

Step up support

Rights body urges longer-term assistance amid Rohingya crisis, UN advisers call upon Myanmar to stop atrocities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More countries need to step up and pledge their support for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh amid an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, Amnesty International said yesterday.

The rights group also said donors should think longer term when it comes to Rohingya refugees.

The meeting of high-level representatives of donor countries at the UN office in Geneva on Monday must include pledges of new money, including from countries in the region, to support rising numbers of Rohingyas who have sought shelter in Cox's Bazar.

"This is an unprecedented crisis that needs an immediate and sustained response from the international community. This means that more countries, particularly those from the region, need to play a much bigger role and share the burden of responsibility," said Omar Waraich, deputy South Asia director at Amnesty International.

"Bangladesh, a poor country which has shown extraordinary generosity, cannot be left to deal with this situation alone," added the official.

"These deeply traumatised refugees are subsisting in extremely difficult conditions, with no prospect of being able to return home any time soon. The international community must mount a response that addresses both their immediate and long-term needs."

Amnesty also said the Bangladeshi authorities and humanitarian groups are in a desperate scramble to scale up their operations.

They must be helped not just over the next few months, but for as long as it remains unsafe for people to return home voluntarily and with safety and dignity.

"Donors should think longer term when it comes to Rohingya refugees. The scale of this humanitarian crisis is such that the international community is continuously failing to anticipate the response needed," said Charmain Mohamed, Amnesty International's Head of Refugee and Migrant Rights.

Meanwhile, two UN advisers called on the government of Myanmar to take immediate action to stop and address the commission of atrocity crimes that are reportedly taking place in northern

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Rohingya refugees queue in the rain to receive food at Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Rape being used as a weapon of war Kids in dire need of food, healthcare

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Wheeler, a sexual violence expert with Human Rights Watch who has assessed the fast-filling camps.

"Rape and other forms of sexual violence have been widespread and systematic as well as brutal, humiliating and traumatic," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Myanmar dismisses all such accusations of ethnic cleansing, saying it has to tackle insurgents, whom it accuses of starting fires and attacking civilians, as well as the security forces.

Yet villagers fleeing the violence say rape is a routine weapon in the military's armoury, with the United Nations now deliberating whether the violence amounts to genocide.

GANG RAPE

Whatever the legal definition, 18-year-old Nurshida knows only too well what happened to her.

Speaking to Thomson Reuters Foundation from the relative safety of her camp, Nurshida recalled how her class of 20 was marched in silence to their school last month, held at gunpoint by uniformed soldiers, then manhandled into the main auditorium.

The schoolgirls, she said, covered as one in a corner, the men - breathing heavily and dripping sweat - occupied another.

The gangrape began immediately.

Fair-skinned Nurshida, with bangles looping her wrist and a loose scarf shrouding her hair, said she was chosen first by the group, six clean-shaven soldiers carrying guns and machetes.

"One of the men held me tightly on the floor. I started screaming, but a second soldier hit me in the face with his hand and undressed me fully. I was silent when they raped me, there was nothing I could do," Nurshida said.

Her two friends were thrown to the floor next. As they were raped, smoke was rising in the distance - her native Naisapru village was on fire, one of many set alight in the exodus.

"All of the schoolgirls were raped and there were loud screams everywhere," said Nurshida, sitting in a mud hut in Bangladesh's Kutupalong camp where she is waiting to register as a refugee.

Authorities say her story fits a horribly familiar pattern.

"The stories we hear point to rape being used strategically as a weapon of war," aid Rashed Hasan, a lieutenant colonel in the Bangladesh army.

Women of all ages and backgrounds have reported similarly brutal sexual assaults - as well as witnessing family killings, losing children and being forced from their homes.

"Rape is an act of power. It knows no discrimination in terms of age, sex or ethnicity," Saba Zariv of the United Nations Population Fund told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

PREGNANT, RAPED, ABANDONED

At nine months pregnant, Jannet says she was brutally tortured and raped at her home in Myanmar.

"My husband was killed five days before soldiers attacked our village. Our three children have never been seen again since," she said, cradling five-year-old Fatima in the flimsy makeshift tent she now calls home.

Fatima, who was delivered in a rice field, is her only remaining family member.

Late into her pregnancy, Jannet said she was alone when the army marched into Fakira Bazaar village. While everyone scattered into the jungle, the 22-year-old chose to hide.

"Several soldiers broke the door. They saw that I was pregnant, but they all raped me." At the end of the day she was left naked, beaten, her children gone.

"I cried and screamed for them, but I still don't know where they are," she said. "I never want to go back to Myanmar... I have lost everything."

Yet safety is not guaranteed in the chaotic Rohingya refugee camps that are quickly becoming the world's largest.

Parvin, 20, said she has been rejected

by her in-laws after soldiers beheaded her husband and raped her while she was five months pregnant.

"They beat me unconscious," she said. "I woke up to an empty village and my in-laws searching for me. I was lying naked on the floor of their house."

The last thing Parvin's mother-in-law did for her was help her wash after the rape. "They told me they didn't want to take responsibility for me and rejected me."

