

# MALAYSIA-BOUND BOAT

## 119 Rohingyas rescued from Bay

AFP, Tehran

Bangladesh Coast Guard intercepted a wooden boat carrying 119 Rohingya refugees bound for Malaysia as it was about to sink, officials said Thursday, the latest in a spate of trafficking incidents this year.

Nearly one million Rohingyas live in squalid camps near Bangladesh's border with Myanmar, many fleeing the neighbouring country after a brutal military crackdown began in 2017.

With few opportunities for jobs and education in the camps, thousands have attempted to reach other countries like Malaysia and Thailand.

The vessel was found in the Bay of Bengal, just off the coast of southern Saint Martin's island, after a tip-off by fishermen, coast guard spokesman Saiful Islam told AFP.

"We found that the boat was taking

water due to engine failure," Islam said. "It was about to sink. Had we not reached there in time, it would have sunk."

Islam said the 119 people on board, including 58 women and 14 children, were heading for Malaysia.

It was the highest number of Rohingyas found in a vessel at sea this year, he added.

So far this year, law enforcement agencies have picked up over 500 Rohingyas from coastal villages and boats as they waited to board boats bound for Malaysia.

At least seven suspected human traffickers have been shot dead so far in 2019 in alleged gunfights with police.

Trafficking often increases after the monsoon, when calm November seas allow small fishing trawlers to travel long distance.

## UN technical team's

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Management Ministry, told The Daily Star on Thursday.

The UN last week set a schedule to visit Bhashan Char to look at the safety features between November 17 and 19.

"The schedule for the visit will be fixed after we get the ToR," Shah Kamal said.

Joseph Surjamonir Tripura, spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency in Dhaka, said the government and UN have agreed to postpone the visit to ensure that the right experts are on hand and all necessary logistical arrangements are in place.

He didn't talk about the ToR required by the government, but said Bangladesh government and UN are discussing the next steps for the UN's assessment of Bhashan Char as a place to relocate the refugees.

"The UN is prepared to move forward with the initial assessment missions at the earliest possible date," Joseph said.

The government took up a housing project in Bhashan Char after some 750,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military campaign in the months following August, 2017, in Myanmar. The refugees joined 300,000 other Rohingyas who had fled previous waves of violence since the 1980s to Bangladesh.

Government officials said destruction of forest, hills and risks of landslides in Cox's Bazar have prompted the authorities to build a temporary housing site for the Rohingyas on the 40-square km Bhashan Char, an island 37 miles from the coast of the Bay of Bengal.

Disaster management ministry officials said that the project implemented by Bangladesh Navy has 120 cluster villages that are capable of accommodating 100,000 Rohingyas. The houses are built four feet above the ground with concrete blocks. The entire housing site is protected by a 13-km flood embankment.

There are also 120 cyclone shelters, which will also be used as schools, medical centres and community centres, they added.

Shah Kamal said there are large swathes of land that could be used for livestock farming and fisheries in Bhashan Char.

The refugees now live in crowded camps in Cox's Bazar where they have almost no work to do.

"We consider it a safe place for living. There will be education facilities as well," he said.

Aid agencies say the island was isolated and flood-prone and put conditions that include a regular shipping service between Bhashan Char and the mainland.

Late last month, Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Mahbub Alam Talukder told reporters that some 6,000 to 7,000 refugees had expressed their willingness to be relocated to Bhashan Char.

UN agencies then decided to send a technical mission to Bhashan Char. It intended to look at the risks of natural disasters, water supply, access to basic services, including health and education, and the freedom of movement within Bhashan Char and to and from the mainland, a UN official said.

Technical experts from Bangladesh government would also accompany the UN mission to Bhashan Char, Senior Secretary Shah Kamal said, adding that he was expecting the UN mission to be satisfied by the facilities built for the Rohingyas.

"Once a group of Rohigya starts living there, I am sure, others will follow suit," said another official of the ministry.

## Lightning strikes 18 times on deadly night in Pakistan

AFP, Karachi

Lightning strikes killed at least 18 people and injured several more during a deadly night in Pakistan's Thar desert, police said yesterday, describing the deaths as "unprecedented".

Thunderstorms and a heavy downpour caused havoc in several villages, destroying dozens of homes, in an unusual rainfall event that a meteorologist says could be linked to climate change.

It was the lightning strikes in 18 different places which had the greatest impact.

## No respite

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will arrive at a sea port soon, it added. Onion prices began to rise about two months ago, when India restricted its onion export. But the prices started to rise sharply last week.

Earlier this month, each kg of locally grown onion was sold for Tk 100-120 in the kitchen markets in the capital. But the price jumped to Tk 160 on Tuesday morning and then kept rising.

The prices rose by Tk 30 to 40 every day since Wednesday.

