

Suu Kyi makes first visit to crisis-hit north Rakhine

APF, Sittwe
Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi visited conflict-battered northern Rakhine State for the first time yesterday, reportedly meeting Rohingya Muslims who have faced an army crackdown that has seen hundreds of thousands of the minority flee.

Suu Kyi, a Nobel laureate who leads Myanmar's pro-democracy party, has been hammered by the international community for failing to use her moral power to speak up in defence of the Rohingya.

Suu Kyi left via state capital Sittwe as evening fell yesterday after a visit that also took her in Maungdaw and Buthidaung in northern Rakhine.

It was her first trip in office to the region, which has seen some of the worst communal violence that has cut through the western state since 2012, severely damaging Myanmar's global reputation.

"The Lady" - as she is known in Myanmar with the Rohingya community in

Maungdaw town, according to local media, a first for a leader keen to console the survivors inside the country and abroad that the crisis has abated and reconstruction of Rakhine can begin.

But it was not clear if Suu Kyi visited some of the hundreds of Rohingya villages torched by the army - allegedly aided by ethnic Rakhine militia in the region.

The Rohingya who remain in northern Rakhine are living in fear, surrounded by hostile neighbours, who refuse to let them farm or move freely.

The UN secretary-general called for unfettered humanitarian access to a zone still under army lockdown.

"The army didn't attack us but made our life very difficult," Mohammad Zafar, 35, from a village in Buthidaung told AFP at the Bangladesh border.

"We were not paid for how long it couldn't go to markets. How work is possible for life like that?"

'HERE FOR GENERATIONS'
Suu Kyi heads a committee charged with rebuilding Rakhine.

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Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi meets with Myo ethnic people in northern Maungdaw in Rakhine State yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP

US lawmakers target Myanmar military with new sanctions

REUTERS, Washington

Senior US Republican and Democratic lawmakers introduced legislation on Thursday to impose sanctions and travel restrictions on senior Myanmar military officials over the treatment of the country's Rohingya minority.

Announced the day before Republican President Donald Trump leaves on his first trip to Asia since taking office, the legislation is sponsored by a group of lawmakers including the Republican Senate Armed Services Committee chairman John McCain, and Senator Ben Cardin, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, according to an early summary of the bill seen by Reuters.

The State Department also announced yesterday that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is leaving shortly on a trip to Asia that will include a stop in Myanmar, also known as Burma.

Among other things, the bill imposes a ban on jade and rubi exports.

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Dhaka clearly wants to see a solution

FROM PAGE 1
Bangladesh are suffering the consequences of the problem and you are paying the heavy toll by your generosity in welcoming so many refugees in your country.

Responding to a question after Myanmar blamed Bangladesh for delaying the start of repatriation process of nearly one million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals in the hope of getting foreign aid, he said it was very difficult for Bangladesh to have clear interest in a solution to the problem, reports our diplomatic correspondent.

Watkins, who has been in the country since February 2015, will leave Dhaka tomorrow ending his mission in Bangladesh. He met diplomatic correspondents under the Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh (DCAB) at Ascott Dhaka Hotel yesterday.

"We all know where the problem is originated and it is not to be solved in Bangladesh. We have to find solutions across the border," Watkins said.

"The solution is not to be the question of the government and the military changing its policy, that is important of course, we have mechanism for that. Myanmar said they will support a Rohingya Commission recommendation but it is more than the implementation which is having the change of the mentality of the people of the entire country," he said.

He observed that there was very deep-rooted antagonism between the populations of the Rakhine State against the Rohingyas which is unfortunately going to take long time to address.

"Even if the two governments find solution to the case, they have to consider their safety and security."

He stressed for mounting more pressure on Myanmar to allow the international community's access to Rakhine State.

Responding to a series of questions about the next general elections in Bangladesh, the UN official said, "Some elections are positive as all parties are prepared for the election and a peaceful transition is essential."

"It's up to the political parties whether

they participate or not. But we want to see that they participate in the elections," he said.

"The UN is not willing to strengthen the capacity of the Election Commission."

"People have to be reassured that all of the institutions of the country are neutral and not under pressure coming from any sources and they are independent," Watkins said.

OIC RESOLUTION FOR UN
According to a draft resolution seen by the AFP, UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon said the UN to denounce the serious rights abuses in Myanmar and demand an end to the military campaigns against the Rohingyas.

