

Bangladesh slams Myanmar for 'atrocities' against Rohingya Muslims

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Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh): Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina lambasted Myanmar for "atrocities" against Rohingya Muslims that she said has reached a level beyond description.

Rohingya Muslims at new refugee camp at Cox's Bazar Ukhia area

"I have no words to condemn Myanmar," she told lawmakers Monday night, noting that Bangladesh had long been protesting the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Buddhist-majority Myanmar.

"Regardless, they are sending Rohingya to Bangladesh afresh. Women are being raped and tortured, children are being killed, and houses are being set on fire in Myanmar's Rakhine state," she said, as more continued to stream across the border.

At least 3,13,000 Rohingya have arrived since August 25, when Rohingya insurgents attacked police posts, prompting Myanmar's military to retaliate with what it called "clearance operations" to root out the rebels. The crisis has drawn sharp criticism from around the world. The United States said that it was deeply troubled by the violence, and Germany halted several aid projects in Myanmar in protest.

The UN human rights chief said that violence and injustice faced by the ethnic Rohingya minority in Myanmar "where UN rights investigators have been barred from entry" "seems a textbook example of ethnic cleansing".

"The Myanmar government should stop pretending that the Rohingya are setting fire to their own homes and laying waste to their own villages," Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini said on Monday in Geneva, calling it a "complete denial of reality."

Meanwhile, a Rohingya villager in Myanmar said security forces had arrived Monday in the village of Pa Din village, firing guns, setting new fires to homes and driving hundreds of Rohingya to flee.

"People were scared and running out of the village," the villager said, speaking on condition of anonymity out of fear for his safety.

Myanmar police disputed that, saying the houses were burned by terrorists they called Bengalis. That term is used derisively by many in Myanmar to describe the Rohingya, who they say migrated illegally from neighbouring Bangladesh, though many Rohingya families have lived in Myanmar for generations.

The Bangladeshi Prime Minister demanded that Myanmar bring the Rohingya back, while the country's Parliament on Monday night urged the UN and other countries to pressure Myanmar to ensure their safety and citizenship once they returned.

"We don't understand why successive Myanmar regimes carried out such atrocities on a particular community when the country is comprised of different groups," Hasina said.

Bangladesh said that it would free 2,000 acres (810 hectares) of land for a new camp in Cox's Bazar district, to help shelter newly arrived Rohingya. The government was also fingerprinting and registering new arrivals. Two pre-existing Rohingya camps were already beyond capacity. Other new arrivals were staying in schools, or huddling in makeshift

settlements with no toilets along roadsides and in open fields. Basic resources were scarce, including food, clean water and medical aid.

Hasina was expected to visit the Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar district on Tuesday. The UN refugee agency also said that it expected new relief supplies for 20,000 people to arrive by air during the day. Aid agencies have been overwhelmed by the influx of Rohingya, many of whom are arriving hungry and traumatized after walking days through jungles or being packed into rickety wooden boats in search of safety in Bangladesh.

Many tell similar stories of Myanmar soldiers firing indiscriminately on their villages, burning their homes and warning them to leave or to die. Some say they were attacked by Buddhist mobs.

In the last two weeks, the government hospital in Cox's Bazar has been overwhelmed by Rohingya patients, with 80 arriving in the last two weeks suffering gunshot wounds as well as bad infections. At least three have been wounded in land mine blasts, and dozens have drowned when boats capsized during sea crossings.

Myanmar's authorities said that more than a week ago that some 400 Rohingya mostly insurgents had died in clashes with troops, but it has offered no updated death toll since.

Rohingya have faced decades of discrimination and persecution in Myanmar and are denied citizenship despite centuries-olds roots in the Rakhine region. Before August 25, Bangladesh had already been housing more than 100,000 Rohingya who arrived after bloody anti-Muslim rioting in 2012 or amid earlier persecution drives in Myanmar.

- AP