

Act quickly, effectively

Jordan's queen urges int'l community over Rohingya crisis

UNB, Dhaka

Jordanian Queen Rania Al Abdullah yesterday called upon the international community to respond "effectively, quickly, and generously" to alleviate the suffering of Rohingyas.

She said it was unforgivable that the crisis was unfolding on the world stage to a largely indifferent audience.

"The world seems to be silent to what many are acknowledging now as an ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims," she told journalists during a visit to the Kutupalong refugee camp and its nearby areas in Cox's Bazar.

"With no respect or regard for the principles of humanitarian and international law, the discrimination against and the persecution of the Rohingya minority has continued unabated, in full view of the world," the Queen said.

She reached Cox's Bazar in the morning to see the Rohingya situation on the ground. State Minister for Foreign Affairs M Shahrir Alam received her. State Minister of Women and Children Affairs Meher Afroze Chumki was also present.

The Jordanian queen spoke of the shocking escalation of violence against

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Queen Rania of Jordan shakes hands with Rohingya children during her visit to the Kutupalong refugee camp in Ukhia yesterday. She went to Cox's Bazar to see the refugee situation there.

PHOTO: AFP

ROHINGYA CRISIS

Khaleda likely to visit Cox's Bazar on Oct 29

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is likely to visit Cox's Bazar on October 29 to see the condition of the Rohingyas who have fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution in Myanmar.

Khaleda will leave the capital for Chittagong on October 28 and spend the night and the following day there. She will then start for Cox's Bazar and visit Kutupalong Rohingya camp. She will return to the capital on October 30.

The decision came at a meeting of the BNP standing committee last night with Khaleda in the chair at her Gulshan office, meeting sources said.

The party plans to stage a huge showdown on November 7 to mark "the National Revolution and Solidarity Day".

It decided to hold a rally at Suhrawardy Udyan in the capital on that day.

Some of the standing committee members said if the party is barred from holding the rally, it should announce alternative programmes.

When a member said police were not allowing BNP leaders and activists to stage demonstrations even at thana level, Khaleda said party programmes have to be held despite all obstructions.

The BNP chief also briefed the

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AL, BNP happy with Sushma's statement on Rohingyas

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The government, the ruling Awami League and the BNP are happy over Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's statement on the Rohingya issue as they hope that India's stance on the crisis will expedite the process of achieving a solution.

About the Indian minister's remarks on the next general election, the AL said there was nothing new in her comments as the party also wants inclusive parliamentary elections with participation of the BNP.

Asked for comments on the issue, some senior BNP leaders said they were "cautiously observing the overall situation".

During a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban on Sunday, Sushma said Myanmar must take back its nationals who fled their homes to escape violence and took refuge in Bangladesh.

Party insiders said the AL thinks that India will now put pressure on Myanmar to take back its citizens. The ruling party considered India's stance to be crucial as Sushma's remarks dispelled criticism that it didn't stand by Bangladesh on the Rohingya issue.

AL presidium member Faruk Khan said they welcomed Sushma's statement.

"We hope India will convey its message to Myanmar and compel the country to take back its citizens," he told The Daily Star.

About the Indian minister's remarks on free, fair and inclusive elections, he said the AL also wants free, fair and inclusive elections which will be participated by all political parties, including the BNP.

"In 2014, we wanted an inclusive election and that's why we tried to convince the BNP to participate in the election. But the party didn't contest it as part of its conspiracies. We hope the BNP will not make the same mistake again and will join the next national election," said the AL leader.

Mohammed Shahrir Alam, state minister for foreign affairs, said the government welcomed Indian minister's statement clarifying its position on the Rohingya issue.

"India's stance on the Rohingya issue will give a clearer picture about

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Tall task in hand

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measles, AIDS, cholera and hepatitis as most of them barely got proper healthcare and vaccination back in their homeland.

The refugees here can easily mix with locals and visit marketplaces, hospitals and mosques and it is likely that the infectious diseases carried by a section of them will affect others as well.

Dodging law enforcers, Rohingyas are also going to Cox's Bazar town, Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracts and other districts to join their relatives who had come to Bangladesh in previous years.

"A large number of these people are malnourished and have a weak immune system. Besides, the highly congested camps are perfect sites for fast transmission of diseases," said physician of an international NGO working in the Rohingya shelters.

Of those who crossed over from Myanmar fleeing a brutal military crackdown in Rakhine State since August 25, about 3.87 lakh suffer from malnutrition, according to Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), which coordinates the operation of different agencies in the refugee shelters.

Cox's Bazar Civil Surgeon Dr Abdus Salam on Sunday said a total of 3.47 lakh Rohingyas so far received treatment at different health centres.

Of them, 65 were diagnosed with TB, 12 with malaria, 44 with measles, 300 with jaundice, 1,000 with Hepatitis B and C, 29 with HIV/AIDS, 70,000 with respiratory tract infection, 40,000 with diarrhoea, 30,000 with skin disease and 9,000 with injuries.

The rest got treatment for other

diseases.

They were diagnosed based on suspicion and any systematic screening will surely find many more cases, he noted.