The draft resolution, written up by the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and introduced this week to the General Assembly's human rights committee, said UN member states were "highly alarmed" by the outbreak of violence and "further alarmed by the disproportionate use of force by the Myanmar forces" against the Rohingyas.

The non-binding measure is expected to come up for a vote in the committee around November 14 and to be discussed in the assembly a month later.

It calls on Myanmar authorities "to end the ongoing military operations" and "to ensure the return of all Rohingyas to their homes in Rakhine State, ensure the return of all refugees, and grant full citizenship rights to the Rohingyas."

HEALTH CARE IN CAMPS
The four Rohingya children in Bangladesh are malnourished, placing them at increased risk of death, warns Save the Children.

"About a third of those children are malnourished," the UN said. "They are nine times more likely to die than the children who are not malnourished, says a research conducted by Save the Children, Action Centre The Faim, UNICEF, UNICEF, and WFP in last two weeks."

"They are significantly more vulnerable to infectious and diseases like diarrhoea and chest infections, it said.

"The situation is worse than we feared, said the UN. Save the Children's emergency nutrition adviser

in Cox's Bazar.

"Large numbers of Rohingya children are arriving in Bangladesh already malnourished. Then they are put in a situation where they have to rely on food rations to survive, where hygiene standards are poor, where clean drinking water is hard to come by and lots of people are getting sick as a result."

"Every day we see children arrive at our health clinics in desperate need of therapeutic food to stave off death," Chennel said.

"It is rare to see this level of malnutrition among children, even in a crisis like this, and even rarer to see it affecting adults as well. A few days ago two men came in to one of our clinics, one weighing 32kg and the other 34kg," Connell said.

TICKING BOMB
The threat of cholera is like a "ticking bomb" for the hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas who have flooded into Bangladesh in recent weeks, the Red Cross chief warned.

"We have every reason to fear that we can get into a situation that can lead to cholera outbreaks," Elhadi As Sy, head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), told AFP in an interview.

"We are definitely sitting on a ticking bomb," he warned.

Sy, who spent three days in Cox's Bazar last week, said the conditions there were "difficult to describe" and "very heart-breaking".

"One of the biggest concerns is the poor sanitation and lack of hygiene facilities that has sparked growing fears over the emergence of cholera, which spreads through dirty water and can kill if untreated."

The IFRC, which last month opened a field hospital near the camps, has treated numerous patients for acute diarrhoea.

"At the same time, the UN began a massive vaccination campaign in a bid to avoid a cholera epidemic, but while no cases have appeared so far, Sy warned unhygienic conditions could see the disease spread."

Too important, yet ignored

FROM PAGE 1
More than six lakh Rohingyas from Myanmar's Rakhine State have taken shelter in crowded settlements in Cox's Bazar since August 2015, in addition to some 212,000 Rohingyas who had entered Bangladesh in the previous years.

In Myanmar, they were denied citizenship and basic rights of education and health services.

Bangladesh government, UN agencies and NGOs have been engaged mostly in providing life-saving relief to the refugees. But family planning service has not been a focus, say officials.

"Family planning should be considered a life-saving service for the Rohingyas now because pregnancies under the present circumstances would be very risky," noted the health expert.

Of the total 8.2 lakh Rohingyas, around 60 percent are children. Of them, about 240,000 children, 120,000 pregnant and lactating women, and 204,000 adolescent girls need nutritional support, according to the Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), a coordinating body of UN agencies and NGOs operating at the settlements.

Pregnant and lactating women as well as newborns need very special care in terms of nutrition, shelter and hygiene. Said Mohammad Iqbal, an official at the office of Family Planning Association of Bangladesh in Cox's Bazar.

Over 18,000 pregnant Rohingyas women, who are not getting enough nutrition, may find it difficult to get proper care during deliveries and afterwards, he said.

Dr Mohiuddin Hussain Khan, health sector coordinator of International Organization for Migration, said the UN migration agency found a high rate of child marriage at the unregistered Rohingya settlements where it has been operating since 2013.

A number of women died there in the previous years because of complications related to teenage pregnancy, added the official.

For the safety of mothers and children, it is extremely important to have a comprehensive family planning programme that would include education on family

planning, supply of contraceptives and monitoring. Mohiuddin added.

Lack of family planning would lead to a population boom. It is likely to worsen the socio-economic condition of the Rohingyas given the realities. They live in overcrowded camps, and diseases are taking toll on their health, he said.

According to Cox's Bazar Civil Surgeon Dr Abdus Salam, at least 65 Rohingyas were diagnosed with tuberculosis, 69 with measles, 42 with HIV/AIDS and 1,400 with jaundice.

