

BANGLADESH

IN SHORT



Main Objectives

- Facilitate voluntary repatriation to Myanmar of those of the 22,500 remaining refugees who are willing and cleared to return.
- Promote and initiate activities fostering self-reliance for refugees unable or unwilling to return in the near future, pending a lasting solution.
- Coordinate and ensure protection and basic services for the refugees, paying special attention to women and children.



Planning Figures		
Population	Jan. 2000	Dec. 2000
Refugees from Myanmar (Kutu Palong)	8,800	5,300
Refugees from Myanmar (Nayapara)	13,730	10,230
Total	22,530	15,530
Total Requirements 3,798,775		



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WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Recent Developments

In August 1997, after approximately 230,000 refugees had returned to Myanmar, the Myanmar authorities considered the repatriation process to have been completed. However, at the request of UNHCR, repatriation to Myanmar was resumed in November 1998.

Constraints

Only some 600 refugees have repatriated in the past eleven months, as a result of the limit of 50 persons per week imposed by the Myanmar authorities, compounded by procedural difficulties in obtaining clearance. UNHCR has asked the Government of Myanmar to accelerate repatriation.

While some refugees who are willing to return to Myanmar may be unable to do so on account of the clearance procedures required by the Myanmar authorities; others are still unwilling to repatriate.

After almost seven years, the refugees remain confined in Bangladesh in closed camps where they are allowed a limited range of activities. Continued direct assistance to this camp population under such restrictions is clearly not in their interests and perpetuates dependence on external support. The Bangladeshi authorities have, however, been unwilling to allow the refugees to engage in any productive activity. The authorities and UNHCR in Bangladesh are continuing to discuss this matter.

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STRATEGY

Protection and Solutions

UNHCR will try to enhance confidence among the refugees and develop a dialogue with the authorities in order to maintain law and order in the camps and ensure their smooth functioning. A process of intensive and objective counselling will enable a maximum number of refugees to return. By being present and monitoring the camps, UNHCR will try to reduce sexual harassment and other forms of violence against refugee women, and ensure that repatriation is voluntary. UNHCR will continue to encourage and promote bilateral talks between Bangladesh and Myanmar to accelerate repatriation.

In addition to providing protection and assistance to refugees from Myanmar, UNHCR will also assist

urban refugees and promote solutions entailing voluntary repatriation or third country resettlement. An information campaign will promote knowledge of international refugee law and efforts will be made to build support for national legislation on refugees and displaced persons.

Assistance

In Bangladesh UNHCR transports returnees from the camps in Bangladesh to the reception centres in Myanmar via transit facilities at border departure points. Returnees are provided with a food ration for their journey (they receive a returnee assistance package upon arrival in Myanmar).

UNHCR has initiated discussions with the Bangladeshi authorities on the introduction into the camps of productive activities to promote some degree of self-sufficiency, and will continue to advocate the need to reduce the refugees' dependence on external assistance and the introduction of activities leading to a more productive life. Meanwhile, basic humanitarian assistance will continue to be provided. This assistance will cover supplementary food (basic food being provided by WFP), cooking fuel, soap, clothing and other domestic and household needs. UNHCR and its partners will also work to maintain and operate camp services, including a water system, latrines, health services, refugee shelters and other camp infrastructure.

UNHCR has worked in 1999 to sensitise its own staff as well as those of governmental and NGO partners to gender issues. This has led to improvements in the design of camp activities to better address the needs of refugee women. For example, distribution of food rations was modified to ensure access to food by single female heads of households. UNHCR has also established a centre for women inside the camp and begun to organise social activities. This centre could also host productive activities, should the concept of self-reliance be accepted by the authorities.

Desired Impact

Ideally, all refugees who wish to return to their places of origin in Myanmar should be allowed to repatriate in a prompt and orderly manner. Limited productive activities, allowing a degree of self-sufficiency, should be allowed by the Bangladeshi authorities for refugees who are not willing or able to repatriate in the immediate future.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management Structure

In 2000, UNHCR will operate in Bangladesh with 30 staff (6 international and 24 local). The Branch Office in Dhaka is responsible for overall management of the country programme, liaison with the Government, relevant diplomatic missions and NGOs. Assistance and protection activities are coordinated by the office in Cox's Bazar, which maintains daily contact with the refugees, government bodies, NGO partners and other concerned parties.

Coordination

At the request of the Government of Bangladesh, UNHCR has since 1992 been helping the authorities care for refugees from Myanmar, ensure necessary protection and coordinate assistance activities. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief is the main central governmental counterpart, and the Repatriation and Relief Commissioner in Cox's Bazar deals with assistance and protection activities in the camps.

UNHCR will coordinate closely with *Médecins Sans Frontières* (Netherlands) who will implement sanitary, health and nutrition services in Nayapara camp with funding from sources other than UNHCR.

Budget (USD)

Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	569,409
Community Services	25,144
Domestic Needs/ Household Support	1,510,841
Education	16,429
Food	100,420
Health/Nutrition	299,729
Legal Assistance	54,220
Operational Support (to Agencies)	248,469
Sanitation	44,385
Shelter/Other Infrastructure	102,660
Transport/Logistics	53,213
Water (non-agricultural)	74,890
Total Operations	3,099,809
Programme Support	698,966
Total	3,798,775

Offices

Dhaka
Cox's Bazar

Partners

Government Agencies

Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief

NGOs

CONCERN, Bangladesh

