in the UN does not represent the conscience, he said, suggesting that the UN General Assembly should be given the power to overrule the Security Council's decision.

He said the system could be like a parliament where majority of the members have the final say on any decision made by the president. Such a system could truly reflect the representation of the world community, Rizvi added.

"Otherwise, we are in great danger," he warned. He also suggested expansion of the 15-member Security Council of UN, but did not elaborate.

He said the pressure from the international community on Myanmar authorities must continue until a solution was reached.

Academics and foreign relations experts at the seminar said the world was witnessing one of the biggest refugee and migrant crisis since World War II.

Delwar Hossain of the international relations department of Dhaka University said fragility in governance, social and economic injustice, priority of national and political interests by the governments lead to such conflicts.

According to the UN Refugee Agency, an unprecedented 65.6 million people around the world are displaced. Among them are nearly 22.5 million refugees, while there are 10 million stateless people denied of basic rights.

Bangladesh, despite not being a rich

## Man beaten

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Women and Children Repression Prevention Act by one Shyamoli Akhter of the same village.

Witness Ruma Khatun alleged that the police were in an angry mood during the raid and were assaulting villagers irrespective of their gender. At one stage, Saidur Rahman stepped forward and protested their actions.

The policemen locked in an altercation with Saidur and later started beating him up in front of the villagers. As he collapsed on the ground unconscious, the policemen took him away, alleged Nadira Begum, Saidur's wife.

The police took him to Kalai Upazila Health Complex where he died of his injuries around 8:30am.

As the news of his death spread villagers gathered at the health complex and besieged the hospital in protest. During the siege, some policemen got stranded inside the complex. At least seven people were injured as additional forces used rubber bullets and lobbed teargas shells to disperse the protesters.

Police later sent Saidur's body to Joypurhat Modern Hospital for autopsy.

Ali Akbar, chairman of Ahmedabad Union Parishad, held the law enforcers responsible for Saidur's death and demanded exemplary punishment of the policemen involved.

High officials of Joypurhat police and administration visited the village and assured the villagers of necessary action against the offenders, said Belayet Hossain, additional SP of Joypurhat.

## Violence, food crisis set off fresh exodus

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According to UN agencies, 5,20,000 of the forcibly displaced people crossed over into Bangladesh since August 25; nearly 40,000 of them arrived in the last 10 days, read a foreign ministry press release yesterday.

Refugees came through two points on the day -- at least 2,000 through Shah Porir Dwip in Teknaf and the rest through Anjuman Para of Palongkhali union in Ukha, according to officials and locals.

"Over 10,000 Rohingyas entered today," Palongkhali Union Parishad Chairman Abdul Gafur Chowdhury told these correspondents.

Thousands of Rohingyas, mostly women and children, who got into the area in early morning, were kept on an embankment till 2:00pm.

They were given relief materials and primary treatment by Bangladesh officials before being sent to Balukhali, where most of the refugees arriving since late August are staying in makeshift camps.

Bangladesh was already hosting 3,07,500 refugees before an army crackdown, in response to Rohingya insurgent attacks on August 25, sent people streaming towards the border.

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Many of the Rohingyas coming in the new surge of refugees were contacted by their relatives who had got through earlier and were told that Bangladesh government has arranged shelter and food for refugees.

Those sheltered here are often found carrying food for the new arrivals or talking over phone with near and dear ones waiting on the other side of the border.

Abul Kasim, 30, who came here yesterday, was contacted by his brother Mohammad Selim, who crossed over from Rakhine about 12 days ago.

"The army and Mog [Rakhine Buddhists] beat us up indiscriminately. They snatched away all our money and then set fire to our houses," he said.

"Then they ordered us to leave the country and not to look back. We started walking, and on the way to Cox's Bazar, collected food from abandoned houses."

Ramida Begum, 16, along with her parents and siblings, came through Anjuman Para point from Buchidong in Myanmar. She had to

walk for six days to reach the border.

"We were hiding for seven days dodging the army. When the army left, we returned to our village and found not a single house was untouched. All were burnt. We did not find anything to eat," she said.

Seventy-year-old Abdul Hakim had to walk for six days to come to Teknaf from Buchidong. He is one of those who entered through Anjuman Para point.

He said food crisis is acute in Myanmar as the military forced them to remain confined to house while local Buddhists would not sell anything to them.

Noor Jayeda, a 23-year-old woman who is 32-week pregnant, crossed the border along with her three children on Sunday midnight and arrived at Shah Porir Dwip yesterday morning.

Hailing from Sikdar Para of Maungdaw, Jayeda said Myanmar army after killing her husband asked them to leave their houses.

"I had to walk for three days. There is a severe food crisis [in Rakhine State] while the army and Mog people are setting fire to houses. The army is also burning

down shops and bazaars. They are destroying even rice warehouses," she told The Daily Star.

Imran Hossain, 33, along with his wife and four children arrived in Teknaf yesterday morning crossing the Naf River.

A day labourer from Gudampara area of Buchidong, he left his house around 11 days before. He stayed with his family members in hilly areas for two days and reached the border after walking another two days.

"There was no food with us. We took salty water and leaves from bushes," he said, adding that 10,000 more people are on the way to Bangladesh.

While the Myanmar military has engaged in a campaign of violence, there is mounting evidence that Rohingya women, men and children are now also fleeing the very real threat of starvation, says Amnesty International.

