

ROHINGYA RETURN

Fresh conflicts in Rakhine making it more difficult

Says UN high commissioner for human rights

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Rakhine State is now experiencing another wave of conflict and human rights violations and displacement, making it harder for the Rohingya to return, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said yesterday.

The new round of conflicts between so-called Arakan Army and Myanmar army and rights violations, two years after the horrific crackdown that forced nearly 743,000 Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh, is affecting both ethnic Rakhine and Rohingya communities.

It “will make it even harder for refugees and internally displaced people to return,” Bachelet said at her opening statement at the 42nd session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, which will continue until September 27.

The statement comes at a time when two attempts of Rohingya repatriation -- once on November 15 last year and then on August 22 -- failed as the refugees refused to return, saying that the conditions for return in Rakhine are not conducive and there is no guarantee of citizenship.

Bachelet said the recent escalation of clashes in Shan State and long-standing conflicts in Kachin State also cause displacement and human suffering, and undermine the peace process.

This session of the Council will hear the final report of the UN Fact Finding Mission, which has given the world a clear picture of the gravity and scale of the violations that have been committed across Myanmar. Myanmar is accused of genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya.

“The need for accountability is compelling and urgent, and I am very pleased to note that the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, which was established by the Council in its historic resolution 39/2, was declared operational by the Secretary-General in August,” said Bachelet.

She urged the Myanmar government to cooperate with the international mechanisms that have

been established both to ensure justice and consolidate Myanmar’s democratic transition.

Despite pressures from the international community, Myanmar has so far denied the allegations of genocide and ethnic cleansing. It has also not provided access to the UN investigators to Rakhine State.

Meanwhile, British human rights charity, ARTICLE 19, yesterday said the decision of Bangladesh authorities to restrict access to mobile telecommunications services by Rohingyas violates the rights to freedom of expression, information and non-discrimination.

The decision also follows the imposition by the Myanmar government of a mobile internet blackout in western Myanmar affecting areas that were formerly home to many Rohingyas.

“The order will have an enormously detrimental impact on the Rohingya refugee population,” said Faruq Faisel, ARTICLE 19’s regional director for Bangladesh and South Asia.

“These measures will deepen the vulnerability and isolation of a traumatised community that has suffered horrific violence and persecution.

Bangladeshi authorities claim they are protecting national security and public order but have failed to put forward any credible justification for such a sweeping measure.

Non-refugee communities residing near the camps have reportedly been impacted by the changes to mobile internet services.

ARTICLE 19 called on the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission to withdraw its recent order and to ensure that the Rohingya refugee community has unrestricted access to essential telecommunications services.

The rights body said the internet shutdown in Rakhine State is against international human rights law and violation of the rights to freedom of expression and information. It called on the Myanmar government to end the internet shutdown.

Australia girds for worst as bushfire season comes early

AFP, Sydney

Australia battled to contain around 160 bushfires in the east of the country yesterday, an early start to a wildfire season that authorities warn could be the worst in decades.

Drought and strong winds have turned swathes of Queensland and New South Wales to tinder, prompting fires that have already damaged dozens of buildings and forced thousands of people to evacuate.

Australia’s hot, dry climate makes bushfires a regular occurrence, but

scientists say climate change is making conditions ever-more combustible.

Government-backed researchers have already predicted the next six months of southern hemisphere spring and summer have “the potential to be an active season” because of a very warm and dry start to the year.

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services assistant commissioner Brad Commens told AFP the early bushfire season had caught authorities off-guard.

Robi, GP launch legal battle

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beyond the legal provisions for realising the amount it claimed through a highly questionable audit. As a result, Robi had no option but to file a civil suit before the court,” he told The Daily Star.

In a separate statement, the GP yesterday said they consistently raised objections to the process, methodology and the findings of the BTRC auditor.

