

J&K, ARTICLE 370

It's an internal matter of India

Says foreign ministry after Jaishankar's visit to Dhaka; the Indian foreign minister says Indo-Bangla ties on a 'positive trajectory'

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh yesterday termed the Indian government's revoking of article 370 "an internal issue of India".

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said this in a press release published on its official website 15 days into the scrapping of the article that provided special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

"Bangladesh maintains that the abrogation of article 370 by the Indian government is an internal issue of India," says the press release.

The statement comes a day after Indian External Affairs Minister of India S Jaishankar held meetings with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen.

"Bangladesh has always advocated, as a matter of principle, that maintaining regional peace and stability, as well as development should be a priority for all countries," the release added.

The BJP-led Indian government stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its autonomy and statehood, creating two federal territories, on August 5.

The order revokes article 370 of India's constitution, which forbids Indians outside the state from permanently settling, buying land, holding local government jobs, and securing educational scholarships.

INDO-BANGLA RELATIONS

Before leaving Dhaka for Kathmandu yesterday morning, External Affairs

Minister of India S Jaishankar said it was good to see the two countries' ties to be on a positive trajectory, UNB reports.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs M Shahriar Alam and Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Riva Ganguly Das saw him off at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 10:30am, said an official.

Jaishankar said he had "productive discussions" with his Bangladesh counterpart AK Abdul Momen on Tuesday, according to UNB.

The Indian minister met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban on the same day.

Bangladesh and India are working to find "mutually acceptable formulas" to share water of 54 common rivers keeping India's commitment to resolving Teesta issue unchanged.

Jaishankar said India's partnership with Bangladesh remains an example of what neighbours can do if they work together as partners.

He said the Indian government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was determined to ensure that this partnership was a role model for South Asia and the world.

The minister said they would like to offer all possible support to realise Bangladesh's development agenda which was in India's interest as well.

India is a leading development partner of Bangladesh and has extended concessional lines of credit to the tune of around \$8 billion.



Medical students helping out doctors and nurses in treating dengue patients at a ward in Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Doomed to fail again?

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against for decades.

As part of the latest repatriation plan, 235 Rohingya families were privately consulted by the UN refugee agency, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in association with the officials of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) over the last two days, but it could not be confirmed if any of the families had agreed to return.

"The consultation with the families has been recorded. These files will be sent to the higher authorities of the government. At the same time, the consultation will continue," RRRC Mohammad Abul Kalam told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

Asked if the repatriation would start today, he did not give a direct answer. "We are fully prepared. It can start anytime," he said.

Before any repatriation takes place, refugees are taken to transit camps and kept there for two to three days, but as of yesterday, no Rohingya was taken to any of the two transit camps -- one at Keruntoli in Teknaf and the other in Chundhum border area in Naikkhanchhari of Bandarban.

The process was announced by Myanmar's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Myint Thu on August 15 and scheduled to begin today.

Myanmar had cleared the names of 3,450 Rohingyas from a list of 22,000 plus Rohingyas sent by Bangladesh.

In early August, Bangladesh provided the approved list to the UNHCR in Dhaka and sought its assistance in assessing their willingness to return to Myanmar.

Accordingly, UNHCR and RRRC officials conducted an "intention survey" on those listed, although it could not be ascertained how many took part in it.

Diplomatic sources said China, which wants a bilateral solution to the Rohingya crisis, is mediating the repatriation process.

'A SECRET LIST'

Nearly 700 Rohingyas of camps 24, 26 and 27 in Shalban of Teknaf have signed a statement expressing concerns at the sudden repatriation plan made without their consultation.

"We are very concerned about how this secret list of names was created and why we are included in it. We never volunteered [for] our names to go on

the list," said a statement prepared by the community leaders of the camps.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the statement.

It said Rohingya leaders met a delegation from Myanmar and ASEAN countries in July and demanded that Rohingya representatives be engaged in any repatriation dialogue. The Myanmar delegation agreed to meet again in two months to continue the talks.

"While we were preparing for it [the talks], suddenly Myanmar and the UNHCR started their own repatriation plan without consulting us," said the statement.

"We want to make it very clear to the UNHCR, ASEAN and the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh that there will be no repatriation without talking to us first," it said.

Bodirul Islam, a Rohingya leader from camp 26, said the situation in the Rakhine State right now was not safe for their return.