The reports of food shortages will add to the urgency of calls by aid agencies and the international community for unfettered humanitarian access to the conflict zone, writes Reuters.

There may be up to 1,00,000

people in northern Rakhine waiting to cross into Bangladesh, the International Organisation for Migration said on Friday.

**DANGEROUS JOURNEY**  
Survivors say it was a Myanmarese trawler.

Alif, a Rohingya refugee who has long lived in Bangladesh, lost nine relatives in the disaster including his mother and father.

"Yesterday, I spoke to my parents on the phone and they told me they would arrive in Shah Porir Dwip tomorrow," he told AFP as he used his bare hands to bury their bodies.

Shortly afterwards, he collapsed screaming in the middle of the cemetery.

Survivor Sayed Hossain wept as he watched the body of his two-year-old son being taken away to the local cemetery for burial, writes the news agency.

"We set off at around 6:00pm. We did not have any choice but to leave our village," he said, telling how the overloaded boat overturned when it hit a shoal and sank in rough water.

"They [security forces] have restricted our movements. Many are starving as we could not even go to

country, is dealing with nearly 9 lakh Rohingyas who are creating huge pressure on local resources.

Abul Hasan Chowdhury, former state minister for foreign affairs, suggested that Rizvi visit Beijing, New Delhi and Moscow to mobilise stronger support for a lasting solution to the crisis of the Rohingyas, who are denied citizenship and other basic rights in Myanmar.

He suggested that Bangladesh deal with Myanmar on multilateral basis.

Lt Gen (ret'd) Md Mainul Islam said while peacekeeping is a critical role in conflict zones, global authorities need to address the root causes of such conflicts.

Rotary Club of Ramna President Aik Cdre (ret'd) Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury BISS Director General Maj Gen AKM Abdur Rahman, Rotary International District 3281 Bangladesh's District Governor FH Arif also spoke.

## 1992 criteria not realistic now

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take back the "displaced residents" of Myanmar and proposed to follow the principle and criteria agreed upon in the 1992 "Joint Statement".

Bangladesh signed a Joint Statement with the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) of Myanmar on April 28, 1992 under which Myanmar agreed to the return of those refugees who could "establish their bona fide residency in Myanmar" prior to their departure for Bangladesh.

Myanmar agreed that the Rohingyas having "Myanmar citizenship identity cards or national registration cards or other relevant documents" issued by the authorities concerned could return to Myanmar.

The 1992 deal was signed after

an influx of more than 250,000 Rohingyas took shelter into Bangladesh.

Mahmood told the top diplomats of 27 countries based in Dhaka that while Bangladesh has welcomed the visit of the Union Minister and his willingness to work together for the return of forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals, with regard to the principles and criteria of return under the 1992 Joint Statement, the foreign minister highlighted that the situation of 1992 and current situation are "entirely different".

Around half of the Muslim villages in the northern Rakhine State have been burned down and it is still going on.

"So, identification of Rohingyas based on their residence in Rakhine would not be realistic. Bangladesh therefore proposed

and handed over a new arrangement to the visiting Minister outlining the principles and criteria for repatriation," he told the foreign diplomats.

"Response from Myanmar on the proposed arrangement of return is awaited," he added.

It should be noted that the foreign minister, during his media briefing on October 2, did not say anything about Myanmar's proposal to take back the Rohingyas following the criteria of 1992.

Bangladesh media came to know about the proposal from a press statement issued on October 3 on the visit of Kyaw Tint Swe to Bangladesh and his subsequent meeting with a Bangladesh delegation. The press release is available on the website of Myanmar State Counsellor Office.

According to the release, a total

of 236,495 people of 46,993 households had been repatriated from Bangladesh to Myanmar from September 1992 until July 2005 in line with the agreed criteria set out in the Joint Statement between Foreign Ministers of Myanmar and Bangladesh on 28 April 1992.

During the briefing yesterday, Mahmood further informed the diplomats that both sides also agreed to form a joint working group in this regard.

He also shared that Myanmar has invited him and the home minister to visit Myanmar and the invitations have been accepted.

Later when briefing reporters, Mahmood said Bangladesh will not take any decision like getting involved in any war with Myanmar as it wants a peaceful solution to the Rohingya crisis through

diplomatic efforts.

"Why should we get involved in war? We won't do that. Why should we destroy our development? We want peace," he said and added that Bangladesh is now a role model of development for many countries worldwide, including some developed ones.

Earlier, the foreign minister thanked the international community for their support and urged them to continue their engagement till a peaceful resolution is found to this humanitarian crisis.

The briefing was held at State Guesthouse Padma and was attended by Ambassadors, High Commissioners and CDAs from diplomatic missions of Australia, China, Egypt, France, Italy, Japan, Russia, Sweden, United States of America, United Kingdom, Germany,

Canada, India, The Netherlands, Vatican, Denmark, Spain, EU, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Switzerland and Norway.

The foreign minister briefed the diplomats about the current Rohingya situation and mentioned that the atrocities in the Rakhine State have not stopped and Rohingyas are continuing to cross the border. According to UN bodies, as of today, 5,20,000 Rohingyas crossed the border since 25 August; nearly 40,000 of them arrived in the last 10 days.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam, Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque and other senior officials were present.