

## RETURN OF ROHINGYAS

## Rakhine situation not conducive yet

UNHCR says; refugee crisis 'grave security risk', International Crisis Group warns

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The present conditions in Rakhine are not conducive for safe and sustainable return of the Rohingya refugees, said the UN refugee agency yesterday.

"Deep divisions between communities remain unaddressed and humanitarian access is inadequate," UNHCR Deputy High Commissioner Kelly Clements said during a press conference at a city hotel.

She said refugees are still fleeing, with some 1,500 arriving in Cox's Bazar a week, and they suffered immense violence and trauma, witnessing deaths of family members and friends.

"Most have little or nothing to go back to -- their homes and villages have been destroyed ... it is critical that returns do not take place precipitously or prematurely," said Clements before she left last night following a three-day visit to Bangladesh, including Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar.

Since August 25, over 625,000

Rohingyas crossed over from Myanmar into Bangladesh fleeing a brutal military crackdown that came in response to insurgent attacks on police and army posts by Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (Arsa).

Myanmar and Bangladesh signed a repatriation deal, but critics said Myanmar has not taken initiatives to create conditions for safe return of the Rohingyas.

Also, certain conditions proposed in the deal, including the one that the Rohingyas have to prove their residence in Myanmar with documents are not feasible, they said.

Kelly Clements said clearly this is a population who fled without documents or the documents have been destroyed in the flight from Myanmar.

"We have to work very closely with Bangladesh and Myanmar in case of other ways of verification of their residence in Myanmar," she said.

The UNHCR hopes to advise both governments on its practical application

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A taskforce to stop illegal stone extraction from river beds in Sylhet destroys an engine that was being used to pump out water. The taskforce seized and destroyed 29 engines yesterday in the Khasi river in Jaintiapur upazila.

PHOTO:

STAR

## ONE PLANET SUMMIT PM to leave for Paris on Monday

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will travel to France on December 11 to attend the One Planet Summit, an event for discussing funding of the fight against climate change.

She is going there at the joint invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and World Bank President Jim Yong Kim.

The PM, who will attend the summit on December 12 in Paris, will return home on December 14, official sources said.

The French government has upped the momentum by announcing concrete plans for its own One Planet Summit, which will have more than 100 countries' representatives and will focus on funding the fight against climate change.

Foreign ministry officials in Dhaka said during her speech at the summit, the PM would reiterate Bangladesh's support for the Paris Agreement and positive attitude towards participating in international cooperation to address climate change.

According to a recent report of German think tank Germanwatch,

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## Fear grows for new uprising

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Israeli forces dispersed several hundred protesters with tear gas at a checkpoint at the entrance to Ramallah, while the Palestinian Red Crescent reported dozens wounded from tear gas, rubber bullets and live fire in the West Bank.

Three Palestinians were wounded east of the city of Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip, medical sources and witnesses said.

Trump's defiant move -- making good on a pledge made during his 2016 presidential campaign -- ends seven decades of US ambiguity on the status of the Holy City, which is claimed by both Israelis and Palestinians.

Trump said it marks the start of a "new approach" to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"It is time to officially recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel," he said in a speech from the White House on Wednesday, urging calm and "the voices of tolerance to prevail over the purveyors of hate."

But his willingness to part with international consensus on such a sensitive issue drew increasingly urgent warnings from around the world.

EU diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini said the decision could take the region "backwards to even darker

times."

Russia said it viewed the move with "serious concern" and Saudi Arabia called it "unjustified and irresponsible."

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said it would put the region in a "ring of fire."

"Hey Trump! What do you want to do?" he asked.

"What kind of approach is this? Political leaders do not stir things up, they seek to make peace."

Palestinian leaders were outraged, with president Mahmud Abbas saying Trump had disqualified the United States from its traditional role as peace broker in the Middle East conflict.

Palestinian shops in east Jerusalem, including the Old City, as well as in the West Bank were largely shuttered and schools closed on after a general strike was called.

"By this decision, America became a very small country, like any small country in the world, like Micronesia," Salah Zuhikheh, 55, told AFP in Jerusalem's Old City.

"America was a great country for us and everyone."

Trump's move left many angry US allies struggling to find a diplomatic response.

Through gritted teeth, Britain described the move as "unhelpful" and France called it "regrettable." Germany

said plainly that it "does not support" Trump's decision.

Eight countries including Britain, France and Italy pressed for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council in response, which was set for today.

Trump also kicked off the process of moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

In doing so, he begins to make good on a campaign promise dear to US evangelical Christian and right-wing Jewish voters -- as well as donors.

Trump's predecessors, from Bill Clinton to George Bush, had made the same promise, but quickly reneged upon taking office.

The 45th US president was determined to show his arrival in Washington spells the end of business as usual, suggesting his predecessors failed to act though lack of "courage."

Israel seized Arab east Jerusalem in the Six-Day War of 1967 and later annexed it in a move never recognised by the international community.

The Palestinians want the eastern sector as the capital of their future state.

Several peace plans have unravelled in the past decades over the issue of how to divide sovereignty or oversee holy sites in Jerusalem.

