

Rohingya crisis fund is ‘well short of needs’

Says UN refugee agency
REUTERS

An appeal to help Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh is “well short of needs”, the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) said yesterday, as refugees called on donors not to forget the crisis ahead of the fifth anniversary of their exodus from Myanmar.

More than a million Rohingyas are living in squalid camps in southern Bangladesh comprising the world's largest refugee settlement, with little prospect of returning to Myanmar, where they are mostly denied citizenship and other rights.

“For the almost 1 million stateless Rohingya refugees, conditions in Bangladesh are extremely overcrowded, and they remain fully reliant on humanitarian assistance for their survival,” UNHCR said.

“The most commonly unmet needs include proper nutrition, shelter materials, sanitation facilities and livelihood opportunities,” it said in a statement.

It said its 2022 response plan sought over \$881 million for more than 1.4 million people, including Rohingya refugees and more than half a million most affected host communities. So far, it was funded at only 49 percent, with \$426.2 million received.

“The support from the international community has been and is crucial in delivering lifesaving protection and assistance services for Rohingya refugees but funding is well short of needs.”

Refugees said it was crucial the world did not forget the plight of the Rohingyas, who are unable to return to Myanmar, but have little future in Bangladesh, with no access to work.

“The global community should not forget our plight. They should help us as much as they can,” Mohammed Taher, a Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh, told Reuters.

“We are not allowed to work here. We must depend on aid agencies for food,” he added.

The Rohingyas say they want guarantees of their safety and to be recognised as citizens before returning. The United Nations says conditions are not yet right for return.

The vast majority fled to neighbouring Bangladesh during a military crackdown in 2017 that the United Nations has said was carried out with genocidal intent.

Myanmar denies genocide, saying it was waging a legitimate campaign against insurgents who attacked police posts.

Myanmar is facing charges of genocide at the International Court of Justice in The Hague over the violence.



UN Special Envoy on Myanmar Noeleen Heyzer, 2nd from right, visiting a Rohingya camp in Kutupalong of Ukhiya upazila in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAT

Russia ‘stepping up’ strikes on Ukraine infrastructure

Warns US, urges citizens to leave the country

AGENCIES

The United States yesterday urged its citizens to leave Ukraine, saying it believed Russia was preparing to target civilian and government infrastructure in the next few days as the war reaches the six-month mark.

The warning followed a ban by the Ukrainian government on celebrations in the capital Kyiv on today's anniversary of independence from Soviet rule due to fears of attack. President Volodymyr Zelensky pledged that any Russian attacks in or around the date would provoke a powerful response.

On the battlefield, Russian forces carried out artillery and air strikes in the Zaporizhzhia region in southeastern Ukraine, where fighting has taken place near Europe's largest nuclear power plant, the Ukrainian military said.

But six months on from Russia's February 24 invasion of Ukraine, and with thousands of deaths and widespread destruction of cities, the conflict is locked in a stalemate.

Russian forces control a large swathe of the south, including along the Black Sea

coast, and chunks of the eastern Donbas region. The prospects for peace look almost non-existent.

Fearing a surge in Russian attacks, the US Embassy in Kyiv yesterday urged US citizens to leave if they could.

The war, now six months old, has pushed people to “a critical breaking point.”

IFRC President Francesco Rocca

“The Department of State has information that Russia is stepping up efforts to launch strikes against Ukraine's civilian infrastructure and government facilities in the coming days,” the embassy said in a statement.

Although it was not the first time the United States has issued such a warning, this one was made as Ukraine is due today to mark 31 years of independence from Soviet rule, reports AFP.

It also followed the killing of Darya Dugina, the daughter of a prominent Russian ultra-nationalist, in a car bomb attack near Moscow on Saturday. Moscow has blamed the killing on Ukrainian

agents, an accusation Kyiv denies.

The Red Cross warned yesterday that the Ukraine conflict is stretching the entire humanitarian system and could have lasting impacts on the ability of organisations to tackle emergencies worldwide.

The war, now six months old, has pushed people to “a critical breaking point,” said Francesco Rocca, president of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

Meanwhile Polish President Andrzej Duda, one of Ukraine's strongest supporters, arrived in the capital yesterday to discuss further support for Ukraine, including military aid.

Russian shelling hit the eastern city of Kharkiv - Ukraine's second-largest city - around dawn yesterday, regional governor Oleh Synyubov said. A house had been hit but no one was hurt, he said.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said on Monday that 5,587 civilians had been killed and 7,890 wounded between February 24 and August 21, mainly from artillery, rocket and missile attacks.

Man gets 17 years for illegal possession of arms, gunpowder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

A Chapainawabganj court yesterday sentenced a man to 17 years' rigorous imprisonment in a case filed over illegal possession of arms and gunpowder.

