

Refugees still fleeing 3 weeks into crisis

By JULHAS ALAM AND DAR YASIN
Associated Press

COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh — Nearly three weeks into a mass exodus of Rohingya Muslims fleeing violence in Myanmar, thousands were still flooding across the border Thursday in search of help and safety in teeming refugee settlements in Bangladesh.

The crisis has drawn global condemnation, with U.N. officials demanding Myanmar halt what they described as a campaign of ethnic cleansing that has driven some 400,000 Rohingya to flee Rakhine state.

One of the dozens of boats carrying Rohingya to the Bangladeshi border town of Teknaf capsized Thursday and at least two people drowned, police said. That brought known drownings in the Naf River to 88 since the crisis began.

Those who arrived Wednesday in wooden boats on beaches near Shah Porir Dwip fishing village described ongoing violence in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, where smoke could be seen billowing from a burning village — suggesting more Rohingya homes had been set alight.

One Rohingya man said his village of Rashidong had been attacked six days earlier by Myanmar soldiers and police.

“When military and police surrounded our village and attacked us with rocket launchers to set fire, we got away from our village and fled away to any direction we could manage,” Abdul Goffar said.

Myanmar presidential office spokesman Zaw Htay said that out of 471 “Bengali” villages in three Rakhine townships, 176 were now completely empty while at least 34 more were partially abandoned. Many in Myanmar use that term as part of the long-standing refusal to accept Rohingya as citizens of the country.

Myanmar has accused the Rohingya of burning their own homes and villages — a claim the U.N. human rights chief criticized



A Rohingya Muslim woman, who crossed over from Myanmar into Bangladesh, shouts for help as a relative lies unconscious after the boat they were traveling in capsized minutes before reaching shore at Shah Porir Dwip, Bangladesh, Thursday.

AP Photo/Dar Yasin

as a “complete denial of reality.”

The crisis and refugee exodus began on Aug. 25, when Rohingya insurgents attacked police posts. Myanmar’s military retaliated with “clearance operations” to root out the rebels, but the fleeing Rohingya say Myanmar soldiers shot indiscriminately, burned their homes and warned them to leave or die. Others have said they were attacked by Buddhist mobs. Hundreds have died, mostly Rohingya, and some of the refugees have needed treatment for bullet wounds.

Facing growing condemnation globally, Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi will not attend U.N. General Assembly meetings Sept. 19-25 to instead deal with what the government said were domestic security issues.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told reporters Wednesday that ethnic cleansing was taking place against Rohingya in Rakhine state. The term “ethnic cleansing” is defined as an effort to

rid an area of an unwanted ethnic group — by displacement, deportation or even killing.

The U.N. Security Council called for “immediate steps to end the violence” and ensure civilian protections. Rohingya have faced decades of persecution in Myanmar, and are denied citizenship despite centuries-old roots in the Rakhine region.

The thousands of Rohingya flooding into Bangladesh every day have arrived hungry and traumatized. Many need urgent medical care for violence-related injuries, severe infections or childbirth.

“The women who are coming for check-ups all have a terrified and exhausted look,” said Sumaya, a midwife at the Nayapara refugee camp working in association with the U.N. population fund. “We keep hearing stories from them of walking through jungles and across hills for days without food, their children carried over their shoulders. They’ve lost their homes.”

Two existing refugee camps were packed beyond capacity, and Bangladesh has said it would free land to build a third. Many of the new arrivals were huddling in makeshift shelters along roads or in open fields. Near the camp of Balukhali, some were setting up tents made of bamboo and plastic along hillsides muddy from days of rain. Children walked uphill to capture rainwater before it spilled into the teeming settlements below.

Food, clean water and other necessities were scarce.

Panic erupted Thursday along roadsides where local volunteers were distributing food, water and other supplies haphazardly from parked vehicles. Local officials shouted through bullhorns for volunteers to coordinate their efforts with aid agencies to avoid spreading chaos.

“There are acute shortages of everything, most critically shelter, food and clean water,” UNICEF country representative Edouard Beigbeder said.

BRIEFLY

Hermiston church dares to share

HERMISTON — A livestream video event features a national outreach effort designed to inspire teens to spark a movement of gospel conversations throughout the country.

The Hermiston Assembly of God Church will host Dare 2 Share LIVE Saturday, Sept. 23 from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 730 E. Hurlburt Ave. The cost is \$20, which includes lunch.

In addition to the video livestream, attendees will experience a live local worship band and a live emcee. The

program includes inspiration and training, outreach sharing and a praise and prayer celebration.

For more about the event, including a link to RSVP, visit www.dare2share.org. For questions, call the Hermiston church at 541-567-5831 or visit www.facebook.com/hermistonassembly.

Stateline Church celebrates 20 years

MILTON-FREEWATER — A 20th anniversary celebration is planned at Stateline Church.

A non-denominational fellowship, the public is invited to

join the congregation in celebration of 20 years of ministering in the community. The event is Sunday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the church, located at 85440 Highway 11, Milton-Freewater. The event will include a special service and a time of sharing how God has touched their lives.

For more information, call 541-938-7552 or visit the Facebook page.

Christian church announces classes

MILTON-FREEWATER — After recently resuming its fall worship schedule, the Milton-

Freewater First Christian Church has announced its Sunday class schedule.

Bible classes for all ages are available at 9:30 a.m. Kids Klub also starts at 9:30 a.m. Geared for children of all ages, it includes arts, crafts, music and more. The regular worship service and Junior Church both begin at 10:45 a.m. The church is located at 518 S. Main St., Milton-Freewater. Valet parking and entry via a ramp are available on the side of the building. Also, there’s an elevator at the north entrance.

For more information, call 541-938-3854 Monday through Thursdays from 8 a.m. to noon.

LIMEY PASTOR Being there together

September 10th came upon us. Our churches gathered by the marina in Boardman. The water flittered and glittered under the blue sky. Eighty-six souls were bathed under the rays of the later summer sun. A plethora of pastors and a plenitude of prayers were with us. Our atmosphere by the water was pretty clear, the smoke of the forest fire in the Gorge was distant, thanks be to God.

When we come together in this way, there is no discernible difference between us. Tethered to Christ and bonded in the love of our heavenly family, we were one church. Just a little piece of the whole, but we were 86 gathered together — both shepherds and sheep (and we each had both of those identities).

One of our local churches was missing, and we missed them. Renee played the electronic keyboard that our former musician Kathy had brought for us. Eighty-six singing voices sounded grand and echoed across the water shivering our spines. Had we had more voices I believe we may have triggered the Eschaton (go on — look it up).

After our worship service and our sermon based on Matthew 18: 1-20, we had a potluck. In my old country such a term, potluck, is not known. I had never heard of it — this bringing together of many morsels to make a feast. A symbol of the United States itself.

Mike Smith, who is a seminarian and will, hopefully, be a pastor in his own right soon enough, had asked me what I would like to eat. I said that my favorite thing was curried baked beans. Now, Mike is a former Marine and loves making new dishes. He rose to my challenge. He made superlative curried baked beans, with his own take on curry with unique Smith spices. Truly the Lord had visited his curry.

I remembered the last two verses of our Gospel text:

19: “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20: For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

We certainly had that covered. It was certain that Jesus was here — and is here, with us all, always. He lives, in us and each other.

Bless you all, friends. Amen.

Colin Brown is the pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Boardman.



COLIN BROWN
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