The international community does not recognise the ancient city as Israel's

capital, insisting the issue can only be resolved in negotiations -- a point reiterated by UN chief Antonio Guterres in the wake of Trump's decision.

Guterres implicitly criticised Trump, stressing his opposition to "any unilateral measures that would jeopardise the prospect of peace."

Trump insisted the move did not prejudice final talks, saying it simply reflected the reality that west Jerusalem is and will continue to be part of Israel under any settlement.

"Peace is never beyond the grasp of those willing to reach it," said the US leader, who declared that "this decision is not intended in any way to reflect a departure from our strong commitment to facilitate a lasting peace."

"The United States would support a two-state solution if agreed to by both sides," Trump said, as he announced that Vice President Mike Pence would travel to the region in the coming days.

Trump further stated that the United States was not taking a position on any "final status issues, including the specific boundaries of the Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem, or the resolution of contested borders."

"Those questions are up to the parties involved," he said.

## Amar Desh editor sued for 'treason'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Accusing Amar Desh acting editor Mahmudur Rahman of treason by "making derogatory comments" on Bangabandhu and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, an Awami League leader of Natore has filed a case seeking Tk 1,000 crore in damages.

Lawyer Malek Sheikh, organising secretary of Natore AL, lodged the case with Natore Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court yesterday afternoon.

After a hearing, the court ordered Natore Sadar Police Station to investigate the matter.

The plaintiff said Mahmudur, while speaking at a seminar at the Jatiya Press Club on December 1, made defamatory remarks about Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and their family.

He said Mahmudur insulted and lied about Bangabandhu's family, termed Bangladesh a "colony of India", and claimed that the present government was illegal.

The complainant said the acting Amar Desh editor insulted Bangabandhu's ideals and offended the prime minister and her family.

## Stop attacks on Rohingyas

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condemns the "horrific actions" of the Myanmar military and security forces, and calls for an immediate cessation of violence.

"Hundreds have been killed," Royce said.

"At least 200 villages have been burned to the ground, landmines have been placed inside Burma's border with Bangladesh, maiming refugees who are seeking safe haven. There are reports of rapes and all types of violence committed against the Rohingyas."

In his remark on the House floor, New York Democratic Representative Eliot Engel said the resolution called on Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi to exercise moral leadership, something that is needed now more than ever.

"We reject the army's claims that what's taking place in Myanmar is a so-called counter-terrorism measure -- that's nonsense. It's a textbook ethnic cleansing, that's what it is."

"We should also encourage other governments to stay engaged and continue to address the pressing needs of these refugees -- needs that will only grow as long as this situation remains unresolved," said Engel, ranking member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

"Bangladesh deserves our deep gratitude for opening its doors to the Rohingyas at a time when our government slams the door shut."

Engel further said, "The governments of Burma and Bangladesh have struck a deal to begin repatriating Rohingyas next month, but it's not yet clear that anyone is interested in returning right now."

Commenting on the passage of the resolution, Republican Representative Steve Chabot told the VOA, "The Burmese military's widespread brutality toward Rohingya civilians over the last few months and its attempts to drive them out of the country are deeply disturbing."

"That is why Congressman Crowley

and I introduced resolution to condemn this ethnic cleansing and show the American people's outrage at these attacks.

"This resolution calls on Burmese authorities to work with the international community to resolve the crisis while also calling on Secretary [of State Rex Tillerson] to impose sanctions on those responsible for human rights abuses," Chabot added.

Tillerson shifted the US approach to the crisis last month when he deemed the violence against the Rohingyas ethnic cleansing, saying, "This violence must stop, this persecution must stop."

Congresswoman Betty McCollum, who visited the refugee camps in Bangladesh last month, said the congressional fact-finding mission has noted that their visits to refugee camps and conversations with survivors made it clear that the persecution of the Rohingyas in Rakhine is a "severe humanitarian crisis that demands robust" American leadership.

"This resolution is an important first step in demonstrating that Congress will not tolerate human rights abuses against Rohingyas. As our delegation saw, there is a path forward. The Burmese government and military must fully implement the recommendations of former UN secretary general Kofi Annan's advisory commission," McCollum said.

A bipartisan sanctions bill, introduced by Engel and Chabot last month, could mean cutting US military ties with Myanmar and imposing harsh sanctions on industries that fund the Burmese military.

If passed, the bill would also reimpose sanctions on the lucrative Burmese gem trade that were lifted last year by the then US president Barack Obama in an executive order.

**CHINA'S CALL FOR DIALOGUE** China has reiterated its call for "dialogue and consultation" between Dhaka and Naypyitaw to resolve the Rohingyas crisis and expressed satisfaction at the progress achieved so far

towards that direction.

"We are very happy to note that Bangladesh and Myanmar are making progress in settling the issue... the Chinese side will continue to work closely with the relevant parties to promote dialogue and consultation for a long term solution to the Rohingyas crisis," Wang Yajun, assistant minister for the International Department of Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), said yesterday.

He was speaking at a briefing in Dhaka's Sonargaon Hotel about the outcome of the 19th National Congress of the CPC held in Beijing recently.