The court jailed lone accused Toufiqueul Islam, in absentia, for 10 years under the Arms Act and another seven years under the Explosives Substances Act. He was handed a fined of Tk 10,000, in default of which he will have to serve six additional months behind bars.

The 38-year-old convict is a resident of Kamlakantapur village in Chapainawabganj's Shibganj upazila.

According to the prosecution, a Rab 5 team in Rajshahi raided a house in Sarkarer Mor of Shibganj on March 29, 2014, and recovered a locally made gun, 3.95 kg gunpowder and arrested Toufiqueul.

That day, the Rab filed the case with Shibganj Police Station.

Additional Public Prosecutor Anjuman Ara said the convict, who was granted bail earlier, is now on the run.

Missing tourist's body recovered from Bay

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The body of a tourist was recovered from the Bay of Bengal in Patuakhali yesterday morning, about 20 hours after he went missing while swimming in the sea near Kuakata beach.

The dead, Md Sabuj, 28, hailed from Bogura. His body was found entangled in the nets of local fishermen near the west coast of the beach around 11:00am.

The body was later handed over to Sabuj's relatives, said OC Abul Khair of Mahipur Police Station.

Sabuj was swept away by strong currents around 1:00pm on Monday when he went swimming with his friends, said Kuakata Tourist Police Inspector Hasnain Parvez.

Informed about the incident, tourist police with the help of fire service personnel launched a rescue operation but failed to trace him on that day, he added.

Robbers loot gold jewellery from ex-cop's home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Robbers stole gold jewellery weighing 45 tola and foreign currency notes from the house of a retired additional inspector general of police in the capital's Eskaton early yesterday.

They cut through the window grills of a room on the upper floor of the duplex of Khandaker Mozammel Haque, stole the valuables from a safety locker and made off, said police and family members.

The foreign currency notes include 400 Singapore dollars.

Mozammel's wife Mitali Hossain said no one was staying on the upper floor of the duplex that night. She said her son and daughter stay there whenever they visit.

“In the morning, we found the door locked from inside. We opened the door and found the room ransacked,” she told The Daily Star.

Monirul Islam, officer-in-charge of the police station, said they were investigating the incident.

EVM use in 150 seats max

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EC officials said chances are slim of adding voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) with the EVMs -- another recommendation that some political parties placed during the talks with the EC.

The commission is taking advice from experts about VVPAT, a system which allows voters to verify that their vote was cast correctly, and most of them so far opined that if the VVPAT is incorporated, the machines will freeze and might have some other technical issues.

“So, there is hardly any chance of adding VVPAT system to the machine,” said an official.

Another EC official said, “We now need to know whether we will get an adequate number of EVMs from manufacturers. We will also be keeping in mind the issue of trained manpower and others.”

With the Jatiya Sangsad polls, likely in late December 2023 or early January 2024, the EVM issue came to the fore especially after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at an AL meeting on May 7 said voting

machines would be used in all 300 constituencies in the election.

Recently, 19 out of 39 registered political parties have directly opposed the use of EVMs, either joining or skipping the talks with the EC held on July 17-31. Among them are the AL's archrival BNP and the main opposition in parliament, the Jatiya Party.

Only three -- the ruling Awami League, Samyabadi Dal and Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh -- during the talks categorically said they want the machines in the national election.

The EC also held a series of views-exchange meetings on EVM in June with 28 political parties. Only four of them, including the AL, said they were in favour of EVMs in national elections.

Introduced in 2010, EVMs were used in various local government elections. The then Election Commission led by ATM Shamsul Huda had used them in the city corporation polls but not in any parliamentary election.

In 2012, the EC headed by Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad also kept the

EVMs out of the national polls.

The Nurul Huda-led commission overhauled the EVM system and used it for polling in six constituencies in the 2018 December election.

Twelve political parties, including the BNP, opposed the EVM while attending talks with the EC in 2017, and 11 parties including the AL supported it.

“The decision to use EVMs in the polls is actually the government's decision, not the Election Commission's. The EC is just a weapon to fulfil the will of the government,” said Nazrul Islam Khan, standing committee member of the BNP, in his reaction to the latest development.

“They appointed people of their choice so that their purpose can be served. We don't even want to make comments on the EC's activities”, he added.

Expressing similar views, Mujibul Haque Chunnun, secretary general of Jatiya Party (Ershad), said, “We don't support the EC's decision to use EVMs in the general election. The EC did not honour the parties that opposed EVMs during the talks. We

condemn the decision.”

He added, “We do not have any confidence in EVM. People believe that voting fraudulence takes place when EVM is used.”

Gono Forum Executive President Mukabbir Khan said the decision was opposite to people's aspirations. “The EC took such a decision due to their subservient attitude towards the ruling party.”