"Clashes between the AA [Arakan Army] and Myanmar army is still going on. So, it is not safe for us to go there now," said Baron Roshid of camp 26.

Another leader, Nosima, from camp 26, said Rohingya women had been raped and killed. "We need security. Without security we will never go back."

"We need a real guarantee of citizenship, security and promise of returning our original ancestral lands. We must talk to the Myanmar government about these before repatriation," said Md Islam.

The Rohingyas raised similar concerns and demands even when the first round of repatriation was scheduled to begin on November 15 last year, a year after Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a bilateral deal in this regard.

To help Myanmar create conditions favourable for the Rohingyas to return, the UNDP and UNHCR signed a tripartite deal with Myanmar in June 2018, nearly a year after 740,000 Rohingyas fled military atrocities in Rakhine, which was described as having "genocidal intent" by UN independent investigators.

The UN still maintains that the situation there is not right for repatriation.

CALLS TO SUSPEND REPATRIATION

Non-government organisations and human rights bodies have asked the Myanmar and Bangladesh governments

to suspend plans to repatriate Rohingya refugees until they can ensure an atmosphere conducive to a safe and voluntary return.

"Myanmar has yet to address the systematic persecution and violence against the Rohingya, so refugees have every reason to fear for their safety if they return," said Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director of Human Rights Watch.

"Many Rohingyas have said they would like to return to Myanmar so long as they don't suffer the same abuse, indignities, and atrocities they have endured in the past," Ganguly said.

Therefore, Bangladesh should not join this "dangerous rush" to send refugees back to where the conditions might force them to flee again, she said.

"We know that thousands of Rohingyas back in Myanmar are still in detention camps," one refugee told Human Rights Watch, referring to an estimated 125,000 Rohingyas who have been confined to open-air camps in central Rakhine State since 2012.

"If those people are released and return to their villages, then we will know it is safe to return and we will go back home."

Sixty-one NGOs also made similar states. These include Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, Concern Worldwide, Catholic Relief Services, ActionAid, Danish Refugee Council, Adventist Development and Relief Agency International, Action Contre la Faim France, World Concern, Oxfam, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children and World Vision.

It said discriminatory policies in Myanmar meant that Rohingya communities in Rakhine continue to face severe movement restrictions, as well as limited access to education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities.

Consultation with displaced communities is limited, and they remain unable to return to their original communities or another location of choice, the NGOs said in a statement yesterday.

"Achieving durable solutions requires the Myanmar government to address the fundamental issues of equal rights and ensure that all communities in the Rakhine State can live in safety, access basic services and pursue livelihoods opportunities," it added.

Med students

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motivate them to use the nets at all times."

The students also provide mental support to the patients and help lab technicians with the tests essential for dengue diagnosis, he added.

They also help out the patients who do not have anyone to take their blood samples to the lab or receive their test reports from labs, he said.

"I feel content when I help with the crisis. Usually, the authorities do not allow medical students [to do these] before their internship."

The hospital authorities have dedicated two wards with 200 beds each for dengue patients. The management also dedicated more healthcare personnel at the wards to handle the rush of patients.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), 1,626 dengue patients had been admitted to different hospitals across the country in the 24 hours since 8:00am on Tuesday.

At least 57,995 people have taken treatment at hospitals with dengue this year.

Prof Dr Uttam Kumar Barua, director of Suhrawady Medical College Hospital, said he requested the college authorities to let 5th year students to help with the tasks at the hospitals.

At the Mugda Medical College and Hospital, around 50 other 5th year students also gave similar voluntary services before Eid.

"But the services are not needed any longer because the pressure of dengue patients have fallen a little bit," said the hospital Director Amin Ahmed Khan.

According to the DGHS, a total of 2,388 dengue patients have been admitted to the Suhrawady hospital. Of them, 344 are now undergoing treatment.

WOMAN DIES

Khadia Aktar Nila, 27, a resident of Gendaria's Dayaganj, died of dengue on Tuesday night at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

She had been suffering from the fever since Eid and was admitted to the DMCH on August 16, said a family member.

At least 107 people died of dengue this year. But the official number is only 47.

Star reporter sued for using the word indigenous

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

A ward councillor in Khagrachhari filed a case against a reporter of The Daily Star on Tuesday for using the word indigenous in a report.

Ward-2 Councillor Masum Rana, who is also the president of a regional group called, Parbatya Adhikar Forum, filed the case against Sanjoy Kumar Barua, correspondent of the newspaper in Bandarban.

