

Start Rohingya repatriation immediately

PM to Myanmar

UNB, Savar

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday renewed her call to Myanmar to immediately start the repatriation of the Rohingyas.

"We're continuing our bilateral talks with Myanmar so that the Myanmar nationals [Rohingyas] could return to their country.... It's my call to Myanmar to soon start taking back their nationals from Bangladesh," she said.

The PM was addressing a parade marking the handover of National Standard (national flag) to the Corps of Military Police (CMP) Centre and

School at Savar Cantonment.

Referring to the influx of over six lakh Myanmar citizens to Bangladesh since August 25, Hasina said they were a burden on Bangladesh. "Despite many limitations, they're being provided with various facilities, including shelter, food and medical care."

She mentioned that her government took many steps for resolving the Rohingya crisis while various forces, including the Armed Forces, police, BGB and Rab along with the administration, public representatives and civilian people were providing necessary services to the Rohingyas.

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Bangladesh Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali MP and Union Minister of Myanmar U Kyaw Tint Swe sign the deal on the return of displaced Rohingyas at the State Counsellor's Office in Naypyidaw yesterday.

PHOTO: FOREIGN MINISTRY

Return to start in two months

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conditions of repatriation for several weeks, signed the instrument following two-day talks between Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the Bangladesh foreign minister.

In a statement issued after the signing, Myanmar State Counsellor's Office said, "The arrangement was based on the joint statement signed by the foreign ministers of the Government of the Union of Myanmar and the People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1992, and contained the general guiding principles and policy arrangements to systematically verify and receive the displaced persons from Rakhine State."

However, the Bangladesh foreign minister last month said Dhaka did not agree to Naypyitaw's proposal for following the principle and criteria of the 1992 deal to take back the forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals.

During his Dhaka visit on October 2 this year, Kyaw Tint Swe expressed his country's willingness to take back the "displaced residents" of Myanmar and proposed to follow the principle and criteria agreed upon in the 1992 Joint Statement.

But Mahmood said the 1992

criteria are not "realistic" and "the situation of 1992 and the current situation are entirely different".

In its statement, Myanmar State Counsellor's Office mentioned, "The present arrangement, which had been agreed to by both the countries based on their friendly and good neighbourly relations, demonstrates the steadfast position of Myanmar, and is a win-win situation for both countries."

Referring to the registration forms the Rohingyas must complete with personal details before repatriation, Myint Kyaing, permanent secretary at Myanmar's ministry of labour, immigration and population, said, "We are ready to take them back as soon as possible after Bangladesh sends the forms back to us."

Diplomatic sources in Dhaka said that though Myanmar signed the bilateral instrument amid global pressure, the arrangement doesn't cover some vital issues such as involvement of the UN in the repatriation process.

It also doesn't mention a specific timeframe for concluding the repatriation, any clause for safeguarding the interest of Bangladesh and the refugees or the Rakhine Advisory

Commission which recommended review of the controversial 1982 citizenship law, they added.

According to the sources, Myanmar has agreed to focus only on the Rohingya population sheltered in Bangladesh since October 2016. More than seven lakh

Rohingyas entered Bangladesh over the last one year following military crackdowns in Rakhine State.

But Myanmar didn't make any commitment over around three to five lakh undocumented Rohingyas who entered Bangladesh in the last three decades. Myanmar also kept mum about the 33,000 Rohingyas staying in two refugee camps in Cox's Bazar since 1992, they added.

The UN and the international community have repeatedly appealed for safe and sustainable repatriation of the Rohingyas to their places of origin.

The Rakhine Advisory Commission, led by former UN chief Kofi Annan, called for freedom of movement for all people in Rakhine and a review of the controversial 1982 citizenship law.

In its report submitted to the Myanmar president on August 23,

the commission noted that scrapping restrictions on movement in Rakhine and granting citizenship to its Muslim minority people could help avoid fuelling extremism and bring peace to the state.

The commission suggested that the Myanmar government should maintain a strong bilateral relationship with Bangladesh to address the challenges in Rakhine. It warned that failure to implement its recommendations could lead to more extremism and violence.

On Wednesday, the US toughened its stance on Myanmar, accusing the country's security forces of perpetrating "horrendous atrocities" against the Rohingyas that amount to "ethnic cleansing" of the Muslim minority.

"After a careful and thorough analysis of available facts, it is clear that the situation in northern Rakhine state constitutes ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya," US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said in a statement.

"No provocation can justify the horrendous atrocities that have ensued."

The statement from Tillerson, who visited Myanmar on November

15, is the strongest US condemnation yet of the military's crackdown on the Rohingyas.

