

Evidence of genocide

Says Holocaust Memorial Museum; rights groups find Suu Kyi "complicit"

STAR REPORT

There is "mounting evidence" of genocide against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, says a new report by US-based Holocaust Memorial Museum, after an investigation by Fortify Rights. The report calls for an immediate halt to the atrocities in Rakhine.

"Without urgent action, there's a high risk of more mass atrocities," said Cameron Hudson, director of the Simon-Skjold Center for the Prevention of Genocide at the Museum in a statement yesterday.

Echoing the findings of Fortify Rights when giving evidence before a parliamentary committee, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Burma Campaign UK and other rights groups urged the government and the international community to see the Nobel laureate as "part of the problem", The Guardian reports. It added that the military crackdown had "thousands" of Rohingyas dead, forced an exodus of 600,000 people and mentioned numerous instances of "appall-

ing rape".

The Rohingyas have suffered attacks and systematic violations for decades, and the international community must not fail them now when their very existence in Myanmar is threatened, Cameron said.

More than six lakh of Myanmar's one million Rohingyas have fled the country to Bangladesh since August 25. International Rescue Committee says two lakh more will arrive in the coming weeks. Some four lakh Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh in the previous years.

Fortify Rights' report titled "They Tried to Kill Us All: Atrocity Crimes against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, Myanmar" is based on a year-long investigation that included more than 200 interviews documented in Myanmar and Bangladesh from October 9 to December 2016 and from August 25, 2017 to the present day.

Myanmar's military has consistently claimed its innocence and in an

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Villagers scooping up fish from the Dholai river in Moulvibazar's Kamalganj yesterday. Every year as winter sets in they take part in this century-old tradition known as Palo Bawa. However, pollution, filling up of wetlands, and fish farming has led to poorer and poorer catches every year, locals claimed.

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

MYANMAR TOUR Pope advised not to use the term 'Rohingya'

Rights groups disagree

REUTERS, Vatican City

Leading figures in the Catholic Church and international politics have advised Pope Francis not to use the term Rohingya during a trip to Myanmar due to political sensitivities but human rights groups want him to uphold international law on self-identity.

Hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingya have fled Myanmar following a military crackdown that the United Nations has described as ethnic cleansing. Majority Buddhist Myanmar rejects the term Rohingya and does not recognise them as citizens nor as an ethnic group in its own right.

In the run-up to his Nov 27-Dec 2 trip to Myanmar and Bangladesh, several high-profile figures including former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Myanmar Cardinal Charles Maung Bo have indicated he should not use the term Rohingya.

Francis, a strong defender of human rights and migrants, has spoken earlier this year of "the persecution of our Rohingya brothers and sisters" and has defended their right to "live their culture and Muslim faith".

The Vatican would not say if Francis might heed the advice and use a term like "Muslims in Rakhine State". Roman Catholics make up a tiny minority in Myanmar.

This month Annan met the pope along with three other members of "The Elders" group of veteran statesmen and women and later hinted strongly that he believed the pope should not say Rohingya.

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Tillerson sees

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However, Tillerson was adamant that broad-based sanctions -- as some have called for in Washington -- were not an answer to the crisis.

During his visit to the Myanmar capital Naypyidaw, his first to the country, Tillerson pledged an additional \$47 million in aid for refugees, bringing the total the US has earmarked for the crisis to \$87 million since August.

Refugees have fled violent clashes in the north of Rakhine state, where Myanmar's military has intensified what it calls "clearance operations" targeting "terrorists" after Rohingya militants attacked police posts, killing 12 security officials.

Continued reports of horrific suffering and atrocities since the crisis escalated have intensified criticism of Myanmar's government and Suu Kyi in particular.

Representatives of the United Nations and the European Union have described the situation as "ethnic cleansing," an assessment echoed by British Prime Minister Theresa May this week.

However, Tillerson said more information was needed for Washington to use that language, and called for an independent inquiry into the causes of the crisis and alleged atrocities.

The United States will continue to work with our partners to ensure there are consequences for individuals confirmed to have been responsible for atrocities," he said.

Those consequences could include targeted sanctions, but Tillerson was clear he felt broad-based sanctions targeting the Myanmar government or other institutions were not appropriate.