The Daily Star yesterday visited six kitchen markets and several retail stores in the capital's Karwan Bazar, Moghbazar, Farmgate, Mohammadpur, Kazipara and Shewrapara.

Prices of some other essentials, including rice, some vegetables and soybean oil, also increased by Tk 5-10 in the last 10 days.

A kg of fine rice was being sold for Tk 48-50 and coarse rice for Tk 33-35 yesterday.

Besides, prices of bottled soybean oil rose by about Tk 5 a litre, and cauliflower by about Tk 10 apiece.

"We can't help eating onion because carries taste bad without it. But at the same time, we can't afford it," said Mohammad Khokon, a shopper in Karwan Bazar.

Another shopper in Kazipara, Farid Uddin said, "We are buying as little goods as we can."

A few days ago, the Burmese variety of onion was cheaper by Tk 20-30 than the local variety, but the prices came quite close yesterday.

The reporters found each kg of local onion was sold for Tk 240-260 at retail stores and Tk 230-240 at wholesale markets yesterday afternoon. The Burmese variety was cheaper by about Tk 10.

The wholesalers and retailers blamed

ONION PRICE PER KG IN RETAIL MARKETS	
Early November	Tk 100 – 120
Tuesday	Tk 150 – 160
Wednesday	Tk 170 – 180
Thursday	Tk 200 – 220
Yesterday	Tk 240 – 260

supply shortage for the price hike and said the prices may soar further unless India resumed exporting onion.

"Importing onion from India was faster and easier. On the other hand, importing from Egypt and Myanmar takes a long time," said Rezaul Karim, a wholesaler in Karwan Bazar.

Meanwhile, many retail stores in residential areas have stopped selling onion.

"I stopped selling onion two weeks ago. Shoppers haggle too much," said Jakir Hossain, a grocery store owner in Tejuri Bazar area.

**PRICES MAY FALL SOON**  
Senior Awami League lawmaker Tofail Ahmed at a relief distribution programme in Bhola yesterday said the prices of onion "will become normal soon" as around 50,000 tonnes of imported onion will reach the country.

"Different countries are facing onion crisis this year," said the chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Commerce.

At another programme in the capital's Dhanmondi, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader said, "We are trying to identify those responsible for the price hike. I hope that the prices will come down soon."



The derailed engine and coaches of Rangpur Express lie beside the rail line near Ullapara Railway Station in Sirajganj yesterday. Around 2:00pm on Thursday, the engine and six coaches of the train came off the tracks. Officials said the rail links between the capital and the country's northern and southern districts were restored around 7:30pm yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Rohingyas see a ray of hope

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We have been facing genocidal crimes for decades," said Nay Say Lwin, media coordinator of Free Rohingya Coalition, a global Rohingya organisation.

"Now Myanmar will be obliged to amend laws to grant us citizenship, and compensate the Rohingyas, including the women who were violated by the Myanmar army especially in 2017," he told this newspaper over phone from Germany on Thursday.

In a statement yesterday, Amnesty International Director for East and Southeast Asia Nicholas Bequelin said the ICC decision marks an important step in the fight for justice and accountability in Myanmar and sends a strong message to the orchestrators of atrocities that their days of impunity are numbered.

He, however, mentioned that the ICC decision allows investigation into only some of the Myanmar military's many crimes against ethnic minorities in that country. It remains essential that the UN Security Council refers the situation in the entire country to the ICC.

The Rohingyas were denied citizenship by Myanmar through a 1982 citizenship law. They have also been deprived of basic rights, including freedom of movement, health services and government jobs, since then.

Over the last four decades, waves of violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State led hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and other countries.

Since August 2017, some 750,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military campaign and took shelter in Bangladesh, joining some 300,000 others who had fled earlier waves of violence.

According to a report of the Ontario International Development Agency, Myanmar state forces killed nearly 24,000 Rohingyas and raped thousands of women and girls since August 2017. Their houses in Rakhine were burnt to ashes.

The UN termed the atrocities a classic

example of ethnic cleansing, while UN independent investigators found elements of genocide in it. Yet, the UN Security Council took no concrete actions against Myanmar mainly because of opposition from China and Russia that have veto powers.

The Amnesty International says the Myanmar military continues to commit serious violations, including war crimes, against civilians in conflict-affected areas in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan states.

Meanwhile, a resolution on the situation of human rights of Rohingyas and other minorities in Myanmar was adopted at the third committee of the 74th UN General Assembly in New York on Thursday.

The resolution, placed by the UAE and Finland on behalf of the OIC and the EU, received 140 votes in its favour. Nine votes were cast against the resolution with 32 countries taking no side.

The UN member states that supported the resolution said it is a significant step towards ensuring protection of the human rights of forcibly displaced Rohingyas and their sustainable return to their place of origin.

Talking to this correspondent over phone from the UK, Tun Khin, president of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, said Myanmar refused to cooperate with the ICC investigation, arguing that it is not a state party to the Rome Statute. But it has to cooperate in the probe as it is an ICC member.