Every day, nearly 2,000 patients throng healthcare centres with respiratory tract infection and 1,700 with diarrhoea, he said.

Certain diseases such as tuberculosis and measles can spread fast in cramped conditions, Mohiuddin said.

"On average, seven to nine people live at each shelter in the Rohingya camps. This is in no way healthy. Birth of babies will only complicate things," he said, stressing the need for family planning services.

Iqbal said the situation could worsen unless awareness programmes are taken up and the refugees are provided with adequate contraceptives.

Pregnant women suffering from malnutrition are likely to give birth to malnourished babies, which would make matters even worse, he said.

AREALTHABITIESPREPARED?
Dr Abul Kalam Azad, director general of health services, said that apart from various health services, the government is working to address the issue of family planning for the Rohingyas.

New shelters for the refugees are being built in an organised way so that they can be given health and family planning services in a more disciplined manner, he said.

Dr Pritu Kanti Bhattacharjee, deputy director at the family planning office in Cox's Bazar, said his office provided the refugees with some 3,000 pills, 1,000 condoms and 3,600 injections through the union health and family welfare centres.

Besides, Rohingyas women are being given counselling on family planning, he said.

However, the need for family planning

services and contraceptives has not been assessed yet, added Pritu.

Sudhyanneeran Doraiswami, head of health section of the UN Population Fund in Bangladesh, said the refugees, especially mothers and children, should be given all necessary health services. But any birth control measures such as sterilisation should not be imposed, not on pills or condoms.

"We need to understand their cultural barriers and take measures accordingly. We should not do anything that stigmatises them," he told this correspondent recently.

Family planning services, which are now being given in a limited and scattered way, should be provided in a coordinated way. The government, UN agencies and other NGOs must coordinate with each other, Doraiswami added.

RIGHTMETHOD
Health officials said Rohingyas are interested in injections, not on pills or condoms. An injection can stop fertility of a woman up to three months.

Dr Bhattacharjee said his office has written to the health ministry saying it could also consider permanent method of contraceptives like vasectomy and tubectomy.

"We will go for permanent methods only if the government permits and the Rohingyas accept voluntarily," he said.

Dr Kaosar Afana, head of Brac's Health, Nutrition and Population Program office, said there is a huge shortage of family planning services at the Rohingya settlements, and they have written to the health ministry for providing contraceptives.

Since Rohingyas women prefer injections for birth control, the government should focus on providing those, he said.

It is also important to take up a comprehensive programme for counselling the refugees on the benefits of contraceptives. Their community leaders can be engaged in this regard, said Afana.

She, however, said sterilisation may not be a good option as it's a sensitive issue and also because the Rohingyas are foreign citizens.

Boy, 4, tied up in sack, tortured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noidhali

A four-year-old boy was allegedly tied up in a sack and then tortured in Raipur in Laxmipur of Noakhali on Tuesday.

The victim Pias, son of a day labourer Md Sohel of Rehan Udin Chowkidar Bari in Bhuiair Hat area of Ramni, was picked up by a Md Rakib and taken to a nearby school.

The victim's father Sohel said Pias left home around 4:00pm but as he did not return in the evening, family members started to look for him.

Locals heard screams coming from the school house and broke into a room. They found injured Pias lying on the floor. His hands were tied, and his left eye was injured as well.

They rushed the toddler to Laxmipur Sadar Hospital.

Rakib managed to flee.

The boy tied him up inside a sack at first and then tortured him.

His family members claimed that Rakib over phone threatened them with dire consequences if they "pursued" the matter or filed a case against him.

Doctor Nasir at Laxmipur Sadar

family members.

The four leaders led the Liberation War in 1971 after Bangladesh had been dissolved by the Pakistan army.

According to media reports, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Marcia Bernicat in August 2015 had informed Dhaka that fugitive Rashid was working in her country after receiving medical asylum.

The US government had been staying since 2010 to track and bring back the absconding killers, came to know that another convicted Noor was residing in Canada illegally.

The country refused to deport him as its policy doesn't approve sending a death row convict back to his homeland. Canada, however, reportedly didn't grant Noor's application for political asylum.

The taskforce has no confirmed information about the whereabouts of the other fugitives as they are always on the move, a taskforce member told The Daily Star, requesting anonymity.

Law Minister Anisul Haq said the government was planning to set up a commission to identify those who were behind the killing of Bangladesh and the four national leaders.

