

Rohingyas have to return to their 'place of origin'

Says India, expresses concern over exodus of Rohingyas

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday said the Rohingya refugees sheltered in Bangladesh and in that country would have to return to their "place of origin" in Rakhine.

The Rohingya crisis could be resolved through adopting a "realistic and constructive" approach rather than condemnation, said Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar.

He was addressing a programme organised by Carnegie India, a centre of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in New Delhi.

"The fact that there is an exodus of a large number of people from the Rakhine State to Bangladesh is clearly a matter of concern. Our objective will be to see how they can go back to their place of origin. That is not easy," the foreign secretary said.

The use of the words "their place of origin" carries significance as the Myanmar government does not recognise Rohingyas as its citizens.

India has already voiced concerns over the gravity of the crisis and held "very high level conversations" with both Bangladesh and Myanmar, Jaishankar told the programme.

He said India was separately engaged with Bangladesh and Myanmar. "We feel that this situation is better addressed through practical measures and constructive conversation rather than doing very strong condemnation. We need a lot

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



Amina, 70, a Rohingya refugee, is carried by her son through Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

UNSC weighing draft resolution

FROM PAGE 1

addressed, according to diplomats.

In late September, the UN Security Council failed to take any concrete action against Myanmar due to opposition by China and Russia.

Since late August, more than 603,000 Rohingya, over half of them children, have fled an army campaign in Myanmar's Rakhine state that the United Nations has denounced as ethnic cleansing. The refugees are living in dire conditions under tarpaulins and in tents in muddy camps, the UN said on Wednesday.

Myanmar authorities say the military operation is aimed at rooting out Rohingya militants who staged attacks on police posts two months ago.

Meanwhile, a top Red Cross official has described the humanitarian crisis affecting the Rohingya as unprecedented and said the world was failing in its response.

Speaking to the Guardian on a visit to the rapidly expanding refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, the head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Elhadji As Sy, said a political solution was needed and called for all leaders "without exception" to take the situation seriously.

In another development, president of the 72nd session of the General Assembly, Miroslav Lajčák, has said the UN would extend all-out support to

Bangladesh in addressing the Rohingya crisis.

He gave the assurance when Dipu Moni, chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, met Lajčák at the UN headquarters in New York yesterday, according to a UN readout.

LIST OF DEMANDS

The draft Security Council resolution condemns the violence in Rakhine and attacks by Rohingya insurgents, while expressing "grave concern" that the Myanmar security forces and vigilantes have been responsible for human rights violations and abuses."

It calls on Myanmar to allow humanitarian aid workers safe access to Rakhine, where the Rohingya who managed to escape the army campaign are now fleeing amid dire food shortages, AFP reports.

The draft resolution also demands that UN rights investigators be allowed access to Rakhine to report on allegations of atrocities, and calls for the appointment of a UN special adviser on Myanmar.

And it urges Myanmar to implement the recommendations of a commission led by former UN chief Kofi Annan that said the Rohingya should be granted citizenship rights.

The 1.1 million Rohingya Muslims have faced decades of discrimination in Buddhist-majority Myanmar and have been denied citizenship since 1982,

which has effectively rendered them stateless.

Rights groups have accused the Security Council of dragging its feet on Myanmar and are calling for tougher measures, such as an arms embargo and targeted sanctions against those responsible for the attacks against the Rohingya.

Addressing the General Assembly's committee on human rights, UN special rapporteur Yanghee Lee of South Korea said the council should adopt a "strong resolution" to tackle a potential threat to the region.

"The crisis in Rakhine state has not only been decades in the making, but has been spilling over and continues to spill over beyond Myanmar's borders," said Lee.

"For a very long time now, this issue has not been simply a domestic affair."

A recent report by the UN human rights office accused Myanmar of seeking to permanently expel the Rohingya by planting land mines at the border with Bangladesh where the refugees are sheltering.

UN rights officials spoke to refugees who gave accounts of soldiers surrounding homes and firing indiscriminately as residents ran for their lives, and of uniformed men gang-raping women and girls.

'UNPRECEDENTED NOT ONLY IN SCALE'

Myanmar has blocked most interna-

tional agencies, including the UN, from parts of northern Rakhine state, where security forces are accused of raping and massacring Rohingya Muslims, the Guardian reported yesterday.

The Red Cross has been allowed to provide emergency assistance to tens of thousands of people inside the country since 25 August, when the violence began, but the exodus of hungry and exhausted Rohingya has overwhelmed staff.

The organisation is appealing for \$33m (£25m) to fund operations in Myanmar and neighbouring Bangladesh.

"We are facing here a crisis that is quite unprecedented not only in scale, but in the depths of the multiple deprivations that people are facing," the British newspaper quoted Sy, the Red Cross head, as saying.

