

Landslide threat to Rohingyas

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With repatriation of the Rohingya refugees nowhere in sight, the monsoon, almost around the corner, threatens to make their camp life worse than ever before. The threats have lately been highlighted by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Homeless and displaced people normally brace for many rain-induced dislocations and disruptions in the season. In the hilly areas such as the greater Chittagong, the greatest danger to vulnerable people is posed by landslides. A series of these avoidable mishaps in the region has brought untold sufferings to hundreds of shanty-dwellers. Those have occurred in the last 10 to 15 years. In all the cases they have led to avoidable deaths, injuries and displacement. This year, given the now-unwieldy turn of the refugee settlement, the spectre of landslides looms large in Cox's Bazar district.

Indiscriminate felling of trees by the refugees has exposed the makeshift Rohingya dwellings to the much-dreaded landslides. The situation has been exacerbated by levelling of hills. As has been seen in the Chittagong port city, a lot of troubling human factors are blamed for this calamity. The refugee enclaves in Cox's Bazar's Ukhia area continue to be a prime cause for deadly landslides. To the apprehension of the local residents, the authorities handling the refugee crisis are still found in a blasé state. This administrative amnesia, earlier seen in the Chittagong tragedies, may aggravate the situation in Cox's Bazar as well. In response to the apprehensions of the WHO over the coming monsoon maladies, the UNHCR, UN Refugee Agency, has also come up to assess the Rohingya situation during the coming rains. Finding scores of refugee families to be vulnerable to landslides and floods, the agency underscores immediate relocation of the risk-prone Rohingyas to safer places. In such a situation, emergency plans deserve the utmost priority.

There is denying the fact that the Rohingya influx has been viewed here with compassion and from a humanitarian angle but it is equally true that sections of these people are disorderly and also reckless. Moreover, there are few monitoring bodies to prevent them from wreaking havoc with nature. Remedial measures now might prove belated. Unless concerted and all-out actions are in place soon, the situation may spiral out of control.

Landslides, as apprehended, will greatly complicate the government's endeavours to repatriate and rehabilitate the refugees. In order to remain free of this undesirable burden, it's time the authorities swung into action to forestall such calamities. The onus also lies with dozens of the UN and other agencies working to alleviate the sufferings of the Rohingya refugees. The Rohingya refugee problem has been called one of the greatest humanitarian crises in the recent times. This crisis has threatened Bangladesh's economy and environment and if it continues, society here will face destabilisation at some point. This country finds itself in a situation which is perplexing and demands deft handling. The coming monsoon will heighten its responsibility to a great extent. A foolproof, and well-coordinated preparedness is the need of the hour.

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