The commission might be formed next week, he told this correspondent yesterday.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam, a member of the taskforce, expressed frustration that the fugitive killers of Bangladesh and the four national leaders could not be brought back home yet.

He said the government was trying

hard through diplomatic and other channels to bring them back home to execute their sentences.

The AG also said some of the killers of Bangladesh and the four national leaders were "same individuals" and a few of them have already been executed.

The Supreme Court in its judgment in the jail killing case observed that the assassinations of the four national leaders were the result of a criminal conspiracy.

"The accused could have executed the killings unless very high-handed powerful state machinery were used in the conspiracy," Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha wrote in Australia on leave, said in the verdict.

The SC on April 30, 2013 had handed death penalties to three former army personnel and life imprisonments to eight others for killing the four national leaders.

The three convicted accused, who were awarded capital punishment, are Risalder (ret'd) Muzlemuddin, Dafadar (dismissed) Mafat Ali Shah and Dafadar (dismissed) Abdul Hashem Mirhida.

The eight jailed for life are Lt Col (dismissed) Khondaker Abdur Rashid, Lt Col (ret'd) Shariful Haq Dalim, Lt Col (ret'd) SIMAN Chowdhury, Lt Col (ret'd) AM Rashid Chowdhury, Maj (ret'd) Ahmed Shafiq Hossain, Capt (ret'd) Abdul Majid, Capt (ret'd) Kizmat Hossain and Capt (ret'd) Nazim Hasan.

The apex court upheld the judgment of a Dhaka court that convicted and sentenced Muzlemuddin, Mafat and

Hashem Mirhida to death and handed life imprisonment to 12 others, including the eight, in 2004.

Farooq - Lt Col (dismissed) Syed Farooq Rahman, Lt Col (ret'd) Sufyan Shahid Rashid Khan, Maj (ret'd) Bazar Huda and Maj (ret'd) AKM Mohiuddin Ahmed - were executed in the Bangladesh murder case in 2010.

The following year, the SC expelled the four from the charges of killing the national leaders in jail as they were executed.

Earlier in August 2008, the High Court had upheld the capital punishment for Muzlemuddin and acquitted Mafat, Hashem, Mirhida, Farooq, Shahid, Mohiuddin and Bazul Huda in the jail killing case.

BCL men

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committee, alleged that the BCL leaders set up the structures at night. They submitted a written complaint against the two to the Jagannath upazila nirbahi officer, he said.

Abdul Monaf, mayor of Jagannath upazila municipality, confirmed the incident of constructing structures.

Contacted, Touha Chowdhury denied his involvement in the incident. But this correspondent could not reach Sajib for comments.

Masum Billah, Jagannath upazila, said he heard about the incident. They would investigate the incident and take action against those responsible for the incident, he added.

From crime den

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land grabbers returned to occupy the free space.

It was then that Alam decided to put his foot down and make a permanent change by turning it into a park.

When Alam sought help from local businesses to fund the project, Safullah Al Muniar, chairman of Indus Group, and authorities from Alauddin Textile Mills picked up the bill.

With help from the contractor of the Dhaka-Tangail four-lane highway project, he excavated around 200m of the dead canal and bound the banks of a meandering river in a mere two weeks.

The newly dredged canal got a facility with the water hyacinths and wastes being pulled out.

"Truth be told, I initially intended to turn it into a simple flower garden. But since the encouragement from the locals, it turned into a large-scale project and was completed in just six months," said the SP.

Flower beds outlining the river banks and lush green grass all around - it was a sight to behold.

Locals sit idly on the concrete park benches along the river bank, children play on the swings and slide and sees-saws while families are seen enjoying picnics underneath the permanent umbrella structures next to flowing fountains.

The large trees provide shade to those resting after their morning walks along the paved walkways.

At sunset, lamps along the walkways light up the park. Both male and female security personnel from the nearby

police line are present at all times to ensure safety.

Although the park is near completion, authorities could not hold back the locals from entering and enjoying the scenic beauty.

People are entranced by the winged horse statues at the entrance while there is no ticket booth to charge an entry fee.

"We expect the work to finish soon. Once completed, the general of Police Shaukat Hagar will inaugurate the park next month," said Alam.

Much appreciated and praised, people have lovingly named the park 'SP Park' to express gratitude to Alam for his efforts.

"We will decide on the nitty-gritty of the park's upkeep and maintenance after it's completed," said the SP.

Wait for justice far from over

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