"The Red Cross has greater access than anybody else [but] the whole response cannot be shifted to the shoulders of Red Cross alone. There should be access for other humanitarian actors. As proud as we are of what we do as a movement, I don't think we're responding to the scale and magnitude of the problem."

He said he was shocked and saddened to see the state of the refugees arriving after days of walking to reach the border.

"A state of deprivation. It's hunger, fear, exhaustion. I hesitate to put a word on it. A horrible state. You see almost the unbearable look of a total destitute person in need. It is almost unbearable," he said. "We have seen terrible refugee situations... but this is very different."

As international pressure has intensified -- the US said this week it was considering economic sanctions -- Myanmar and Bangladesh have begun talks on repatriation. Many Rohingya want to return home, but only if their safety is ensured.

Thousands of Rohingya continue to arrive in Bangladesh each day, but Sy said there was still hope for a political solution to the crisis.

"Ideally political solutions should have been found to the problem so that we minimise the factors that are really pushing people on the road of exodus because home is no longer safe," he said.

"We are calling always for humanity to prevail, but of course it's a political debate that is in the hands of political leaders to have the responsibility and we hope that they will take it seriously. All of them. And I mean all of them. At the national level as well as international level."

UN REJECTS MYANMAR CLAIM

A UN settlement program, UN-Habitat in Myanmar, yesterday rejected a state

ROHINGYA CRISIS

TIB slams World Bank loan offer

UNB, Dhaka

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has voiced concern over the World Bank's loan offer to Bangladesh to deal with the challenges emerged after Rohingyas took shelter in the country.

In a statement yesterday, TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said it has been learnt from newspaper reports that the WB is trying to provide loan assistance to Bangladesh for addressing the Rohingya crisis, which is unethical, unacceptable and a matter of concern.

The TIB chief said if the global bank has a good intention to help Bangladesh deal with the crisis, it must refrain from increasing loan burden on the country. As a donor agency, it should continue mounting pressure on Myanmar to repatriate their displaced people.

Iftekharuzzaman asked the government to strengthen diplomatic efforts to get interest-free financial assistance from international agencies, including the World Bank, to address the demand of Rohingya people.

media report that it had agreed to help build housing for people fleeing violence in the northern Myanmar state of Rakhine, where hundreds of thousands have been displaced by the army crackdown.

The development underscores tension between Myanmar and the United Nations, which in April criticised the government's previous plan to resettle Rohingya Muslims displaced by last year's violence in "camp-like" villages.

The state-run Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper said yesterday that UN-Habitat had agreed to provide technical assistance in housing displaced people in Rakhine and the agency would work closely with the authorities to "implement the projects to be favorable to Myanmar's social culture and administrative system".

But Stanislav Saling, spokesman for the office of the UN resident coordinator in Myanmar, told Reuters in an email that "no agreements were reached so far" after the agency's representatives attended a series of meetings with Myanmar officials this week in its capital Naypyidaw.

The United Nations' principles state that all refugees or displaced persons have the right to return to property or land from which they were arbitrarily or unlawfully removed.

Two arrested for assaulting minor boy in Barisal

The torture incident goes viral

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Police arrested two people at Char Shafiqur Haat of Barisal's Muladi for torturing a boy accusing him of "stealing a mobile phone".

Matiur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Muladi Police Station, said Sohel Sardar, deputy director of Bangladesh Legal Aid Centre Foundation, Barisal chapter, lodged a case against six people yesterday over the torture of 13-year-old Shaon.

In the case statement, it was mentioned that some people tied the hands and legs of Shaon and beat him up at Char Shafiqur Haat on October 21 for "stealing a mobile phone from the house of one Sabuj".

When Shaon was being beaten up, somebody recorded the incident on a mobile phone and later uploaded the video on Facebook.

The video went viral and some human rights activists informed Saiful Islam, superintendent of Barisal police, of the matter.

The SP asked Muladi police to detain the perpetrators.

Police arrested Sabuj and one Mohsin on Wednesday night, said OC of Muladi Police Station.

The boy was on a visit to his maternal grandmother Marzina's place from the capital. His mother works as a house help in the capital, police said.

Shaon and Marzina were in the capital and Marzina was being brought back to Muladi, the police official said, adding that they were trying to arrest the other accused.

The Daily Star could not reach the victim or his family members for comments.



Same old trick

FROM PAGE 1

around 14,000 Rohingyas may get the chance of repatriation, if at all. The reality is that more than six lakh Rohingyas have already arrived in Bangladesh since August 25.

The mention of the 1992 agreement is a tactic to buy time and avert international pressure.

