

# Bangladesh saved over 6,00,000 lives

## UNHCR assistant high commissioner says, calls for safe and dignified return of Rohingyas

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Any return of the Rohingya refugees who took shelter in Bangladesh must be voluntary, safe and dignified, and the UNHCR assistant high commissioner for protection said yesterday.

Volker Türk, the UNHCR official, also appreciated the role of Bangladesh in tackling the Rohingya issue and assured the country of full support from his agency.

"The people of Bangladesh and its authority have our full appreciation and admiration. You have literally saved over 6,000,000 lives by opening the border and allowing the Rohingyas to enter," he told a press conference.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) organised the conference at a hotel in the capital after Türk concluded his five-day visit to the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar.

"Our initiative was extremely noble

and honourable, and you deserve full support from the international communities and the UN," he said.

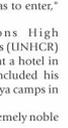
Replying to a question, the commissioner said, "It is clear that we need to fight for the return of the refugees who fled from Rakhine State. It is obvious that the people who fled are in a very vulnerable and extremely dire situation."

About Myanmar government's delay in solving the crisis, he recommended having patience and be persistent to ensure Rohingyas' right to return to their country. He said, "We also need to ensure the return is sustainable."

The commissioner said, "We also have to listen carefully to the needs of the host community in Cox's Bazar."

"We need to work with the government of Myanmar and its people to help them implement the Rakhine commission report. Of course, it won't be easy, but we need to start the process," he

Volker Türk



SEE PAGE 10 COL 2



Police were stationed in front of Lakehead Grammar School in the city's Dhanmondi yesterday evening after the Dhaka district administration stopped its operation over alleged links to militancy.

# Act now to solve

PARLIAMENTS OF 44 COUNTRIES. IT ENDS TODAY.

In yesterday's statement, the CPA urged Myanmar to ensure the sustainable return of all forcibly displaced Rohingyas, who have taken shelter in Bangladesh and other countries, to their homes in Myanmar within the shortest possible time.

"The Rohingya issue must be addressed in the light of the recommendations made by the Kofi Annan Commission, it noted.

More than six lakh Rohingyas have taken refuge in Bangladesh since the Myanmar military launched a brutal crackdown on the Rohingyas in Rakhine on August 25.

The lawmakers urged the parliament of the Commonwealth countries who unequivocally condemn the atrocities committed against the Rohingyas in Myanmar which amounts to genocide."

The CPA also urged the Commonwealth Parliament and its lawmakers to keep up on the developments in Myanmar and inform the CPA secretary general for raising the matters at the next conference in Mauritius in 2018.

NEW CPA CHAIRPERSON

Emilia Monjova Lifaka, deputy speaker of the national assembly of Cameroon, was elected chairperson for the next three years.

Other candidates for the position were: Yvonne M Osborne MIA, speaker of the Montserrat Legislative Assembly; and Nikki Rattle, speaker of the Cook Islands Parliament.

Members countries elect a new chairperson at the general assembly every three years.

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The CPA called upon all its member states to help secure the basic rights of the Rohingyas, extend humanitarian support to them and join the efforts of Bangladesh and the international community towards a sustainable return of the Rohingyas to their homeland.

The lawmakers requested the CPA secretary general to convey the statement to all the parliaments of the CPA member states, the United Nations secretary general, and relevant international and regional organisations.

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# School shut for 'militant links'

FROM PAGE 1

The education ministry ordered the Dhaka DC on Sunday to take measures to shut the school, also for carrying out activities against the nation.

Salma Jahan, joint secretary of secondary and higher secondary education, in the order said the school had no government permission.

Earlier on January 23, the ministry sent a letter to the home ministry requesting an investigation into Lakehead's alleged terror links.

The school was co-founded in 2000 by Rizwan Haroon, who has been dubbed as a top militant in some media reports, and Jennifer Ahermed, wife of alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir coordinator and Dhaka University teacher Syed Golam Mowla.

Though "listed as a militant suspect by the home ministry", Rizwan sneaked into the country from the UK dodging immigration police at the airport in Dhaka, the reports said in May this year, based on information from an intelligence agency.

Sources in the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police at the time, however, said they did not have

any such information about Rizwan and that he was not wanted in any of their cases.

According to school insiders and official sources, a number of wanted militants linked with outfits like "Neo JMB", al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula and Hizb ut-Tahrir worked at the school as teachers.

Mai (ret'd) Jahidul Islam, military commander of "Neo JMB", worked at Lakehead in December 2015. He however, quit his job as its general manager (admin) on March 7 last year, added the sources.

Jahid, killed in a police raid in the capital's Rupnarayan on September 2 last year, allegedly had trained the militants who took part in the Gulshan cafe attack on July 1 last year.