“Despite that, we have been pursuing continuously to establish a constructive dialogue with the regulator to reach an amicable transparent solution, including arbitration. Unfortunately, all our efforts had been unheeded by the BTRC and they have been seeking to realise the disputed audit claims by enforcing unwarranted measures,” it said.

Both the operators said issuing

show cause notices was “not lawful” as the matter was sub judice.

The telecom regulator ran separate audits into the two operators’ books from their inception until December 2014 and claimed the amount. However, both the operators disputed the amounts, claiming that they did not evade any taxes.

The claims include amounts for unpaid yearly spectrum fees, value added tax, revenue sharing etc. The BTRC has been claiming the amount since completing the audit for Robi in July last year and for GP in April this year.

On August 22, the government gave the go-ahead to the BTRC to serve show cause notices to the mobile carriers. The operators moved the court within days.

The telecom regulator says Robi owes Tk 867.24 crore to it and the GP Tk 12,579.95 crore.

Centre plans

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18 percent of Assam’s population and a majority of the party’s vote bank. Party MLA Silditya Dev had even alleged that the NRC was part of a “conspiracy to keep Hindus out and help Muslims”.

Shah yesterday said the NRC was “a problem”. “A lot of people think many people were left out of NRC. We want to assure that no illegal migrants will be able to stay in Assam and go to another state. We want the country to be rid of illegal migrants,” he said, assuring states like Meghalaya that have expressed concern about illegal migrants from Assam settling in their state.

At a North Eastern Council meeting in Guwahati on Sunday, Shah said, “I want to clearly say that not a single illegal migrant will be allowed to stay in the country by the Government of India. That is our commitment”.

The home minister has also assured that the Centre had “no plan

to abrogate the Article 371” of the constitution, which gives north-east its special status.

“Let me clarify this. (Articles) 370 and 371 has no relation. The citizenship bill will not hurt (Article) 371, the government of India will ensure it. We will ensure it does not infringe our tribal laws,” he said yesterday, referring to the government’s plan to bring a bill that will grant Indian citizenship to members of six minority communities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan even if they do not have valid documents.

The prospect of this that worried the northeastern states that want to keep their tribal culture free of outside influences.

The government’s move to end special status of Jammu and Kashmir has left states like Nagaland -- which also enjoys special status under the Article 371 of the constitution - concerned.



A bus skidded off a road and its front side fell into a ditch in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila early yesterday, leaving a woman dead and at least 16 other passengers injured. The wounded blamed reckless driving for the accident.

PHOTO: STAR

Trapped by lure of bright future

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Helpless, Mujad and the other youths started to think about an escape route. At one point, they gathered courage and finally managed to informed the matter to the law enforcers through their friends.

On Saturday, Rapid Action Battalion raided several rented apartments of the company and rescued about 150 youths, including 30 females, Assistant Superintendent of Police Sujoy Sarker, operations officer of Rab-1, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Rab arrested eight suspects during the drive, he said.

ASP Sujoy said the Multi-level Marketing (MLM) company embezzled crores of taka with promises of jobs that do not even exist.

The company targeted vulnerable job seekers in different districts and lured them into joining it with fake promises of good salaries and others perks, including accommodation and pensions, Rab said, adding that the victims were told the firm

was run by current and former officials of government and private organisations.

At times, they took money up to Tk 50,000 from each job-seeker in the name of “refundable security money”. They also took the job-seekers’ signatures on blank papers, Rab officials said.

They frequently changed apartments so that they could not be traced and the victims have less chances of knowing each other, he added.

Another victim, Mohammad Milton, 20, from Noakhali’s Begumganj, said he came to Uttara on receiving a similar phone call from his friend Zia.

As Milton arrived at the Lifeway Bangladesh (Pvt) Limited’s office, he was told his job would be to post different advertisements online.

Those running the office told him they were working for a special force of the government, Milton said.

He was promised a salary between Tk 15,000 and Tk 20,000 as well as free accommodation, food and treatment.