Now she lives alone in a bamboo house, terrified of men.

"I can never get married again now that I was raped. I have no choice but to raise my baby alone," she said. "That's all that drives me now. I have lost all else."

'TRAFFICKERS TARGET CAMPS'
Australia's ABC News adds: organised criminal gangs and sexual predators are scouring the Rohingya refugee camps on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border looking for orphans, promising dubious jobs and exploiting women for so-called "survival sex", according to aid groups.

"We've heard stories of people coming in and offering people, looking for orphans and saying, 'We'll take you to a safe place'," Zia Choudhury, Bangladesh country director for the humanitarian group CARE, said.

"[They're] offering people jobs to go and work as cleaners or maids, and we know that those are organised gangs who are going to whisk these vulnerable people away and take them to some worse situation."

"We also know that men are turning up and offering cash to people who are so hungry, so thirsty, they need help, they need money, they're offering cash for sex."

The government and aid agencies are doing all they can to keep these predators out of the camps and protect vulnerable people, Zia said.

Despite the emerging risk, the camps still represent relative safety for thousands of new arrivals every day.

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Director Anthony Lake said in a statement yesterday.

These children urgently need food, safe water, sanitation and vaccination to protect themselves from diseases that thrive in emergencies. They also need help in overcoming all they have endured, he said.

"They need education, counselling and hope."

According to the Unicef, almost 60 percent of the latest Rohingya arrivals are children, crossing at a rate of between 1,200 and 1,800 a day.

Most of the refugees are living in overcrowded and insanitary makeshift settlements. Despite an expanding international aid effort led by Bangladesh, the essential needs of many children are not being met.

Edouard Beigbeder, Unicef representative in Bangladesh, said, "The refugees are still coming, but already we can see the appalling dangers that the children are facing."

"Living in the open, with food, safe water and sanitation in desperately short supply, the risk of waterborne and other diseases is palpable."

High levels of severe acute malnutrition among young children have been found in the camps, and antenatal services to mothers and babies are lacking. Support for children traumatised by violence also needs to be expanded.

The Unicef called for an end to the atrocities targeting civilians in Myanmar's Rakhine State, and for humanitarian actors to be given immediate and unfettered access to all children affected by the violence there.

At present, Unicef has no access to Rohingya children in northern Rakhine State.

A long-term solution to the crisis in Rakhine State is needed, and the issues of statelessness and discrimination against the Rohingyas must be

addressed as recommended by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, it said.

Ahead of an international pledging conference on October 23 in Geneva, the Unicef urged donors to respond urgently to the requirements of the updated Bangladesh Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) released by the UN and humanitarian agencies.

It called for \$434 million, which includes \$76.1 million to address the immediate needs of newly-arrived Rohingya children, as well as those who arrived before the recent influx, and children from vulnerable host communities.

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

Most Rohingya children are not fully immunised against diseases such as measles.

The UN agency said it is also focused on providing Rohingya children with learning and support services in child-friendly spaces.

WHO'S VACCINATION CAMPAIGN

The World Health Organisation said more than 700,000 people, including the newly arrived Rohingyas, have been administered oral cholera vaccine in Cox's Bazar.

The first phase of the oral cholera vaccination (OCV) campaign covered 700,487 people aged one year and above. They included 179,848 children aged between one and five, it mentioned in a statement yesterday.

The campaign was launched on October 10.

The second phase is scheduled to start early next month to give an additional OCV dose to children aged between one and five for added protection, it noted.

N Paranietharan, WHO representative in Bangladesh, said, "The coverage is commendable as the oral cholera vaccination campaign was planned and rolled out against very tight timelines."

Unicef Representative Edouard Beigbeder said, "The campaign has successfully vaccinated nearly 180,000 children aged one to five years. We will organise another round for these children to provide them with a second dose that will better protect them against this dangerous disease."

The OCV campaign was planned following a risk assessment conducted by the health and family welfare ministry, with the support of the WHO, the Unicef, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), in late September.

8 LAKH ROHINGYAS IN COX'S BAZAR: IOM

More than 6,900 Rohingya refugees, who were stranded in dire conditions in no-man's land at Anjumanpara on the Bangladesh side of the border, were moved by the Bangladesh army to several makeshift settlements in Ukha and Teknaf on Thursday, the IOM said in a statement yesterday.

Some 800,000 Rohingyas are now living in the settlements, and 589,000 of them have arrived in Cox's Bazar since August 25, it mentioned.

The IOM estimated that more than half of the new arrivals are women and girls. It also identified a total of 28 collective sites and 99 locations in host communities where the refugees were staying between September 30 and October 9.

Of the Rohingya population, 33,542 (four percent) were registered and living in two UNHCR refugee camps. The remaining 96 percent were living in makeshift settlements, spontaneous sites and host communities, it added.

N Korea

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acquiring a long-range nuclear missile.

"They are close enough now in their capabilities that from a US policy perspective we ought to behave as if we are on the cusp of them achieving that objective," Pompeo said.