During his Myanmar visit on November 19, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed a three-phase solution for resolving the Rohingya issue.

According to an UN estimate, more than 622,000 Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh from Rakhine since the Myanmar military launched a brutal crackdown on the ethnic minority on August 25.

Bangladesh had seen influx of Rohingyas from Myanmar also in 1978, 1991 and 2016. Now, more than one million Rohingyas are staying in Bangladesh.

In its statement, Myanmar State Counsellor's Office said, "Western countries as well the OIC had portrayed the matter as an international issue by passing resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. The Security Council also issued a Presidential Statement on the issue."

"The principled position of Myanmar is that issues that emerge between neighbouring countries must be resolved amicably through bilateral negotiations," it added.

Talking about Rohingyas returning is premature

Says Amnesty citing existing 'apartheid' in Myanmar

STAR REPORT

The idea of Rohingya refugees' return to Rakhine is premature and unthinkable until Myanmar's suffocating "apartheid" system is dismantled, Amnesty International said yesterday.

In response to news that the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh have signed an agreement to return close to a million Rohingya refugees currently in Bangladesh, Amnesty International's Director for Refugee and Migrant Rights, Charmain Mohamed, said: "While precise details of this deal have not yet been revealed, talk of returns is clearly premature."

"There can be no safe or dignified

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UN envoy: Sexual attacks against Rohingya may be war crimes

AP, United Nations

Widespread atrocities against Rohingya Muslim women and girls have been orchestrated and perpetrated by Myanmar's military and may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, the UN envoy on sexual violence in conflict said Wednesday.

Pramila Patten, who met many Rohingya victims of sexual violence in Bangladesh camps during a visit this month, said she fully endorses the assessment by UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein that Rohingya have been victims of "ethnic cleansing."

Patten said at a news conference that the widespread use of sexual violence "was clearly a driver and push factor" for more than 620,000 Rohingya to flee Myanmar. It was "also a calculated tool of terror aimed at the extermination and removal of the Rohingya as a group," she added.

Myanmar's government has denied committing any atrocities as has its military. The government refused a

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News portals spreading propaganda about mayor Says DNCC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A number of online news portals had been running baseless and misleading reports about Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Annisul Huq, said the DNCC yesterday.

Annisul's family members requested all to be aware that misleading information about the mayor was being circulated, said the DNCC in its first ever press release about the mayor's health.

The mayor, who was undergoing treatment at the Intensive Care Unit of a London hospital, has been moved to a rehabilitation centre on October 31 and he was gradually improving, it said.

It said Annisul had been feeling unwell for months before his trip to London with his family on July 29 for the birth of his daughter's child. His health deteriorated there and he was diagnosed with cerebral vasculitis, said the press statement.

It said according to his doctors it could take several months for him to recover.

The DNCC asked everyone to pray for his early recovery.

Annisul was admitted to a neurology hospital in London on August 13.

Immunity granted

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A government source said Mugabe, who is 93, told negotiators he wanted to die in Zimbabwe and had no plans to live in exile.

"It was very emotional for him and he was forceful about it," said the source, who is not authorised to speak on the details of the negotiated settlement.

"For him it was very important that he be guaranteed security to stay in the country...although that will not stop him from travelling abroad when he wants to or has to," the source said.

Mugabe resigned on Tuesday as parliament began a process to impeach him, sparking wild celebrations in the streets. His rapid downfall after 37 years in power was triggered by a battle to succeed him that pitted Mnangagwa against Mugabe's much younger wife Grace.

Power tariff to rise from December

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This is the eighth retail power tariff hike in the last eight years, and the previous one was in September 2015.

Meanwhile, in a press release yesterday, left-leaning political parties announced that they would observe a half-day hartal across the country on November 30, protesting the hike.

The commission, however, withdrew the minimum charge for the use of power, giving some comfort to poor households who consume very low amount of electricity.

The marginal power consumers are charged Tk 90 a month by Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board and Tk 100 a month by the BPDB even if they consume electricity worth less than that amount.

As a result, the monthly bill for 30 lakh consumers, who use less than 50 units and account for 13 percent of all consumers in the country, will go down from next month, said the commission in a statement.

It also said the tariff hike would not affect 38 percent of consumers.

The retail rate for households using 0-50 unit has been fixed at Tk 3.50 per unit; 0-75 unit at Tk 4 per unit; 76-200 unit at Tk 5.45 per unit; 201-300 unit at Tk 5.70 per unit; 301-400 unit at Tk 6.02 per unit; 401-600 unit at Tk 9.30 per unit and above 600 units at Tk 10.72 per unit.