Awami League Presidium Member Kazi Zafarullah refuted the allegations of the opposition parties and said, “I totally disagree with them and this allegation is unfair. This EC has been appointed by the president in line with law.”

He added, “The EC has demonstrated EVM before us and we are convinced that there is no scope for election fraudulence there. A voter will be able to cast vote for the candidate of his or her choice.

“It is the EC that will conduct the election, not the Awami League. As a party, it is the Awami League's responsibility to assist the commission to hold a free and fair election.”

UN split over ban on Taliban officials' travel

AFP, United Nations

Members of the United Nations Security Council remained divided Monday over whether to exempt some of Afghanistan's Taliban officials from a travel ban, diplomatic sources said.

Under a 2011 Security Council

resolution, 135 Taliban leaders are subject to a sanctions regime that includes asset freezes and travel bans. Thirteen of them benefited from an exemption from the travel ban, renewed regularly, to allow them to meet officials from other countries abroad.

All-EVM polls

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Amid boycotts by the BNP and the Jatiya Party, the ruling Awami League-backed candidates became chairmen in 25 districts, AL leaders running as independents won in 13, and AL leaders won unopposed in 21.

Polls were held in two other districts later.

As per the Zila Parishad Act, 2000, amended in 2022, the administrators will be in office until a new administration is formed.

However, the term of the administrators will not be over 180 days and an individual cannot be an administrator more than once.

According to the law, only the elected representatives of different local government bodies like city

JS committee stunned

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after the end of a fiscal year,” it said.

In accounting, reconciliation is the process of ensuring that two sets of records are in agreement. It is used to ensure that the money leaving an account matches the actual money spent.

Between 2010 and 2012, the BPC had to pay \$6 million as demurrage for using ships of foreign companies as “floating storages”.

“Though the BPC had the capacity to unload five to six fuel-carrying ships, it had kept anchored eight to 10 ships at a time. The BPC described those as floating storages, which is unacceptable,” the audit report said.

Referring to the National Energy Policy, 1996, the report said the

country should have a fuel storage capacity for at least 60 days, but it now has a capacity for 30-35 days. “The BPC is paying thousands of dollars as demurrage every year by not expanding the storage capacity ... This is unacceptable because there are enough space and experts to build storage tanks.”

According to a report that the BPC submitted to the parliamentary body yesterday, the storage capacity was 9.90 lakh tonnes in fiscal 2012-13, which stood at 13.60 lakh tonnes in 2021-22.

The CAG report mentioned that the BPC paid Tk 9.15 crore as lighterage charge -- a refundable transport fees for loading and unloading a cargo -- to the exporters during the audit

period, but it didn't issue any invoice for a refund of the amount.

Citing other irregularities by the BPC, the audit report said the BPC sold furnace oil to non-operational power plants, took loans from the government despite having huge deposits with banks, and kept with it the money it collected as VAT from businesses instead of giving it to the state exchequer.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, ASM Feroz said the BPC conducted only internal audit over the last 10 years whereas it was supposed to be done by the CAG. Besides, there had been irregularities in BPC's purchases.

About the non-disposal of the audit objections, he said, “It's a

failure of the authorities concerned.”

According to meeting sources, acting BPC chairman Khalid Ahmed told the parliamentary body that there was no scope for institutional mismanagement and irregularities in the BPC.

FUEL PRICES TO BE ADJUSTED

At yesterday's meeting, top officials of the power, energy and mineral resources ministry told the House watchdog that fuel prices would be adjusted as soon as possible in line with the global prices.

The parliamentary body asked the ministry to take measures to increase the BPC's storage capacity of refined and crude oil and keep adequate funds at hand for emergency purposes.

Soybean oil officially up

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Biswajit Saha, director for corporate and regulatory affairs of City Group, one of the leading commodities players, admits that the price of soybean oil is stable in the international market.

This month, the soybean oil price ranged from \$1,446 to \$1,502 per tonne in the international market, according to Indexmundi. In June, it had gone up to \$1,920 a tonne.

“But the dollar price has increased 15 to 20 percent,” Saha said, adding that the refiners have to pay for the edible oil at the current dollar rate and not the rate prevailing at the time of opening the letter of credit for the

import.

The prices of every essential have gone up on excuse of the dollar rate and the increased fuel price, said Abdur Rahman, who works at a non-governmental organisation in Chattogram.

“But no one has any idea what will happen to the common people. The salaries of limited income people are not rising,” he added.

More than 5.48 lakh tonnes of palm oil and soybean oil worth Tk 7,845.6 crore were imported between July 1 and August 23 through the Chattogram and Mongla ports, according to the National Board of Revenue.