Moniruzzaman Masud, a math teacher at Lakehead, was arrested along with Golam Mowla and several other Hizb ut-Tahrir men in September 2008 in Rajshahi while distributing leaflets in calling for establishing a "caliphate" de-throning the then government.

Besides, Tebbeez and Rizwan Sharif, both wanted by police for suspected militancy links, happened to be teach-

ers at Lakehead.

According to international media reports, Tebbeez and his brother Rajib Karim and Rizwan Sharif had contacted radical preacher Anwar al-Awlaki, a key figure in al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, saying they wanted to join jihad overseas.

Talking to The Daily Star, Tebbeez's father, however, denied the allegation.

A few years back, Rizwan Haroon and his family got the ownership of Lakehead. In March this year, RM Group Limited, a company that supplies construction equipment and materials, purchased the school.

Khaled Matin, managing director of RM Group, yesterday told this newspaper that they purchased Lakehead without knowing that there had been allegations against the management of involvement in militancy.

He claimed to have sacked 12 teachers facing such allegations, and brought changes in the entire management. The school now has no terror connection and he welcomed the ministry investigation, he added.

After his two kids were admitted to

Lakehead, Khaleda said, he started to like the school for its "Islamic environment" and later decided to buy it.

The school has around 1,100 students and 180 teachers. Monthly tuition fees for each student range from Tk 10,000 to Tk 15,000.

Visiting the Dhanmondi and Gulshan campuses around noon yesterday, this correspondent saw some guardians waiting for their children.

"Where will my son go at this time of the year?" said a guardian, worried following the ministry order.

Fearing disruption in their children's education, many parents contacted the school office and wanted to know what will happen next.

Talking to this correspondent at its Dhanmondi branch, a guardian seeking anonymity said she chose the institution since it is "different" from the other schools.

"The curriculum is the same like that of other English medium schools. But children here learns religious etiquettes," she said.

# Death trap in stone

FROM PAGE 1

Muhammad Shamsul Alam Sarker, additional superintendent of police of Sylhet, said the police were trying to stop the excessive use of military force on the river.

Over the years, influential stone traders have been illegally extracting stone from the Lovachara river and its nearby banks in Kamaghat upazila, destroying the environment and putting locals at risk, even though they officially declared quarry area was a long way away from the spot where the six-sided upazila is located.

Rangla Tila, Lalmarit Tila, Bakhal Chhara, Rajar Tila, Monipur village, Deyu Tila, Dalkergui, Bajekhel, Saudgram, Paschimpara, Mirapang Shah Tila and some other areas are being targeted by the syndicate of stone fillers, locals said.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Tania Sultana said, "We had conducted a mobile court probe last week in the area."

To investigate the death of the six, a three-member probe body led by a Special Mohammod Aminur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner of

Sylhet, has been formed by the district administration.

Rahat Anwar, deputy commissioner of Sylhet, said manual stone extraction was legal only in the quarry area, but these children were trying to extract stone from an unusual and risky spot.

"We have been very active in stopping illegal stone extracting in all quarry areas in Sylhet and a taskforce continuously runs there. More steps will be taken to completely stop illegal stone extraction," the DC said.

Lawyer Shah Shabada Akhter, regional coordinator of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), said that the incident happened yesterday was not officially a quarry stone extraction was going on.

Police also formed a separate three-member probe body led by Abul Hasnat, additional superintendent of police of Sylhet, to investigate the death.

The committee was asked to submit its report within five working days, said Samsul Alam Sarker, additional SP (media) of Sylhet.

# Aman output likely to fall

FROM PAGE 1

The floods and the blast prompted the government to go for large-scale rice import from Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, India and Myanmar. The private sectors are also already on an import spree with rice import hitting the all-time high of 14 lakh tonnes in just first four months of this fiscal year.

Prices of coarse rice that had peaked in July-August period have come down but are still high by at least 30 percent, comparing to last year's market prices of the staple.

The USDA and the agriculture ministry attributed the losses faced by farmers to floods. They, however, said crop losses would be "nothing alarming" as farmers tried hard to recoup them by going for late and secondary planting.

Officials at the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute and the International Rice Research Institute

also lauded the farmers for going for rice varieties that are submergence-tolerant and can withstand 15 to 17 days of stagnant water.

THE USDA REPORT

The USDA report said, "The impact [of flood] on food supplies and livelihood of farmers has been dramatic. Those estimates may actually be conservative: according to the Humanitarian Coordination Task Team [HCTT], the area of crop damage was 650,000 hectares.

"Of the damage, the crops most affected were Aus, Aman, Aman seedbed, seedling, jute, and vegetables. The secondary flooding also destroyed freshly planted Aman paddy and seedbeds, which dealt a fresh blow to farmers."