Per unit power cost for irrigation

IMPACT OF POWER TARIFF HIKE AT RETAIL LEVEL

CONSUMER CATEGORY	UNIT USED	EXISTING BILL (TK/M)	NEW BILL (TK/M)	BILL INCREASE/DECREASE (TK/M)	% INCREASE/DECREASE
Residential	75	310	325	+15	+4.8%
	100	439	461	+22	+5.0%
	150	711	759	+48	+6.7%
	250	1,251	1,341	+90	+7.2%
	350	1,815	1,952	+137	+7.5%
	450	2,547	2,743	+196	+7.7%
	1,000	7,939	8,543	+604	+7.7%

SOURCE: BPDB

pumps will be Tk 4.

Small industries will have to pay Tk 8.20 to Tk 9.84 a unit, depending on the period of the day.

Educational and religious institutions, charities and hospitals will have to spend Tk 5.73 for using every unit of power, while per unit power cost for street lamps, water pumps and battery charging will be Tk 7.70.

Depending on the day, commercial users and offices will have to pay Tk 10.30 to Tk 12.36 per unit.

In February this year, the Bangladesh Power Development Board submitted a proposal to increase the bulk power tariff to Tk 5.59 a unit from Tk 4.87, which is a 14.78 percent hike.

The BPDB had sought a 14.78 percent hike while other power distributors demanded up to 22 percent increase at retail level.

Prof Shamsul Alam, energy adviser to the Consumers Association of

Bangladesh (CAB), said the proposals to increase the power tariff were not logical. "During the hearings, the proposals could not be justified. Still, the tariff was hiked."

Measures like producing less power burning diesel and rationalising capacity payment (payments for being available to produce power) for rental and quick rental power plants could have saved at least Tk 7,843 crore in 2015-16 fiscal year or Tk 1.56 per unit, according to the CAB.

The savings would have brought down the bulk rate, which would have reflected in the retail rate, Shamsul added.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said the tariff of electricity has reached a level that is going to make Bangladesh uncompetitive in the export market.

"Bangladesh used to enjoy an advantage in the export market

because of cheap electricity price. That advantage has already eroded. Now we are getting into an area where we already have costly electricity. The trend is that it would go up further."

He said unfortunately, the government was not focusing on how to make electricity more affordable and did not pay enough attention to setting up medium to large power plants and coal-based power plants and accelerating power imports from India.

"Electricity in India is quite cheap and available on the trading floor. All you need is regulatory framework and permission so the private sector, as well as BPDB, can import electricity by taking part in the auction. Indian producers would also like to export power to Bangladesh because they have overinvested in the sector."

The BERC held a series of public hearings on the proposals of state-owned power distributors from September 25 to October 5.

It also held a special public hearing on power tariff reduction proposal placed by the CAB to reduce the bulk power tariff.

The CAB had proposed reducing the bulk tariff price by Tk 1.32 per unit by taking different measures and implementing the previous BERC order to ensure the purchase of lowest-cost electricity by the BPDB.

sector, rather than allowing more banks.

"More banks will prove to be detrimental to the banking sector and the overall economy as well," he said.

Vice-Chairman Md Jashim Uddin of Bengal Group was, however, hopeful of getting the banking licence and the business potential.

"The country's businesses are expanding. So, setting up of more banks will help the businesses," he told The Daily Star recently.

He said one or two new banks were not meeting expectations but the other ones were running their operations properly.

Approached by The Daily Star, Bangladesh Bank Deputy Governor SK Sur Chowdhury declined to comment on the matter of new banks.

2013.

"The government should learn from the past. Allowing any new bank will not bring any good to the financial sector," he said.

He claimed that the BB had issued licences to nine banks considering the political backing of the owners and despite severe criticisms from different quarters.

The nine banks had adopted an aggressive lending strategy in a competitive market, which deteriorated their asset quality, he noted.

He said 57 banks in Bangladesh was too many and that weaker banks should merge with stronger ones.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the government and the BB should focus on reforms and establish discipline in the banking

Khaleda

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and a list of her witnesses in the case.

After the hearing, the makeshift court at Bakshibazar fixed November 30 for the next hearing.

In 2011, Anti-Corruption Commission filed the Zia Charitable Trust graft case with Tejgaon Police Station accusing four, including Khaleda, of abusing power to raise funds for the trust.

Khaleda had also placed similar statement in the Zia Orphanage Trust Graft case.

In July 2008, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case with Ramna Police Station accusing Khaleda, her eldest son Tarique Rahman, and four others of misappropriating over Tk 2.10 crore that had come as grants from a foreign bank.