

# BANGLADESH

## INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Facilitate voluntary repatriation to Myanmar of those of the 22,500 remaining refugees who are willing and able to return.
- Promote and initiate activities that encourage self-reliance for refugees who are either unable or unwilling to return in the near future, until a durable solution is found.
- Co-ordinate and ensure protection and basic services for the refugees, giving special care and attention to the needs of women and children.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Voluntary repatriation of Myanmar refugees took place on a weekly basis. A total of 153 families/905 persons returned to Myanmar during the first six months of the year. Since repatriation resumed in November 1998, a total of 349 families/2,139 persons had returned to Myanmar by the end of June.

The slow pace of repatriation is due to clearance procedures required by the Myanmar authorities. Out of 22,500 refugees in the camps, 7,000 had already been cleared prior to the suspension of voluntary repatriation in July 1997. Of these 7,000, submissions for 948 families/5,758 persons were made to the Myanmar authorities for re-verification during the first six months of the year. Cases involving 546 families/3,305 persons are still pending.

At a bilateral meeting between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in January, both sides agreed upon a number of measures to expedite repatriation. However, most of them have yet to be implemented. The slow progress of repatriation and the reluctance of the Myanmar authorities to consider the return of the uncleared 16,000 refugees remain a major source of contention.

The Myanmar authorities agreed to accept the repatriation of incomplete families, which was

previously not permitted. This should facilitate the return of 71 families/411 persons.

During the first quarter of the year, there were allegations of physical abuse, psychological pressure and confiscation of refugee documents, which are necessary in order to receive rations and medical treatment from the camp authorities. UNHCR intervened to address these issues. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and UNHCR agreed to conduct a joint investigation of the matter. This was initiated in June.

As of the end of June, there were 166 registered refugees detained in prisons in Cox's Bazar, Rangamati, Banderban and Chittagong. UNHCR visited them and checked on their status, provided counselling and distributed material assistance. Refugees who had completed their sentences were allowed to return to the camps. UNHCR undertook periodic monitoring visits to the border areas.

UNHCR successfully reached an agreement with the Bangladeshi authorities to introduce productive activities in the refugee camps where such activities had not been previously allowed. Activities included small-scale vegetable-gardening, poultry-farming and tree-planting. Beneficiaries were selected from amongst female-headed families, elderly refugees, large families and other vulnerable groups.

UNHCR opened an additional centre for refugee women at the end of May, bringing the total number of UNHCR-supported women's centres to three. The centres' activities included sewing, embroidery work and weaving of fishing nets. In addition, various awareness-raising sessions were held on domestic violence, women's role in society, the importance of girls' education and reproductive health. New schools have been constructed, six in Kutu Palong camp and eight in Nayapara camp. A two-week teacher-training course was conducted to improve basic teaching skills and classroom management of the volunteer teachers. The enrolment rate of girl students' increased to 40 per cent of all students.

Preparatory work for the expansion of eight health centres and six schools in Ukhiya and Teknaf Thanas took place and actual construction will start in July. WFP's input for Food for Work will be used for repair and construction work.

Following a vulnerability survey carried out by WFP in 1999, general refugee rations were increased from 2,007 kcal to 2,112 kcal per person per day. A 'Refresher Training on Food Basket Monitoring and Distribution', organised by UNHCR and WFP, was attended by those involved in food distribution as well as refugees. Health services and sanitation activities continued without any interruption. Water had to be delivered in cistern trucks to Naya-para camp during the dry season.

During the first half of the year, 11 urban refugees from various countries were recognised and one person voluntarily repatriated, bringing the total number of recognised urban refugees to 125. A total of 50 refugees received a lump-sum grant to undertake productive activities and their subsistence allowances were discontinued. Meanwhile, a number of refugees apparently left the country and several requests for additional subsistence allowances were made. As a result, UNHCR requested its implementing partner to conduct a thorough evaluation of the self-reliance of urban refugees.

UNHCR continued to work closely with the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) of Dhaka University and the Bangladesh Bar Council to raise awareness on refugee law. Early this year, RMMRU held a two-day course at Dhaka University on refugee issues. UNHCR signed agreements with the

Bar Council and the RMMRU to hold six training workshops for students, lawyers, and government officials and five workshops for police personnel. The model national law drawn up by the Regional Consultation on Refugees and Migratory Movements in South Asia was translated into Bengali.

### REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

UNHCR plans to hand over assistance activities to NGOs and to phase out its direct involvement in the provision of assistance. Discussions are underway to hand over the medical referral programme to an implementing partner. Efforts will continue to promote productive activities in camps. Reproductive health activities will receive special attention during the second half of the year and priority will be given to involving men in family-planning activities.

UNHCR will continue to promote the self-reliance of urban refugees. Based on the outcome of the evaluation of the self-reliance project for urban refugees, which was completed at the end of July, a change of the modalities of the self-reliance project is being discussed. The introduction of a loan-scheme for refugees is currently considered. For a better understanding of their needs, home visits will be conducted more frequently by the implementing partner.

Preparations are underway for a high-level meeting between parliamentarians and policy-makers on Bangladesh's accession to the 1951 Convention and the adoption of national refugee legislation.

### FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	3,798,775	2,969,938	3,917,868	1,432,500

\*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region/country, opening balance and adjustments.