The case was filed with Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court in the district.

The plaintiff alleged that the journalist intentionally made provocations to destroy peace in the hills in the report titled, "Three indigenous villages face land grabbing".

After recording the case, the court directed the Police Bureau of Investigation of Chattogram to investigate the matter and submit a report by September 12.

The complainant could not be reached over the phone for comment.

Johnson, Merkel to face off in first Brexit talks

AFP, Berlin

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was scheduled visits Berlin yesterday to kick off a marathon of tense talks with key European and international leaders as the threat of a chaotic no-deal Brexit looms.

On his first foreign visit since taking office, he will seek to convince German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and on Thursday French President Emmanuel Macron, to renegotiate elements of the UK's impending divorce from the European Union -- something the EU leaders have already ruled out.

Then, at the weekend, all three will meet US President Donald Trump, a vocal supporter of Brexit and its champion Johnson, and the leaders of Canada, Italy and Japan at a G7 summit in the French seaside resort of Biarritz.

Johnson, in a do-or-die gamble, has insisted Britain will leave the EU on October 31, no matter whether it has ironed out remaining differences with the bloc or not, at the risk of economic turmoil.

The apparent hope is that the other 27 EU members will blink and make concessions to avoid a no-deal Brexit that would hurt people and companies on both sides of the Channel.

In Berlin, Johnson will be received with military honours at 1600 GMT before his talks with Merkel.

Although chances for a breakthrough appeared slim, a Merkel spokesman said that, after the two had spoken by phone, "sitting at a table together to discuss Brexit and other European issues ... is of course useful".

WORLD BANK ON WATER POLLUTION

Economic growth of some countries can be reduced by a third

AFP, Washington

Heavily polluted water is reducing economic growth by up to a third in some countries, a World Bank report said, calling for action to address human and environmental harm.

The report relied on what the Bank said was the biggest-ever database assembled on global water quality using monitoring stations, satellite data and machine learning models.

"Clean water is a key factor for economic growth. Deteriorating water quality is stalling economic growth, worsening health conditions, reducing food production, and exacerbating poverty in many countries," said World Bank Group President David Malpass on Tuesday.

The report found that when Biological Oxygen Demand -- an index of the degree of organic pollution and a proxy for overall water pollution -- crosses a threshold of 8 milligrams per liter, GDP growth in downstream regions drops by 0.83 percentage points, about a third for the mean growth rate of 2.33 percent used in the study.

This is because of impacts on health, agriculture, and ecosystems and a "stark indication that there often trade-offs between benefits of economic production and environmental quality, and that the externalities... can be circular," the report said.

A key contributor to poor water quality is nitrogen, essential for agricultural production but which leaches into rivers and oceans where it creates hypoxia and dead zones, and in the air where it forms nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas.

The report said that early exposure of children to nitrates affects their growth and brain development, reducing their health and earning potential.

For every additional kilogram of nitrogen fertilizer per hectare, yields may rise up to five percent, but childhood stunting increases as much as 19 percent and future adult earnings fall by up to two percent compared to those not affected.

And increased salinity as a result of manmade pressures such as irrigation, stormwater runoff, leaching of fertilizer, and urban wastewater discharge is pushing down agricultural yields.

The report estimated enough food is lost to saline water each year to feed 170 million people, about the population of Bangladesh.

The authors divided their recommendations into three main areas: information campaigns to raise awareness, prevention efforts to stem some of the worst problems and investments to treat pollution once it has occurred, with more modern technologies like reverse-osmosis offering new pathways.

US urges UN to extend Iran arms embargo, travel ban

AFP, United Nations

The US urged the United Nations Tuesday to extend an arms embargo on Tehran that is due to expire next year as part of the embattled Iran nuclear deal.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told the UN Security Council that the clock was ticking on a resolution restricting weapons sales to Iran that is due to end in October 2020.

Pompeo warned that the expiration of provisions in Security Council

Resolution 2231 would also see a travel ban on a key Iranian commander lifted.

"Time is drawing short to continue this activity of restricting Iran's capacity to foment its terror regime," he said.

"The international community will have plenty of time to see how long it has until Iran is unshackled to create new turmoil, and figure out what it must do to prevent that from happening," Pompeo added.



A dead Bengal tigress at Sharankhola range office of the forest department in the Sundarbans. Officials of the department found the carcass yesterday morning.

PHOTO: PARTHA CHAKRABORTY