The Chinese leader, who arrived in Dhaka on Wednesday on a three-day Bangladesh visit with a high-profile delegation, expressed satisfaction over the signing of a bilateral agreement between Dhaka and Naypyitaw for repatriating the Rohingyas sheltered in Bangladesh.

Wang Yajun said China has been urging the global community to create an "enabling environment" for dialogue and consultation to address the Rohingyas issue.

Lauding Bangladesh's role, he said the country has made tremendous efforts in giving shelter to the Rohingyas. "The Chinese side highly appreciates the good gesture from Bangladesh."

He further said China fully understands the pressure faced by Bangladesh in economic, social and environmental aspects.

The CPC leader said China's three-step suggestions to find a solution to the Rohingyas crisis has been acknowledged by Bangladesh and Myanmar as well as the international community.

Earlier, Awami League Presidium Member Faruk Khan, who was present at the briefing, sought China's support to find a solution to the Rohingyas crisis soon.

Chinese Ambassador in Dhaka Ma Mingqiang moderated the briefing.

## No talks to bring BNP to polls

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capital, Hasina said the unilateral declaration will create anarchy around the world, reports UNB.

"There is a UN resolution on the issue. So steps should be taken as per the resolution. No one will accept such violation of the UN resolution... this is my statement," she said.

East Jerusalem was supposed to be the capital of Palestine if the border drawn after the 1967 war is considered. There should be a status quo on that, she noted.

The press conference was held to brief the media about the outcome of her just-concluded Cambodia visit, but issues related to the election, Rohingyas crisis, corruption charges against the BNP chief and her family dominated the event.

At the beginning, the PM read out a statement highlighting the achievements of her three-day visit and her government's plan to strengthen ties with Phnom Penh in different fields.

Later, replying to a question, she dismissed the possibility of an early election, saying "the country is not in any crisis for which it should go for snappolls".

On the Rohingyas crisis, the PM said her government continued to receive enormous global support, and that during her Cambodia tour she requested Phnom Penh to pursue ASEAN leaders to support the Rohingyas cause.

Asked to comment on a recent remark by Khaleda about granting pardon if the BNP returned to power, Hasina said she found the comment rather ambiguous.

"I'm not quite clear whether the BNP chairperson was showing mercy or if she was seeking it for her attempt to kill me by launching the 2004 grenade attack."

"What offence have I committed that I need her pardon?" she said.

Rather the BNP chairperson should offer an apology for the killing of former finance minister Shah MS Kibria, Ahasanullah Master, the gre-

nade attack of August 21, 2004, and the killings of several thousand Awami League leaders and workers after assuming office as PM in 2001, she added.

Hasina also accused the BNP of all attempts on her life saying, "every incident took place following their instigations and threats".

About the corruption charges against Khaleda, she said her government did not file any case against the BNP chief, although the BNP government filed a dozen cases against her.

"All corruption charges against Khaleda Zia were brought by the past caretaker government, which was represented by the people, including the president, the chief of the caretaker government and the then army chief -- all favourable to Khaleda Zia," she said.

The PM also slammed Khaleda for "trying to evade justice," saying the BNP chief applied for staying a graft case more than 150 times and filed 22 to 23 writ petitions to delay the proceedings.

Hasina also recalled the country-wide arson attacks "by BNP and Jamaat" in 2013, 2014 and 2015, and said Khaleda should offer an apology to the nation for those misdeeds.

About allegations that Khaleda laundered huge sums to Saudi Arabia, the prime minister said it was regrettable that the news was reported by the foreign press, not by the local media.

"It is very unfortunate that I have seen no interest on the part of the local media, except for two TV channels and two newspapers, to run the news," she said.

"I don't understand why the [local] media is so weak towards the patrons of assailants and anti-liberation forces," she said.

CAMBODIA VISIT

Elaborating on her Cambodia visit, the PM said the two sides discussed enhancing trade and investment, cooperation in agriculture, fisheries, civil aviation, ICT, labour and vocational training, aquaculture and tour-

ism.

Both sides decided to hold the first foreign minister-level meeting on Joint Commission in the first half of next year, aiming to deepen diplomatic ties.

She said she and her Cambodia counterpart Hun Sen agreed to take necessary steps to deepen investment and trade relations considering the huge potential in the areas.

The two sides are also considering a proposal for opening of resident diplomatic missions in each other's capital.

The prime minister said an announcement was made for naming the Baridhara Park Road in Dhaka after late King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia and naming Road-337 of the Cambodian capital after Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

BNP REACTS

The BNP reacted critically to the PM's comment about their participation in the election.

Party Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said the notion that the BNP would contest the polls regardless of the situation was wrong.

He also urged the PM to make responsible comments, leaving aside her ego.

"It is a political right of a party to participate in elections. In the context of Bangladesh, there is no question of taking part in an election by giving an undertaking. Rather those in power will be compelled to take initiatives to hold an inclusive election."

"We repeatedly said we do not want confrontation, instability. We want peaceful transfer of power through an inclusive election. If the prime minister is a responsible person, she will understand the expectations of the people."

On PM's remark that the government would not hold talks with the BNP, he said, "It is her responsibility. It is the responsibility of the prime minister to ensure an election atmosphere and ensure participation of all political parties."