

# 1.5 lakh Rohingyas arrived in months

## Says WFP, fears 50,000 more may come by year end

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An estimated 1,50,000 new Rohingya have arrived in Bangladesh in the recent months and 50,000 more are expected to join them by this year end, putting further strains on Bangladesh.

The Rohingya continue to flee the Rakhine State of Myanmar due to escalating violence, said the UN World Food Programme in its country brief published on May 19.

With the new arrivals, the total number of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar and Bhashanchar will be close to 12.5 million by the year end.

The highest number of Rohingya, around 7.5 lakh, fled to Bangladesh in 2017 following a military crackdown in 2017.

Despite several attempts, none of them volunteered to return to Myanmar citing lack of safety and guarantee of citizenship.

With the escalation of conflicts between the Myanmar military and Arakan Army since 2023, more Rohingya members fled to Bangladesh, especially in July-August last year.

"This trend of continued arrivals of new Rohingya will create a difficult situation for us," Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) Mohammed Mizanur Rahman, told The Daily Star yesterday.

According to officials handling the Rohingya crisis, 30 to 40 Rohingya members are entering Bangladesh every

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People stand amid the debris of a razed residential settlement that authorities say belonged to illegal Bangladeshi nationals near Chandola Lake in Ahmedabad, India, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Italy PM may visit in late Aug

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is likely to visit Bangladesh in late August to strengthen bilateral ties, said a foreign ministry official.



Giorgia Meloni

"The schedule is almost confirmed. We're now working to finalise the agenda," the official said, adding that the two-day visit is expected to begin on August 29.

He said key topics may include safe migration, trade and investment.

Earlier this month, Italian Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi visited Dhaka and signed an MoU on migration and mobility to promote legal migration and curb illegal migration and human trafficking.

"We've been working to arrange the prime minister's visit, a major event for us. It became possible due to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus's strong ties with Italy," a diplomatic source in Dhaka said.

After the UK, Italy is the second-largest European destination for Bangladeshis. As of January 1, 2023,

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## Editor's Council concerned over a clause of anti-terror ordinance

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said entity or in support of it, or any kind of campaign through media, online, social media or any other means, or organisation of rallies, meetings, press conferences or public speeches shall be prohibited."

In a statement issued yesterday on behalf of the Editors' Council, its President Mahfuz Anam and General Secretary Dewan Hanif Mahmud said the application of such a clause could confine the space for public expression and press freedom in the country.

"The addition of a provision that creates scope for potential misuse is not expected from the interim government," the statement read.

The council demanded that the clause be suspended and reconsidered.

## Yunus holds high-level meeting on law and order

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attended the meeting as well.  
The meeting reviewed the law and order situation across the country based on reports presented by senior security officials.

Prof Yunus stressed the need to maintain a stable security situation in the capital and elsewhere in the country. He also expressed appreciation for the efforts by the security forces in some of the high-profile incidents.

## 14,000 babies may die in 48 hours

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Before the announcement of the punitive measures, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told parliament that he, along with the leaders of France and Canada, was "horrified" by Israel's military escalation.

The leaders of Britain, France and Canada warned on Monday that they could take "concrete actions" against Israel if it did not stop military operations in Gaza and lift restrictions on aid.

However, Israel remained defiant. It said that external pressure will not change its course.

"The world is judging. History will judge them [Israel]," the British foreign secretary said while unveiling the measures, urging Netanyahu to agree to a ceasefire.

"Blocking aid, expanding the war, dismissing the concerns of your friends and partners – this is indefensible, and it must stop," he said.

Greek Foreign Minister Giorgos Gerapetritis also condemned the intensified Israeli offensive, saying the number of Palestinians killed in Gaza is intolerably high.

Meanwhile, Sweden's top diplomat yesterday said that the country would work within the EU to push for sanctions against certain Israeli ministers over Israel's treatment of civilian Palestinians in Gaza.

"Since we do not see a clear improvement for the civilians in Gaza, we need to raise the tone further," Foreign Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard said in a statement to AFP.

The Israeli army stepped up its offensive in Gaza on Saturday, saying it was aimed at defeating Hamas.

Israeli strikes have since killed

scores of people in the besieged coastal territory, according to rescuers.

In its latest war update, the Israeli military yesterday said it carried out attacks on 100 targets in Gaza in the last 24 hours.

Gaza's health ministry said Israeli attacks have killed at least 83 people and wounded 290 during the past 24 hours.

Israel called up tens of thousands of reservists before expanding its military offensive, and sent in ground troops on Sunday.

Israel's security cabinet approved earlier this month a plan to expand the military operation, which one official said would include the "conquest" of Gaza and the displacement of its population.

Meanwhile, Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN Palestinian refugee agency, yesterday warned that Israel's expanding operations could eventually create conditions where Palestinians are not able to live in Gaza.