A total of 50 medical teams of the government, UN or NGOs are working in and around the camps. Patients are also seeking services from local government facilities.

"Every day, around 2,000 patients with respiratory tract infection and 1,700 with diarrhoea are thronging the healthcare centres," Dr Mohiuddin Hussain Khan, health sector coordinator of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), said on October 17.

IOM says only 27 percent of the sites are accessible by a vehicle of any kind, making delivery of aid and health services difficult.

Experts recommend systematic health screening, immunisation coverage, pure water and sanitation for all. There should be isolated units at health centres to prevent the spread of the diseases, they say.

THE RISK FACTORS

There are around nine lakh Rohingyas, including the new arrivals, in Ukhia, Teknaf and Ramu upazilas of Cox's Bazar and Naikhyangchhari upazila of Bandarban.

Many fell sick, became weak or got hurt during their long walk from different parts of Rakhine. They had minimal or no food and they drank from open water sources on the way to border.

In the initial weeks of the latest influx, the refugees faced severe shortage of food, water, sanitation and medicine on this side of the border while many lived under the open sky amid heavy rains.

\$340M pledged

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Vital humanitarian aid must continue, Ahsan said, adding: "It is of paramount importance that Myanmar delivers on its recent promises and work towards safe, dignified, voluntary return of its nationals back to their homes in Myanmar."

Myanmar continued to issue "propaganda projecting Rohingyas as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh", Ahsan said, adding: "This blatant denial of the ethnic identity of Rohingyas remains a stumbling block."

Myanmar considers the Rohingyas to be stateless, although they trace their presence in the country back generations.

Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, later told journalists that the two countries had begun talks on "repatriation".

Any return must be "voluntary, safe and dignified" and conducive conditions have to be "recreated" in Rakhine,

he said. "This must include a solution to the question of citizenship, or rather lack thereof for the Rohingya community," Grandi said.

Khaled al-Jarallah, deputy foreign minister of Kuwait which co-hosted the meeting, called on Myanmar authorities to "cease the practice of stripping the Rohingya minority of their right of citizenship, which as a result deprives them of the right to property and employment".

The UN appealed for the \$434m fund to provide life-saving aid to 1.2 million people for six months.

"We need more money to keep pace with intensifying needs. This is not an isolated crisis, it is the latest round in a decades-long cycle of persecution, violence and displacement," Mark Lowcock told the talks.

"Children, women and men fleeing Myanmar are streaming into Bangladesh traumatized and desti-

The government and aid agencies are still struggling to provide services in a systematic way as the new refugees remain scattered in Ukhia and other areas of the district.

Some 19,300 emergency latrines and 4,071 tube wells have been installed for them. However, 50 percent of the latrines are about to be filled up and they will be unusable very soon, says a report of ISCG led by IOM on Sunday.

Dr Azharul Islam, chief physician and head (hospitals) at ICDDR,B, said a recent field assessment found that many of the tube wells are close to latrines. "So there is a high possibility of faecal contamination of water."

The number of latrines is also inadequate and some people still go for open defecation, Azharul Islam said, suggesting that distances should be maintained between latrines and tube wells.

He also recommended disinfecting the faecal waste, a source for diarrhoeal diseases including cholera.

Cholera can kill people very fast if untreated. In severe cases, it can lead to extreme dehydration and even death within hours.

Though no cholera patient has been yet found among the new refugees, IOM says, there are records of cholera outbreaks in Rohingya refugee camps in the past.

The good thing is, said Dr Azharul, the government with the help of World Health Organisation and other agencies have vaccinated refugees.

According to ISCG, over 7 lakh people, including Rohingyas and locals in the areas hosting refugees, were vaccinated for cholera earlier this month.

Dr Md Toufiq Rahman, an adviser of

USAID-funded Challenge TB Project, said tuberculosis that remained dormant might become active now because of malnutrition of Rohingyas and their stay in cramped camps.

TB is spread from person to person through the air. When people with lung TB cough, sneeze or spit, they propel the TB germs into the air, says WHO.

Dr Toufiq added that Hepatitis B and E also pose a high risk as the viruses are spread mostly by faecally contaminated drinking water.

Another challenge is jaundice. A physician working in the Rohingya camp said the fact that over 300 have already been diagnosed with jaundice means it is quite prevalent in the Rohingya camps.

Dr Mohiuddin Hussain Khan of IOM said there are Rohingya women who were raped in Myanmar and this heightens the possibility that there could be more HIV/AIDS patients.

He said there have not yet been any reports of "risky behaviours" of Rohingyas women or girls with local communities. What is a matter of concern is the rate of using condoms among the refugees is low.

Dr Mohiuddin suggested massive awareness campaigns and systematic service deliveries to check the disease. All those vulnerable to HIV/AIDS need to be screened and treated, he said.

Cox's Bazar Civil Surgeon Abdus Salam added, "There is a plan for rotavirus vaccination for diarrhoea and scaled up anti-HIV/AIDS programme. We are waiting for funds."

Physicians are also worried about measles, an airborne disease that easily spread through coughs, sneezes, saliva

or nasal secretion of those infected.