Pompeo said US intelligence had kept close tabs on the North Korean program in the past, but that its missile expertise is now growing too quickly to be sure when it will succeed.

"But when you're now talking about months our capacity to understand that at a detailed level is in some sense irrelevant," he said.

"The president's made it very clear," he added.

"He's prepared to ensure that Kim Jong-un doesn't have the capacity to hold America at risk. By military force if necessary."

This week, North Korea's deputy UN ambassador declared that Pyongyang would not put its nuclear arsenal on ballistic missile program on the table unless Washington drops its "hostile" stance.

And Kim's regime has made no secret of its efforts to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of hitting US mainland cities or bases in the Pacific, conducting regular tests.

McMaster told the conference, organised by the Federation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), that the regime would not be allowed to develop arms that would threaten the United States.

Question leaked hours before test

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Prof Sadeka Halim, acting dean of the social science faculty, told The Daily Star.

"If someone had got the leaked questions on Thursday night, he should have informed us about the matter before the start of the exam. Why are allegations being raised after the exam is over?" she questioned.

BCL LEADERS ARRESTED

The arrested Chhatra League leaders are Mohiuddin Rana, a master's student of physics and also an assistant secretary of the BCL central committee; and Abdullah Al Mamun, a third-year student of applied chemistry and chemical engineering and also the theatre and debate affairs secretary of the BCL's Amar Ekushey Hall unit.

The two were picked up by the Criminal Investigative Department (CID) of police from two DU dormitories early yesterday. During primary interrogation, the arrestees admitted to their crime, said CID.

The third arrestee, Ishrak Ahmed Rafi, was detained by the mobile court when he was taking the exam. Later, the CID took him in custody.

Meanwhile, the pro-Awami League student's body yesterday in a press release said it expelled Rana from the platform for violating "organisational discipline".

Talking to this newspaper at the CID headquarters in the city's Malibagh, Rana said he was working as a middleman for a "syndicate". "I



It looks like a credit card, but it's not. Beneath the cover of a credit card is actually a communications device, used to cheat during the DU admission test yesterday. After inserting a SIM card into it, the device is kept in the pockets or taped to the chests of admission seekers, left. The answers to the questions come from outside the hall through the earpieces.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

contacted admission seekers and supplied them with leaked questions with the help of a former Chhatra League leader.

He said he acquainted with Alip Biswas, an ex-BCL leader of Dhaka College, four years ago while carrying out organisational activities.

"Alip asked me to put some examinees under a contract," said the BCL leader. According to him,

Alip now works at Bangladesh Krira Shiksha Pratishthan in Savar.

"This year, I was assisting two examinees. I had two clients [students] for admission under 'Ka' unit last year. One of them got admitted to the university," Rana said, adding that he received Tk 20,000 for the job.

Ishrak said he entered a Tk 4 lakh contract with Zenith, a student of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural

University, who had introduced him to Rana.

Asked about Zenith, Rana said he became acquainted with the agricultural university student while conducting organisational activities. "Zenith is a Chhatra League activist," he added.

Another arrestee Mamun said he was not involved in helping examinees get the answers through the electronic device.

"I got question papers of entrance exams of some public universities from a senior student at my dormitory. He is Moshirur Rahman Sameer, a fourth-year student of psychology and also a vice-president of the Chhatra League Amar Ekushey hall unit," he said.

Despite repeated attempts, this newspaper could not reach Moshirur over the phone for comment.

Briefing reporters at the CID headquarters yesterday afternoon, Molla Nazrul Islam, special superintendent of CID, said they had information from a journalist that some DU students were involved in leaking questions of admission tests.

The CID then informed the DU vice-chancellor about the matter and sought his help to conduct a drive on the campus, he added.

"Along with the university's proctorial body members, we carried out drives at Amar Ekushey Hall and Shahidullah Hall and picked up Mamun and Rana from there."

Nazrul said they seized electronic communication devices (which look

like ATM cards), mini earpieces, and mobile phones from the arrestees.

According to the CID, an admission seeker can communicate with an outsider by inserting a tiny earpiece into his ear and keeping the electronic device in his pocket. After a few minutes into the test, the examinee is told the answers through the device from outside the exam hall.

The CID official said they were probing the cheating and trying to nab the members of the "syndicate".

12 JAILED

A mobile court, led by Executive Magistrate Towheed Elahi, jailed 12 admission seekers one month each for using electronic devices in the exam hall.

They are Nur Mohammad Mahbub, Farhadul Alam Rafi, Abdullah Al Mukim, Risad Kabir, Asaduzzaman Minarul, Istiak Ahmed, Joy Kumer Saha, Rezwana Sheikh Shova, Masuka Nasrin, Tarikul Islam, Nasirul Haque Nahid and Miraj Ahmed.

The CID filed a case with Shahbagh Police Station accusing the three arrestees under the public exams law and ICT act, said Abul Hassan, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Earlier on October 13, another mobile court led by the same magistrate jailed 12 DU admission seekers under "Ka" unit for 15 days each for cheating during the entrance exam in a similar way.

Our DU correspondent contributed to this report.