He even gave the company Tk 50,000 as deposit money. He was then taken to an apartment where he met another 15 other youths.

“The youths immediately told me that I did a mistake,” Milton recalled.

He said those from the company assured him that the youths were telling lies. They also took him to restaurants and different parties.

“But after a few days, they started torturing me mentally. I was forced to convince two of my friends into coming here and depositing Tk 50,000 each,” he said.

He said 15 jobseekers from Noakhali had joined the company.

During the Rab drive only three of them were rescued. “We don’t know the whereabouts of the rest,” he said.

Milton said some officials left the office hours before the Rab drive saying there were going to Cox’s bazar. “The 12 youths were probably with them,” he said.

The Daily Star tried to contact the company authorities several times yesterday, but none of them picked up calls from this correspondent.

Bribery rampant at sub-registrar offices

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41 offices of sub-registrars in those districts. The country has 497 sub-registrar’s offices.

TIB also collected data from the Directorate of Registration of the law ministry, talked to different stakeholders and used “capacity, transparency, accountability, and prevention of corruption” as indicators.

In 2017-18 fiscal year, 36.72 lakh deeds were registered under the Directorate of Registration and the government earned about Tk 12,433 crore in revenue during the process, the TIB report said.

Most of the deeds were land related.

The report said people had been offered “packages” to have their deeds registered. Sometimes it was a fixed amount and sometimes a percentage of the value of the land. The amount varied depending on the price, type, and location of the land as well as the type of deed and availability of other documents required to get it registered, it said.

Most service seekers had little or no idea about the actual fee for having

a deed made by deed writers. Most deed writers took additional money from them, even in the name of their association.

In many cases, a section of sub-registrars, apprentice deed copy makers, office assistants, mohorar, and deed writers give consent to illegal realisation of money from service seekers, the report said.

After an unscrupulous sub-registrar get his or her cut, the rest is shared among others involved, it said.

The report said people had to pay between Tk 1,000 and 5 lakh for deed registration and Tk 1,000 and Tk 7,000 for a copy of a deed. They had to pay Tk 500 to Tk 5,000 to deed writers’ association.

The report said a bribe of up to Tk 3 lakh was required to get enlisted as an apprentice deed copy maker, get a licence for a deed writer, and for inclusion in the deed writers’ association.

Up to Tk 8 lakh bribe is required for promotion to mohorar from an apprentice deed copy maker, up to Tk 10 lakh for promotion to an office assistant, and up to Tk 20 lakh for

transfer of a sub-registrar, it said.

For becoming a permanent deed copy maker, in many cases one had to secure “recommendations” from the mayors, lawmakers, and ministers on top of paying the bribe.

During the research, TIB found that complaint boxes were absent at 24 out of the 41 sub-registrars’ offices and people had not been made sufficiently aware of their right to file complaints.

In the report, TIB made 15 recommendations.

Iftekharuzzaman said with corruption controlled and transparency and accountability mechanisms established, the sector would yield more revenue for the government.

With good intention, the people responsible for corruption and irregularities could be identified and given exemplary punishments, he said.

The government also needs to modernise the sector, especially by introducing digitalisation of land registration and other land-related services. This would make controlling corruption easier, he added.

We need better players: Shakib

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winners as the Bangladesh players showed hardly any character, of which there was plenty in the opposition camp, despite Afghanistan playing just their third Test.

It was Shakib’s horrible shot selection, when he went for a cut off the first ball he faced after play resumed and only managed to edge chinaman bowler Zahir Khan, that was the hammer blow for the hosts.

It did not take long for Afghanistan to wrap up the Bangladesh innings. Soumya Sarkar was the only recognised batsman and he became the last wicket to fall as player-of-the-match and Afghan skipper Rashid Khan picked up his 11th wicket of the match, having picked up a five-for in Bangladesh’s first innings.

When dissecting their performance after the match, Shakib was asked how many marks, out of hundred, he would give his team for the performance over the past five days, and his reply was brief and to the point: “Zero”.