The finding of 44 with measles through random screening suggests there could be many more cases among the Rohingya children, said a physician of an international NGO in Cox's Bazar.

The authorities vaccinated some 1.35 lakh children for measles and rubella, 72,000 children for polio, and 72,000 children received Vitamin A supplementation, but many could be left out amid continuous influx and high mobility of people.

The ISCG report said finding places for setting up more health centres remains a challenge to cater to the need of unreached population in some of the large shelters in Balukhali, Unchiphrang and Kutupalong.

Experts say the health risks will continue to be high until the Rohingyas are accommodated in specific areas where healthcare and other services can be provided in a systematic manner.

Graham Eastmond, shelter sector coordinator of the ISCG, said the authorities have started developing the 3,000-acre land allocated in Balukhali to bring all the Rohingya refugees under one camp.

"Accommodating so many people in one camp again is dangerous for health. If there is a disease outbreak, it will spread fast, making it difficult for the authorities to address," he said.

Bangladesh.

CANADIAN ENVOY FOR REFUGEE CRISIS

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appointed a special envoy to Myanmar yesterday tasked with pressing its leadership to resolve the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Trudeau also announced in a statement that Canada would be doubling its contribution this year of humanitarian aid for the refugees to \$20 million.

Former senior MP Bob Rae will "reinforce the urgent need to resolve the humanitarian and security crisis in Myanmar and to address the situation affecting vulnerable populations, including the Rohingya Muslim community," read the statement, released as an international donor conference opened in Geneva.

Rae, who preceded Trudeau as leader of Canada's Liberal Party, will also advise him on how best to support

"those affected and displaced by the recent violence."

Trudeau said he is "deeply concerned about the urgent humanitarian and security crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State, particularly the brutal persecution of the Rohingya Muslim people."

At a press conference, Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland called for the immediate end to "widespread attacks against the Rohingya."

"These are crimes against humanity and the responsibility for ending the ethnic cleansing falls squarely on Myanmar's military leadership and its civilian government," she said.

Canada, she added, is looking at possibly resettling some of the refugees.

Rae will travel to the region next week and make his findings public at the end of January.

[From AP, Reuters and AFP]

Bangladesh comes first

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Sushma said these while inaugurating the new Chancery Complex of the High Commission of India at Baridhara and 15 India-funded development projects of Tk 71.64 crore in Bangladesh.

Sushma, who arrived in Dhaka on Sunday, jointly held the Fourth Joint Consultative Commission meeting with her Bangladesh counterpart AH Mahmood Ali.

Promising to sincerely resolve "irritants" between Bangladesh and India, she at Baridhara said the relations between the neighbours are now outstanding, and that both countries are working to resolve these issues in the spirit of "friendly relations and

with right intention".

Though she did not specify the nature of the issues, she apparently hinted at the question of sharing water of common rivers, particularly of the Teesta, which has been pending since September 2011.

"I can assure you we [India and Bangladesh] will solve all irritants with sincerity," Sushma left Dhaka at 1:15pm.

Calling AH Mahmood Ali her 'brother and dada', she referred to the peaceful solution to the disputes over Maritime Boundary and Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh.

The prime ministers of the two countries laid a strong foundation of

cooperation which is expanding day by day. "I am confident we would be able to take the relations to greater heights in the times to come."

She also emphasised on investing in young people and said they are the future leaders of the two nations.

The High Commissioner of India Harsh Vardhan Shringla described the achievements of the Indian High Commission here, including easing the visa process and development projects.

Inauguration of 15 development projects

The External Affairs Minister of India formally inaugurated 15 development projects in sectors including education, healthcare, IT, water sup-

ply and social welfare with the grant assistance of India.

According to documents, the 15 development projects have been chosen keeping in mind the geographical spread, socio-economic benefits and priorities of the Bangladesh government.

Eleven water treatment plants are being built in southern Bhandaria Upazila in Pirojpur. The plants will provide desalinated potable drinking water to 150,000 people.

Some 36 community clinics will also be built.

Reconstruction of Ramna Kali Temple, which was destroyed by the invading Pakistani army in 1971, is also included in the projects. The

main temple, a five-storey guesthouse, a deep tube-well in the temple premises and a gate would be built.

In addition to three Lines of Credit of \$ 8 billion, India has been extending grant assistance for small socio-economic projects.

In the past three years alone, Sushma said 24 India-funded grant assistance projects were completed. They included construction of students' hostels, installation of tube-wells, cultural centres and orphanages.

Presently 58 projects, including city development projects in Rajshahi, Khulna and Sylhet, are being implemented.

The Chancery Complex of the High Commission she inaugurated at

Baridhara is on five acres of land allotted in 1993 through a reciprocal govt-to-govt arrangement.

The Chancery complex consists of the residence of the High Commissioner, a housing block, a sports complex, and a hall for recreation.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, Health Minister Mohammed Nasim, Environment and Forest Minister Anwar Hossain Manju, Prime Minister's Political Affairs Adviser HT Imam, Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque, Indian Foreign Secretary Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and other high officials, educationists and journalists were present at the event.