"We want Myanmar to succeed, we want its democracy to succeed," he said. "I have a hard time seeing how (broad-based sanctions) help this crisis."

Acknowledging proponents of sanctions are "well intentioned," he called

for patience in dealing with the "very complex situation" in Rakhine.

"It's difficult when you're sitting half way around the world and you see the images from the refugee camps in Bangladesh to not want to just rush to do something," he said.

Speaking alongside Tillerson, Suu Kyi said what was "most important, is that we bring peace and stability to this country, which can only be done on the basis of the rule of law."

Since the crisis began, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate has come in for intense criticism from the international community.

In a highly publicized September speech on the situation in Rakhine, Suu Kyi said Myanmar was not "afraid of international scrutiny," but did not denounce alleged atrocities against the

Rohingya community and appeared to ignore the findings of a report commissioned by her administration.

Myanmar considers the Rohingya refugees illegal immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh, despite the fact that many Rohingya families have lived in Rakhine for decades. Bangladesh considers them Burmese.

Responding to a question about her alleged silence on the issue Wednesday, Suu Kyi said "I haven't been silent."

"What people mean is what I say is not interesting enough," she said. "My statements are not meant to be exciting, they are meant to be accurate."

"I've not been silent, (but) I have not been making very incendiary statements," Suu Kyi added, before thanking Tillerson for the "open mindedness with which you came here."



US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson shakes hand with Myanmar's State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi during a press conference in Naypyidaw yesterday.

Rohingya crisis

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Myanmar and Myanmar has to find a solution."

Hasina said the entire global community has expressed solidarity with Bangladesh for the first time on any issue, which never happened before.

Referring to lingering of the Rohingya crisis for decades, the premier said it all began in 1978 when Ziaur Rahman came to power unconstitutional.

NO PROVOCATION

Hasina said a vested quarter has been trying to engage the Rohingyas in acts of violence.

Issuing a note of warning against the instigators, she said, "Anybody who provokes Rohingyas into getting involved in acts of violence must face the music. And there is no doubt about this."

Reiterating her government's firm stance against militancy, she said Dhaka would not allow anybody to use this land to operate terrorist activities in any neighbouring country.

"I want to say one thing: we believe in peace; we want to maintain good relations with our neighbours; we'll in no way allow anyone to use the land of Bangladesh to carry out any sort of terrorist or provocative activities in any other country. We won't tolerate this," she said, answering to a question from Nazibul Bashar Maizvandary.

In a supplementary question, Cox's Bazar lawmaker Abdur Rahman Bodi said 15,000 people from five unions in his constituency have been suffering as their resources were affected because of the arrivals of Rohingyas.

In response, the PM said, "If we can provide food and other assistance to 10 lakh Rohingyas, we can feed 15,000 locals as well."

[With inputs from UNB, BSS]

2 'robbers' killed in 'gunfight'

A CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Two alleged robbers belonging to a notorious gang were killed in a "gunfight" in Sharankhola range of the Sundarbans early yesterday morning.

The deceased were identified as Yousef Fakir, second in-command of Abbas Bahini, and gang member Ruhul Amin, police said.

Hasan Emon Al Rajib, wing commander of Rab-8, told The Daily Star that his team was acting on secret

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Man killed

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on Tuesday. A brick chip, hurled by the attackers, also hit the forehead of Abdur Rob as he tried to stop them. He collapsed instantly, said police quoting locals.

Rakib and his cohorts fled, said police.

Abdur Rob was rushed to Sadarpur Upazila Health Complex where duty doctors declared him dead, said Omor Faisal, residential medical officer at health complex.

Sohel was admitted to Bhanga Upazila Health Complex. Talking to this correspondent there, he said, "Rakib and his men killed my father as we protested the teasing of the housewife. I want his punishment."

Sohel's mother filed a murder case against 12 people, including Rakib and his father Babu, over the incident.

Sukumar Golder, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Sadarpur Police Station, said, "We recovered the body and sent it to Faridpur Medical College Hospital for autopsy."

Food assistance for poor declines

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Due to low stock in public granaries, the government is now providing rice for Tk 30 a kg to only 3.8 lakh beneficiaries in six flood-ravaged Haor districts and has pledged to continue it till January next year.