"The resultant shortage of seedlings caused a price shock and in turn replanting of Aman rice were down sharply from market needs:

some farmers switched to early winter crops instead of the costly seedlings," the report said.

The report also noted the use of less productive local variety rice seeds would result in poor output, the USDA forecasts said.

It also noted that though the transplanting of Aman was completed quite late in the season owing to an atypical monsoon this year, favourable weather for growth of Aman rice indicated a likely good harvest.

The USDA report adds, "Massive amounts of crops lost to flooding imposed economic hardship on millions of farmers and households. The flooding affected 34 out of the 64 administrative districts of the country."

"Heavy late monsoon rains in the upstream provinces of Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal in India caused flooding in the north-eastern districts of Bangladesh."

# Myanmar needs to engage with UN, Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 1

adoption of this statement," said the statement.

The UNHCR called upon the Myanmar government to work with the government of Bangladesh and the UN to implement the commitment to establish the Joint Working Group (JWG) and to expedite the voluntary return of all internally displaced persons from Bangladesh to Myanmar.

Sebastiano Cardi of UNHCR, president for November, read out the statement at a meeting of the council on Monday.

With this, the UNSC again failed to adopt a resolution to press for an end to the excessive use of military force on Rohingyas in the face of strong opposition from China.

The UN body on September 13 had issued another statement, expressing deep concern about violence in Rakhine. On October 2, Dhaka and Naypyidaw had agreed to set up a JWG to facilitate the repatriation of Rohingyas, but they failed to do so as Myanmar wanted to solve the crisis

bilaterally without including the UN in the joint group.

The development came during Myanmar Union Minister Kyaw Tint Snyet's visit to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh had signed the Joint Statement with the State Law and Order Restoration Council of Myanmar on April 28, 1992 under which Myanmar agreed to take back those refugees who could "establish their bona fide residency in Myanmar" prior to their departure from Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali said Dhaka did not agree to Naypyidaw's proposal about following the principle and criterion of the 1992 deal.

"He said the criterion was 'not realistic' and the situations of 1992 and 2017 were entirely different.

The UNSC in Monday's statement welcomed Myanmar's decision to

establish the "Union Enterprise Mechanism" for humanitarian assistance, resettlement and development in Rakhine. It also lauded the government commitment to ensure that humanitarian assistance and development work undertaken by the Union Enterprise Mechanism is provided for the benefit of all communities in Rakhine without discrimination and regardless of religion or ethnicity.

It further urged the Myanmar government to ensure the Union Enterprise Mechanism supports the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced individuals and refugees to their homes in Rakhine, and to allow UN agencies to operate with full access in Rakhine.

"The Security Council calls upon the government of Myanmar to address the root causes of the crisis in Rakhine State by respecting, promoting and protecting human rights without discrimination and regardless of ethnicity or religion, including by allowing freedom of movement, equal access to basic services, and equal access to full citizenship

for all individuals.

"The Security Council welcomes the government of Myanmar's public commitment to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State chaired by Kofi Annan, as well as the establishment of a ministerial-level committee to implement the recommendations."

The UNSC stressed the importance of undertaking transparent investigations into allegations of human rights abuses and violations, including sexual violence and abuse and violence against children, and of holding to account all those responsible for such acts to provide justice for victims.

Over six lakh forcibly displaced Rohingyas have taken shelter in Bangladesh since the Myanmar army launched a crackdown on the ethnic minority group on August 25.

# WB offers both

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In the meetings, the WB said a country may get a maximum of \$400 million from the WB refugee window; one-sixth of which will be from regular soft loan allocation and the remaining five-sixth will come from the refugee window. Fifty percent of the amount will be grant and 50 percent loan.

Relief and disaster management ministry officials proposed giving the whole amount as grant as the assistance is being given on humanitarian grounds. Officials of the other ministries echoed the same view.

Foreign ministry officials said the government has different opinions about taking loans from development partners. It wants quick return of the Rohingyas and as such it has not yet formally announced them as refugees. If the loan is taken from the bank, it would mean allowing the crisis to linger.

Finance ministry officials said a wrap up meeting with the WB mis-

sion was held at the Economic Relations Division on Saturday.

The ERD said they will convey their detailed opinion about the assistance after opinion of the ministries concerned is received. The WB team will quickly send the draft proposal to the ERD.

A WB document, which outlines the criteria to be eligible for the assistance, does not say Bangladesh has to formally declare the Rohingyas as refugees.

However, Dhaka has to meet two major criteria to get the fund.

"A country would be eligible if the number of UNHCR-registered refugees, including people in refugee-like situations, is at least 25,000 or it is at least 0.1 percent of the country's population," according to the document.

In addition to that, it would need to have in place an action plan, strategy or similar documentation that describes concrete steps, including possible policy reforms.