Nevertheless, the ICC can carry out investigation as Bangladesh, a state party to the Rome Statute, agreed to cooperate with it, he said.

The ICC can hold responsible individuals, not a state, for the crimes against Rohingyas. But the ICJ can hold Myanmar responsible as a state, he said.

Tun Khin said the UN and other international institutions are obligated to respond to an ICJ decision to help enforce a judgment against Myanmar.

"So, there could be further action from the UN Security Council or the

UN General Assembly," added the Rohingya activist.

According to the Article 94 of the UN charter, though the ICJ cannot enforce its decisions, all the UN members have to comply with its decisions in the cases in which they are parties.

"If any party to a case fails to perform the obligations incumbent upon it under a judgment rendered by the Court, the other party may have recourse to the Security Council, which may, if it deems necessary, make recommendations or decide upon measures to be taken to give effect to the judgment," it says.

Razia Sultana, a Rohingya activist, said many countries remained silent about taking steps against Myanmar. They should now stop doing business with the Southeast Asian country to put pressure on it to stop genocide against the Rohingyas.

The OIC's 57 member states are supporting the case with the ICJ, while Canada has come forward to back it, she said, urging all other UN members to throw their weight behind it.

Nay San Lwin said the Argentine court can also begin an independent investigation and issue arrest warrants against the accused in the case.

Rohingya activists are also preparing to file lawsuits with the national courts of some other countries, he added.

In a statement yesterday, Param-Preet Singh, associate director in the International Justice Programme of Human Rights Watch, said the ICC's approval of investigation gives Rohingyas victims renewed hope that the architects of the brutal scorched earth campaign against them may one day be held to account.

Rights activist Noor Khan Liton said Bangladesh, which has been taking the brunt of the Rohingya influx for decades, should strongly support the case with the ICJ.

"We cannot fail the Rohingyas anymore. If we do, it will be the worst instance in the global justice system," he added.

## SIRAJGANJ TRAIN DERAILMENT Dhaka-Ishwardi rail connection restored 30 hrs after accident

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, back from Sirajganj

Rail connection between Dhaka and Ishwardi was resumed yesterday, 30 hours after it was disrupted due to a rail accident in Sirajganj's Ullapara upazila.

Abdullah Al Mamun, Paksey divisional transportation officer (DTO) of Bangladesh Railway, said both metre-gauge and broad-gauge lines was restored around 7:30pm.

The rail link that connects all the northern and southern districts with Dhaka was interrupted as Rangpur Express, a Rangpur-bound passenger train, derailed near Ullapara Railway Station Thursday afternoon.

Nine compartments of the train, including its engine and power car, were derailed and three of those caught fire. At least eight people were injured and rushed to the upazila health complex.

**COMMITTEES START PROBES**

Two probe committees, formed by Bangladesh Railway and Sirajganj district administration, started probing into the rail accident yesterday morning.

Paksey DTO Mamun, who heads the probe committee formed by Bangladesh Railway, said, "We started investigating the accident and checking if there was any fault in signal, pointing, engine, or coaches."

He, however, did not disclose any findings. "We would not disclose further details before the probe ends," he said.

Meanwhile, sources in Bangladesh Railway told The Daily Star that either wrong signals or flawed repair work of the rail line was behind the accident.

"Trains now operate digitally and loco-masters cannot change lines even if they want. Everything is digitally controlled from the station. Trains change lines only when signal is open and pointing is okayed by the station," said a railway official, seeking anonymity.

Asked, Abdul Hamid, stationmaster of Ullapara Railway Station, denied the allegation and said, "There is no scope of making mistake as everything is controlled digitally."

No official of Ullapara Railway Station made a mistake that could lead the train to the accident, he claimed.

About the allegation of the faulty repair work, Al-Fattah Md Masudur Rahman, chief engineer of railway west zone, said, "The small repairing work is a continuous process. We cannot clearly say if there was a fault in the repair work before the investigation finishes."

**'WOULD CHECK IF IT WAS PLOTTED'**  
Nurul Islam Sujon, minister at the Ministry of Railways, yesterday visited the accident spot.

Anyone responsible for the accident, including railway officials, would be punished if proven guilty, he said while visiting the spot.

"We are also checking if it was plotted," he said.

On Tuesday, another massive rail accident took place as Dhaka-bound Turna Nishita Express rammed Chattogram-bound Udayan Express at Mandobagh Railway Station in Kasba upazila of Brahmanbaria.

## DR Congo rebels kill six members of same family

AFP, Goma

Rebels have killed six members of the same family in eastern DR Congo, local officials said yesterday, more than two weeks after the Congolese army announced an offensive to root out insurgents.

Officials said a man and his five children had been killed and three other people injured in the assault late Thursday in the Beni region, an area plagued by armed groups.