But a large number of flood-hit people in the 34 affected districts are getting PFDS benefits far less than they get even in usual times.

Many areas in Rangpur's Taraganj were hit by flood twice this year.

Maleka Begum, a widow who works at a local hotel in Taraganj, doesn't have any land.

Talking to this correspondent over the phone, the 50-year-old woman said food aid from the government would have been helpful in supporting her family of four at this difficult time.

The night guard, however, added that the government is providing rice under the open market sale (OMS) programme, but its price has been doubled to Tk 30 a kg from Tk 15 last year.

At the beginning of fiscal 2017-18, the government's rice stock dipped to a historic low of just 1.5 lakh tonnes, which has now gone up to a little more than four lakh tonnes.

The food minister said his ministry was trying hard to increase the food stock to 10 lakh tonnes by January.

Officials told The Daily Star that with this low food stock, the government has to support the food needs of over six lakh Rohingyas, who have crossed over to Bangladesh from Myanmar since August. UN aid agencies are taking the host country's food support for the Rohingyas on the understanding that these would be reimbursed upon receipt of sufficient international aid.

Dr Khan Ahmed Syed Murshid, director general of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), finds it only natural that the government's food assistance has been "very tight" given its "not-so-good stock".

He said this is a lesson the govern-

ment learnt the hard way. Because of a poor stock, it couldn't intervene in the market when rice prices continued to show upward trend.

Besides, food support for the Rohingyas is also putting pressure on the public food stock, he added.

"You can't always foresee floods, droughts or price fluctuations on the international market. So what you have to do is keep arrangements for absorptions of such shock," Murshid noted.

SEEDS FOR FARMERS

Under the agriculture ministry's rehabilitation initiatives, more than seven lakh farmers got incentives, including seeds and other agro-inputs, to recoup flood-induced crop loss.

Aman crop in over six lakh hectares of land was severely damaged in the last flood. However, many farmers

could replant the monsoon rice as the government provided them with seeds.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury told this newspaper that it's still too early to predict the yield of Aman that farmers have just started harvesting.

A recent field report of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) projected 1.3 million tonnes of Aman production this year, down by 3.5 lakh tonnes from last year's output.

Boro yield in May this year was less than last year's, as some 20 lakh tonnes of rice were lost to Haor flashfloods and fungal attack in different areas of the country.

Since July 1 this year, the government and private traders have imported 17 lakh tonnes of rice.

Police now say they picked up the two

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night said Mithun and Ashit were arrested under section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, on charges of conspiring "to topple the present government" and "to bring BNP to the state powers through illegal means".

He also claimed that the duo might have gone into hiding as Mithun, who was convicted in four cases, was wanted by police.

Mithun's wife Sumona Chowdhury Seema told The Daily Star yesterday that her husband and Ashit are victims of a conspiracy. "We believe police picked the duo up and kept them on Tuesday.

In their remand prayer, DB inspector Almagir Hossain Patwari, also the investigation officer, said the two held a meeting with BNP leader Chowdhury Abdullah Al Faruk at his Sher-E-Bangla Nagar residence in the middle of this year to "discuss toppling the present government and to bring-

ing BNP to power through illegally".

"They will return or be found"

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said those who are now missing will return or law enforcers will find them.

He said many disappeared on their

own in the past and law enforcement agency members found many of them while some others returned themselves.

The home boss made the remarks after inaugurating a modern morgue at Suhrawardy Medical College in the capital's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

Asked about missing North South

University teacher Mubashar Hasan and journalist Utpal Das, he said detectives were on alert and the incidents were being investigated.

Without naming anyone, he also said he hoped that a person, whose disappearance has been much discussed lately, would be rescued soon by the detectives.

Assistant Professor Mubashar went missing on November 7. Utpal Das, a senior reporter of news portal purboposhchimbd.news, has been traceless since October 10.

At least eight others, including a book importer, a businessman, a

student and political leaders, have either been abducted or gone missing since August 22.

MORGUE OPENED

The morgue at Suhrawardy Medical College started its formal journey yesterday with a forensic team and a mortuary having the capacity to pre-

serve nine bodies.

This is the third morgue in the capital after those in Dhaka Medical College and Sir Salimullah Medical College.

The home minister said the morgue would help medical students to a great extent.