"What I see for the time being is a continuation of the destruction, of the deaths and killing of the Palestinians in Gaza. And my fear is that we might reach a point where Gaza might not be a land any more for Palestinians to live in," he said in a media interview.

On Friday, President Donald Trump of the United States, Israel's strongest ally and main arms supplier, acknowledged that "a lot of people are starving" in Gaza.

"We're looking at Gaza. And we're going to get that taken care of," Trump told reporters in Abu Dhabi, on a regional tour that excluded Israel.

Yesterday, a UN spokesman said

it had received permission to send "around 100" trucks of aid into Gaza.

The UN has long said Gaza, with a population of about 2.3 million, needs at least 500 trucks of aid and commercial goods daily to tackle the crisis.

However, no aid truck entered into Gaza till evening, reports Al Jazeera.

On the ground, aid agencies said acute hunger is spreading across Gaza.

According to the UN's Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), more than 93 percent of children in Gaza – about 930,000 – are at risk of famine due to the ongoing war and blockade.

Since early March, at least 57 children have been reported to have died from malnutrition.

Families in Gaza are resorting to eating animal feed, expired flour and flour mixed with sand, while children suffer from hunger-induced illnesses such as diarrhoea and extreme fatigue.

Meanwhile, Qatar's prime minister said Israel's military offensive in Gaza had undermined peace efforts' momentum after the release of US-Israeli hostage Edan Alexander.

Qatar has, alongside Egypt and the United States, mediated efforts to end the war.

"This irresponsible, aggressive behaviour undermines any potential chance for peace," Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani said at the Qatar Economic Forum.

Gaza's health ministry said at least 3,340 people have been killed since Israel resumed strikes on March 18, taking the war's overall toll to 53,573.

## BNP to press for polls

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believing that guiding the country towards elections will help ease the instability.

On Monday night, the BNP Standing Committee held a meeting to discuss the overall political situation, with a particular focus on the proposed constitutional reforms and the upcoming July Declaration.

Most members expressed concern over what they said was the government's "deliberate attempt to delay the election process".

"We don't want a disgraceful departure for Dr Yunus, which is why we're observing the situation carefully. We want to avoid confrontation, but if we're pushed to the edge, we may be compelled to launch a stronger movement after July," said a Standing Committee member, wishing to remain anonymous.

He added that BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman instructed the Standing Committee members to weigh potential strategies for a broader movement.

However, party leaders acknowledge that a rushed movement carries risks. They fear that if the movement escalates into confrontation, vested quarters may exploit the situation. On the other hand, if they remain silent, they may lose the momentum.

"We could take to the streets right now, but it would likely trigger chaos, and a third force might take advantage of it. But the way the government is proceeding, it appears the government has no intention to hold elections anytime soon," said a second Standing Committee member, also on condition of anonymity.

Recent Standing Committee meetings have explored various movement strategies in detail, although no dates have been finalised.

For now, the party will continue its two-month member collection campaign to strengthen organisational capacity and build grassroots momentum.

In parallel, affiliated and associate organisations are mobilising young members through regional events. Youth rallies and seminars have already taken place in Chattogram

and Khulna, with similar events planned for Bogura and Dhaka. A rally in Dhaka is also under consideration, but a date is yet to be fixed.

Chief Adviser Dr Muhammad Yunus has repeatedly said that the election would take place between December this year and June next year, but BNP suspects the government is delaying the electoral process in the name of reforms.

BNP leaders say the government has not announced a clear timeline for elections and that "vague and conflicting statements" by the government raise their suspicion.

BNP plans to counter this through political programmes, first by raising their voice and eventually by holding rallies and mass campaigns, to put pressure on the government to announce a specific election date.

But with Eid and monsoon season approaching, BNP leaders say any protest must be carefully planned. "If we launch a movement too early, it may backfire. People are already weary of constant protests. We have to choose the right moment," said a senior BNP leader.

Top party leaders at Monday's meeting discussed ways to mount pressure on the government without sparking instability.

"We will take to the streets if the election is not held in time. No one can stop or silence us," Zainul Abedin Farroque, a member of the BNP Chairperson's Advisory Council, said at the National Press Club on Sunday.

"We are silent for now on Tarique Rahman's instruction. He wants us to focus on strengthening the organisation first."

He warned that once party activists lose patience, even senior leaders may no longer be able to control the situation on the ground.

"Do you [chief adviser] want to create conflict and misunderstanding over the election?" asked BNP Standing Committee Member Salahuddin Ahmed at a rally in Khulna on Saturday.

"Do you want the people to march towards Jamuna [chief adviser's residence]?"

## Govt looking to defuse trade

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A representative from a top trade body suggested the government to launch diplomatic and political negotiations with India at the top level.

The commerce secretary-level meeting will help to understand the mindset of the Indian side, he

and imported goods worth \$9 billion, according to the commerce ministry presentation at the meeting.