The agreement was signed after an influx of more than 2.5 lakh fear-stricken Rohingyas who fled their country following a crackdown.

After prolonged discussions, Naypyidaw 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.

But since then, things have changed in Myanmar, making it impossible for Rohingyas to meet these criteria.

The Myanmar government began a citizenship verification process in 2014 under the draconian 1982 law which deprived Rohingyas of citizenship. It allowed temporary resident cardholders to apply for citizenship on condition that they are listed as Bangalees.

But in 2015, the temporary resident cards were also cancelled, denying Rohingyas voting rights in the 2015 elections that saw Suu Kyi's return to power. Later in June that year, Myanmar started issuing Identity Cards of National Verification.

As the Kofi Annan Commission set up by Suu Kyi this year reported that around 4,000 Rohingyas out of one million have been recognised as citizens or naturalised citizens. Around 10,000 more Rohingyas got national verification cards considered as a pre-emptive step towards citizenship.

Myanmar's proposal means it is unwilling to take back more than the 14,000 registered Rohingyas. And its intent not to take back all Rohingyas has been exposed through its home secretary's remark that "I am not sure how many people would be repatriated".

Naypyidaw's attitude also indicates that its strategy is designed to buy time as its home secretary said "Bangladesh wants to repatriate as soon as possible. But we will go step by step and form a

joint working group for repatriation."

Myanmar is in no hurry even to form a joint working group. When its minister visited Dhaka, both sides agreed to form the joint working group. In yesterday's statement, Myanmar said the working group would be formed in November.

And this time, it came up with another devious tactic as it is now speaking about resettlement of Rohingyas whom they will take back. This indicates that Myanmar will not allow Rohingyas to return to their homeland in Rakhine State.

According to a report by Myanmar newspaper Irrawaddy, Myanmar home secretary said on Tuesday, "We are yet to rebuild infrastructure and draw up resettlement plans to accept them back."

When the Myanmar minister visited Dhaka early this month, there were around five lakh newly arrived Rohingyas in Bangladesh. But that number has now crossed six lakh.

Naypyidaw also doesn't believe in the UN statistics on Rohingyas crossing border into Bangladesh.

"There is a huge gap regarding the numbers of people who fled to Bangladesh between the ground survey of Rakhine State government and UN statistics," said the Irrawaddy report quoting the Myanmar president's office.

In yesterday's statement, Suu Kyi, de facto leader of Myanmar, was quoted that she expressed her firm conviction to resolve bilaterally all issues including repatriation of the Rohingyas in an amicable manner.

But the tactics of her government portrays the opposite.

In the statement, the Myanmar government, however, acknowledged a historic truth by saying the Rohingya families have lived in Myanmar for generations.

It further admitted that Rohingyas are denied citizenship and access to basic civil rights such as freedom of movement, decent education and healthcare.

These acknowledgements clearly show that the Myanmar state machinery has made things extremely difficult for the Rohingyas to live there as human beings.

Qatar moves to end

FROM PAGE 20

world's largest trade union body, said workers' committees would be established in every workplace in Qatar, with workers electing their own representatives.

Also, a special disputes resolution committee with a timeframe for dealing with grievances would be established for ensuring rapid remedy of complaints.

Qatar now employs nearly two million foreign workers.

The country recently came under severe global criticism for exploitation of migrant workers, mostly from South Asia, and also for "kafala" system, as it is in the process of building new infrastructure in the run-up to hosting the 2022 football World Cup.

The ITUC, which has been a major critic of Qatar's migrant labour laws, said under the new measures, employ-

ment contracts would be lodged with a government authority to prevent contract substitution.

This would end the practice of workers arriving in the country only to have their contracts torn up and replaced with a different job, often on a lower wage, said the ITUC in a statement.

Also, employers will no longer be able to stop their employees from leaving the country, it said.

Identification papers will be issued directly by the Qatar government, and workers will no longer rely on their employers to provide them with ID cards, without which workers can be denied medical treatment.

"The new guidance from Qatar signals the start of real reforms in Qatar which will bring to an end the use of modern slavery..." ITUC General Secretary Sharad Burrow said in the statement.

"Sometimes, I stand underneath the tree and enjoy the gathering of the little birds," he said.

The den

FROM PAGE 20

gather in the banyan tree planted three years ago. Six months ago, the first group of the birds arrived and since then, the numbers have swelled.

"Every day, hundreds of people gather in the bus terminal for different purposes. But no one disturbs the birds though the tree isn't too tall," said Khairul Islam, a local of the area, adding that people like to take photographs of the birds.

As soon as night falls, the cacophony subsides. The birds then hide themselves behind the leaves. Behind each leaf is a little bird displaying a symbiosis unexplored.