

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: ASA 13/06/92

Distr: UA/SC

15 May 1992

SECTIONS ARE ASKED TO SEND UP TO FIVE FAXES/TELEXES EACH. PLEASE ALSO BRING THIS ACTION TO THE ATTENTION OF THE REFUGEE COORDINATOR IN YOUR SECTION.

Further information on EXTRA 49/92 (ASA 13/05/92, 14 May 1992) - Fear of Refoulement

BANGLADESH/MYANMAR: Burmese Muslim refugees in Bangladesh

The Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar (Burma) are reported to have postponed the repatriation to Myanmar from Bangladesh of Burmese Muslim refugees from the Rakhine (Arakan) State, sometimes known as Rohingyas. The repatriation was due to begin on 15 May 1992.

The decision to postpone the repatriation was taken after the Bangladesh police opened fire on refugees from the Balukhali refugee camp, who were protesting against the planned repatriation. Between one and three men were reportedly killed, and six injured.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

According to press reports, the demonstrators were demanding that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) be fully involved in the repatriation process, and that there be assurances for their safety on return to Myanmar. At present, the bilateral agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar does not provide for the UNHCR to supervise the repatriation. The Government of Myanmar has apparently rejected proposals for UNHCR supervision so far. Indeed, the agreement does not provide any mechanisms at all to ensure that only those refugees who volunteer are returned to Myanmar, that human rights conditions have improved in Myanmar before any refugee is repatriated, or that the the safety of those who return is monitored.

Muslim refugees continue to enter Bangladesh from the Rakhine State, apparently fleeing from continuing gross human rights violations committed by the Myanmar military. One thousand refugees are reported to have arrived in Bangladesh from Myanmar on 14 May 1992 alone.

Officials of the Bangladesh and Myanmar Governments are due to meet again on 17 May 1992 for further discussions on repatriation.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes

- welcoming the news that the planned repatriation of Burmese Muslim refugees has been postponed;

- urging that the Government of Bangladesh ensure that any future agreement with the Government of Myanmar on the repatriation of Burmese Muslims contains effective mechanisms, including the full participation of the UNHCR at all stages of the repatriation as follows: to ensure that refugees who return have made a genuinely voluntary decision to do so; that human rights conditions in the Rakhine State have improved before any refugee is returned; and that all returned refugees will be effectively protected from further violations;

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- expressing concern that the Bangladesh police may have used excessive force in opening fire on refugees demonstrating against the repatriation;

- urging that the incident be fully and impartially investigated, and that the police are clearly instructed not to use lethal force in future, except in life-threatening situations.

APPEALS TO:

A S M Mustafizur Rahman
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Topkhana Road
Dhaka
Bangladesh

Faxes: + 880 2 833 597; + 880 2 411 281

Telexes: 642200 PAMA BJ or 64222 PAMA BJ

[Salutation: Dear Minister]

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO: diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY TO ARRIVE IN BANGLADESH BY 19 MAY 1992.