Bangladesh imports industrial raw materials, garment items, fabrics, intermediary goods for industrial uses, food, cotton, chemicals, machinery, processed foods, agricultural items, rice, protein items



said, adding that the small, medium and large business enterprises will be severely affected if the trade barriers are not removed as soon as possible.

Bilateral trade between the two neighbouring countries last fiscal year was \$10.56 billion: Bangladesh exported goods worth \$1.56 billion

## DSCC workers threaten strike

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Ishraque's supporters have been demonstrating in front of Nagar Bhaban since May 14.

At the capital's Khilgaon yesterday, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said the interim government was using "muscle power" to prevent Ishraque from becoming the mayor.

Rizvi was visiting Rakibul Hasan, an injured activist of the July uprising.

On March 27, Dhaka's First Joint District Judge and Election Tribunal Judge Nurul Islam overturned the 2020 DSCC election results and

declared Ishraque the rightful winner.

Rizvi said Ishraque had every right to demonstrate for justice.

"In many ways, the current interim government resembles the Hasina regime. This is not what the public wants."

Taking a jab at Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan, the adviser for local government, rural development and cooperatives, he said: "He is a young man who suddenly has serious responsibilities for the state. That's why there is an imbalance in his comments."

### VERDICT TODAY

The High Court is set to deliver its verdict today on a writ petition

that sought a stay on the Election Commission's decision declaring Ishraque the mayor.

The bench of Justice Md Akram Hossain Chowdhury and Justice Debashis Roy Chowdhury fixed the date after concluding hearings on the petition.

Lawyers Mohammad Hossain and Kazi Akbar Ali represented the petitioner, while AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon argued for Ishraque.

After the lower court overturned the 2020 DSCC election results, the EC issued a gazette notification officially declaring Ishraque the mayor.

## NCP demands reconstitution of the EC

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in front of the Nirbachan Bhaban at Agargaon at 11:00am today.

The announcement came from a press conference at Rupayan Tower in the capital's Banglamotor. Party leaders, including NCP convener Nahid Islam, member secretary Akhter Hossen, and chief coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary, spoke.

The NCP demanded the EC's reconstitution, saying that "the EC neither contested nor appealed in the case filed over the DSCC's mayoral post". The party alleged that the EC was clearly taking the sides of a party and a candidate.

The party came up with the demands and programmes while supporters of BNP leader Ishraque Hossain were demonstrating in front of Nagar Bhaban, demanding that he be sworn in as mayor of DSCC.

"We believe the biased role of the Election Commission is responsible for the situation," said the statement which Akhter read out.

Akhter said services were being disrupted due to the absence of an

elected public representative.

"It is evident that the biased Election Commission, formed under fascist laws, is incapable of holding local government elections. Therefore, we urge the interim government to immediately consider the proposals of the reform commission, reconstitute the Election Commission, and take steps to hold the polls without delay," said Akhter.

At the briefing, Nahid said, "...It's very clear that they [EC] are taking sides with a particular party and a particular candidate. And there's no guarantee they won't do the same when such crises arise in future ... That's why we cannot keep our trust in this Election Commission.

"If our demands are ignored, we will intensify our movement accordingly, but we will do so through democratic means."

He further said, "As a major and established political party, people expect a certain level of maturity from them. But they are failing to demonstrate that.

"Shahbagh and the Nagar Bhaban are being blocked, and threats are

being made to lay siege to Jamuna... In various ways, efforts are being made to destabilise the country. That's why I would urge everyone to step back from such positions."

Nahid also called on political parties to resolve the crisis through dialogue.

The NCP in its statement said, "Despite being a defendant in the case of Ishraque Hossain vs Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh and others, the Election Commission unprecedentedly chose not to contest the case. As a result, a one-sided verdict was delivered. It also did not appeal to the higher court against the verdict, which gave special privileges to the complainant."

The NCP added that the EC was making statements that appeared to align with the position of a major political party rather than that of neutrality.

The party said that even before the delivery of judgment in the case, a DSCC administrator was appointed under the relevant law on August 19, 2024, rendering the entire case "ineffective".

Although the EC later sought the law ministry's opinion on gazette

publication, it hastily issued the gazette before receiving the ministry's response, alleged the NCP.

"The overall role of the Election Commission in this matter was clearly biased," he added.

Responding to a question from journalists, NCP leader Nahid said local government elections should be held immediately as a "critical situation" has arisen in the country.

"It is not possible for this Election Commission to hold the local government polls. We cannot place our trust in them because they are acting in a biased way. They have not considered the reform proposals, and there are flaws in the process through which the Election Commission was formed."

"Candidates from those illegal elections are now moving to courts – for a bit of power, for a post. This has created a crisis-like situation. So, to get rid of this situation, local government elections must be held.

"This government, this administration, and the Election Commission will also be tested on how capable they are to hold a fair election."