



PHOTO: SHAKHAWAT HOSSEN SHAFAT

"You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is like an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty." — Mahatma Gandhi

SNAPSHOT

MAILBOX

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Myanmar Army behind the crimes

Amnesty International, a New York-based human rights watchdog, recently published a fact-finding report on the atrocities in Rakhine state in Myanmar which revealed that top army personnel were responsible for crimes against humanity of the Rohingya community who then fled to Bangladesh.

The European Union has already imposed sanctions on seven top army officials of Myanmar who were deployed in Rakhine state during the crackdown against the Rohingya community. Meanwhile, the Myanmar government has already sacked a major general and the army commander in Rakhine state and another Lieutenant General has resigned from his job. The Myanmar army denied has allegations of widespread crimes several times but both the sackings and resignations indirectly proved who was behind the crimes.

The crimes have been called "genocide", for this, Amnesty International strongly recommended Myanmar to be referred for justice at the International Criminal Court (ICC) immediately. The Rohingya community also demanded justice when the UN Secretary General and World Bank President recently visited the camps in Cox's Bazar.

Md Zillur Rahaman
Lalmohan, Bhola



PHOTO: REUTERS

RMG and its future

RMG brings in almost \$30 billion for our economy, contributing more than 50 percent of our GDP while it employs 5 million workers directly and considering the supply chain, more than 10 million people are involved in this trade overall. After the Rana Plaza tragedy, many apparel factories went for a complete makeover of practices regarding workers safety and improving the work environment. Before the Rana Plaza tragedy, the

number of factories were more, after the incident many factories had to shut down as they couldn't afford the cost for safety upgrades nor did they get any grants. This created huge unemployment and losses while the fittest factories survived.

After 5 years, the scenario has changed a lot as of the 10 best RMG factories in the world, seven are located in Bangladesh. However, discrepancies are widening as foreign buyers or brands pay very low price but are selling for almost 10 times higher prices

in their retail stores and are earning huge profits. On the other hand, government brands are demanding workers' pay rise but where will this rise come from? Also, the cost of production of gas, electricity, yarn, cotton is spiraling fast. The industry is facing stiff competition from other Southeast Asian countries. Before it's too late, regulations and policies should be industry-friendly so that this flourishing sector does not perish.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

A 'secret' memorandum of understanding (MoU) between UN agencies and the Myanmar government, a draft of which has been leaked online, revealed that Rohingya refugees cannot expect much change back home on their proposed return. While the UN is yet to publicly release the final MoU, the fact that the Rohingya themselves had not been consulted has been criticised by the Rohingya community.

In earlier returns too, in 1978 and the early 1990s, the Rohingya had not been consulted even though the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was involved in facilitating returns. This time, the return is even more complicated as more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees have crossed the border in the latest influx since August 2017. UNHCR has called this MoU "the first and necessary step" to create conditions conducive for the return of the refugees.

The terms of the 10-page agreement had been kept hush-hush, despite repeated calls for the MoU to be made public. Yanghee Lee, special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, at a June 27 session of the Human Rights Council, stated, "It is disconcerting that the MoU remains not publicly available and there has not been transparency about its terms... Most frightful still is the fact that the Rohingya refugees have not been included in any of the discussions around this MoU nor consulted in relation to the repatriation process as a whole."

A draft of the classified document, dated May 30, was finally obtained and subsequently published online by the Free Rohingya Coalition (FRC), a global network of Rohingya activists, more than three weeks after the final MoU was signed by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UNHCR, and the government of Myanmar on June 6. The copy of the MoU has also been verified by Reuters.

"They signed the MoU in public but no one knew what was in it. The UN agencies didn't consult with Rohingya representatives who are working for Rohingya rights inside Myanmar, in the camps in Bangladesh, and across the world," says Rohingya activist and an FRC coordinator, Nay San Lwin, to *Star Weekend*.

The terms of the MoU

Noticeably, the tripartite MoU does not refer to the Rohingya by name, instead referring to "displaced persons from Rakhine State who have been duly verified as residents of Myanmar" as eligible for return. It goes on to say that

the government "will issue to all returnees the appropriate identification papers and ensure a clear and voluntary pathway to citizenship to those eligible."

In the text, citizenship is mentioned conditionally although it is a key demand of the Rohingya refugees. Mohibullah, chairman of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights, based in the refugee camps, says

repatriation of the refugees. Photographs of a new camp in Maungdaw to accommodate returnees show desolate houses surrounded by barbed wire, more reminiscent of detention centres than of 'reception centres'.

Existing camps in central Rakhine for those internally displaced in earlier violence in 2012 have been called 'concentration camps' and are notorious

Rohingya leaders in the camps, however, say they won't return without guarantee of citizenship, freedom of movement, and assurance of their safety. This is a sticking point for the refugees who consider free movement and recognition as refugees crucial for their return, says Mohibullah. "We will not accept this MoU unless we are properly accorded our rights. So far, no one [in the camps] has expressed their willingness to return."

RETURN TO MORE OF THE SAME

A draft of a confidential agreement between UN agencies and Myanmar does not contain any concessions for Rohingya refugees on their proposed return

MALIHA KHAN

to *Star Weekend*, "We will not accept these identification documents. These identify us as Rakhine Muslims and not as refugees and as Rohingya." Since 2015, the Rohingya have been required to carry National Verification Cards, a residency document provided by the government which falls short of citizenship and that they reject.

The MoU also states that it is for those "who wish to return voluntarily, safely and in dignity to their own households and original places of residence or to a safe and secure place nearest to it of their choice." There is thus no guarantee that the Rohingya will be able to return to their lands in their own villages. There is also the fact that hundreds of villages have been burned or razed to the ground by security forces, as has been seen in satellite images released by Human Rights Watch and other organisations.

More likely, the refugees will be sent to 'reception centres' and temporary resettlement camps near the border which the Myanmar government set up following bilateral agreements signed with Bangladesh for voluntary

for already detaining some 120,000 Muslims, mainly Rohingya, who are unable to move freely and have no access to education, employment, or healthcare.

Just as the agreement does not explicitly guarantee citizenship, it similarly does not guarantee freedom of movement. The MoU states "returnees will enjoy the same freedom of movement as all other Myanmar nationals in Rakhine State"—hardly assurance that things will be different this time for the Rohingya, who earlier too could not move freely within or outside Rakhine.

Another point of contention is the children born in the camps of Bangladesh, whom the MoU refers to as "born out of unwarranted incidents" and calls for them to be certified by a Bangladeshi court in order to be considered for verification. "We are outraged and dismayed by the usage of 'unwarranted incidents'. There is significant evidence, investigated by medical agencies based in the camps, that Rohingya women and young girls were brutally raped and gang-raped by the Myanmar military," says Lwin. The

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