That made one wonder about why a team, after playing Tests for 19 years, would not get even one point from

their captain and what that said about the culture of cricket in the country.

“It is definitely hard to accept [the result]. It is very disappointing because we had four wickets and we had to play one hour and ten minutes. It’s difficult to explain about the others’ [dismissals], but I can explain mine. Because I got out off the first ball, that made the situation very difficult for the team. The responsibility is mostly on me. I could have done without playing the cut, as the ball was not there for that shot,” Shakib told reporters when asked how hard it was to accept the result.

Although he was not willing to call the defeat a shameful one, he did say that if Bangladesh really want to improve in Test cricket they need to improve the quality of the players.

“If we want to play more consistently, we need to improve the quality of the players. We need more quality players. Otherwise, we will have to continue banking on conditions and situations favouring us,” he said.

Over the need to improve the domestic structure, there was a bit of

needle in the captain’s voice when he said that it should have been looked after from the moment Bangladesh started playing Test cricket 19 years ago and that he is not the one to answer that question.

It is certainly a steep fall from being one of the top contenders to win the man-of-the-tournament award in the recent World Cup to being on the receiving end of a humbling loss. When asked if it was a difficult transition to accept, Shakib said, “I am right where I have always been, after the World Cup and now. Everyone can see it how they choose, that depends on them. I always try to perform. I cannot contribute in every match, that’s normal. And if a player is always selected [and plays well], he should get more match fees [than those who play badly].”

When asked whether he would give his suggestions to the BCB as the leader of the side, Shakib said, “If I don’t have to [lead the side], I think it will be better for my cricket [laughs], on a personal basis. But if I have to lead, of course I need to discuss a lot of things.”

XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE

One killed, five wounded in S Africa

AFP, Johannesburg

At least one person was killed and five others injured in Johannesburg on Sunday, police said, after security forces clashed with looters in the latest outbreak of xenophobic violence.

South Africa’s biggest city and other areas were hit by a surge of attacks against businesses owned by migrants in the last week, leaving at least 10 people dead and prompting protests from several African countries.

Riot police fired stun grenades and rubber bullets on Sunday to break up crowds targeting shops in the city’s Central Business District (CBD), police said.

“We can confirm one person was reported dead,” police spokesperson Xolani Fihla told AFP. “We can’t confirm the cause of death.”

Five more people were reported injured, Captain Kay Makhubele, a national police force official, told eNCA news.

Police later said on Twitter the CBD, Jeppestown and Hillbrow neighbourhoods were under control.

South Africa is a major destination for economic migrants from neighbouring Lesotho, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. But others come from South Asia and Nigeria looking for work in the continent’s second largest economy.

The recent violence soured ties between South Africa and Nigeria, which summoned Pretoria’s envoy and boycotted an economic summit in Cape Town in protest.

Officials said several Nigerian businesses were attacked and burned down, though they said no Nigerians were killed.

Foreign workers often face anti-immigrant violence in South Africa, where they compete against locals for jobs, particularly in low-skilled industries.

In 2008, xenophobic attacks left 62 people dead, while in 2015, seven were killed in attacks in Johannesburg and Durban.

Holy Ashura

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teachings of Prophet (SM).

The day is a public holiday.

Different religious organisations have drawn up various programmes to observe the day.

Islamic Foundation arranged a special milad mahfil at Baitul Mukarram national mosque yesterday, marking the occasion.

Members of the Shia community will bring out a Tajia procession in the city today. The procession will start from Imambara Hussaini Dallan in Old Dhaka.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police has banned carrying of lethal weapons like metal weapons, knife, sword and other sharp weapons during the Tajia procession.

Adequate security measures have been taken around Imambara Hussaini Dalan to ensure smooth observance of Holy Ashura.

Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and private TV channels are airing special programmes highlighting the significance of the day.

Meanwhile, President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have issued separate messages on the occasion.