

## International

## Hiding from traffickers in 'prison-like' tents, Rohingya girls dream of school

## Girls are confined to one-room bamboo tents

**NEW DELHI:** Trapped inside "prison-like" tents in Bangladesh's refugee camps because of fears they will be trafficked or sexually harassed, teenage Rohingya girls dream of going to school and playing outside, aid agencies said yesterday. Adolescent girls are confined to one-room bamboo and tarpaulin tents so as to avoid men, only venturing out in the early hours to relieve themselves, the children's charity Plan International said on World Refugee Day.

"They spend almost every hour of every day inside their sweltering tents, where the only activities they have to keep themselves occupied are cooking and cleaning," said Orla Murphy, Plan International's Bangladesh director. "There is a real hunger for social interaction, the feeling of normality," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The number of Rohingya in camps in Cox's Bazar has swelled to almost 1 million since last August, when an army operation in Myanmar following Rohingya insurgents' attacks on security forces prompted an exodus to Bangladesh. With the start of the monsoon season, the government is working to relocate tens of thousands of people amid fears of landslides and waterborne diseases. Plan International interviewed 300 girls aged between 10

and 19, many of whom said they have little or no freedom to go outside and they only spend time with their families, reminiscing about happier times back home in Myanmar.

"In Myanmar if I wanted to play, I could, but I cannot play here," 11-year-old Noor told Plan International in a report that described adolescent girls' lives as 'prison-like'.

"I had friends and went to school. I was really interested to learn English and tailoring. But there is no school here." Children's charities only run temporary "learning centers" for some refugee children up to the age of 14 because Bangladesh does not allow formal schooling in the camps. With a growing number of Rohingya refugees being sold to older men as child brides by human traffickers, and widespread domestic abuse, rights groups called for more services to protect girls, from education and security to toilets.

"They become susceptible - sex tourism thrives here," said Nafeesa Shamsuddin, a spokeswoman for Bangladesh's BRAC charity. "Pimps target these vulnerable girls." While younger girls can be seen hauling bags of grains and firewood, fetching water or looking after babies, they are forced into isolation when they reach puberty, said Daphnee Cook, a spokeswoman for the British charity Save the Children. "Many childhoods end around this age," she said. "The perception is that these girls are now women and will face more risks." — Reuters



## Rohingya girls sold to men as child brides



**RATHEAUNG:** This undated handout picture shows a group of Muslim women composed of Rohingyas and Bangladeshi boarding police trucks in Rathedaung township in Rakhine state after their damaged boat ran into trouble off the coast of Rakhine state. — AFP

## North Korea, China discuss 'true peace', denuclearization

**SEOUL:** North Korea's Kim Jong Un and Chinese President Xi Jinping came to an understanding on issues discussed at a summit of the two leaders, including denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, the North's state media said yesterday. Kim and Xi assessed the historic meeting Kim had with US President Donald Trump in Singapore last week and exchanged opinions on ways to resolve the issue of denuclearization, Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

The North Korean leader also promised during a meeting with Xi in Beijing to cooperate with Chinese officials to secure "true peace" in the process of "opening a new future" on the Korean peninsula, it said. Xi told Kim the neighbors' joint efforts could definitely ensure peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, China's official Xinhua news agency said.

"I have faith that, with the joint efforts of China and North Korea, our relationship can definitely benefit both countries and both peoples," he said, during a meeting at Beijing's Diaoyutai state guest house. Kim told Xi that previously China and North Korea had helped each other out like family members. "General Secretary comrade Xi Jinping has shown us touching and familial support and concern," he said, according to Xinhua. Kim wrapped up his two-day trip to Beijing yesterday with a visit to an agricultural sciences exhibition and the Beijing subway command centre, Xinhua added.

The visit follows his Singapore summit, where Kim and Trump reaffirmed a commitment to work towards complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Trump surprised officials in South Korea and the United States after that meeting by saying he would end "provocative" joint US-South Korean military exercises. The United States and South Korea said they had agreed to suspend a joint military exercise set for August, although decisions regarding subsequent drills have not yet been made.

Yesterday, South Korean Foreign Minister Kang

Kyung-hwa said the decision to suspend the exercise could be reconsidered, based on future developments with North Korea. "I think we've made it clear this is a goodwill gesture to strengthen dialogue momentum," Kang said. "It's not irreversible. They could come back if the dialogue loses speed, or if North Korea doesn't live up to its denuclearization commitment," she said. Kim is on his third visit to China this year. Xi offered high praise to the North Korean leader on Tuesday for the "positive outcome" of last week's summit with Trump.

KCNA also reported that Xi said relations between

China and North Korea had reached a new level of development since Kim's first visit in March and that the pacts by the two leaders were being carried out "one-by-one". Kim also told Xi he was willing to bolster friendship and cooperation, it said.

It was widely expected that Kim would visit Beijing to brief Xi on his summit with Trump, which included Pyongyang agreeing to hand over the remains of troops missing from the 1950-53 Korean War. Two US officials told Reuters on Tuesday North Korea could start that process within the next few days. — Reuters



**BEIJING:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (right) and Chinese President Xi Jinping wave to children after reviewing an honor guard during a welcome ceremony in Beijing's Great Hall of the People. — AFP

## Battle for Yemen port of Hodeida

**SANAA:** Emirati-backed Yemeni government forces seized Hodeida airport yesterday in a major step towards retaking the rebel-held port city after a week of fighting that has left nearly 350 people dead. The offensive to retake Hodeida from rebel fighters who have held it since 2014 has raised UN concerns for vital aid shipments and food imports through the city's docks. Here is a timeline of the battle:

## Troops launch offensive

The offensive is launched on June 13 after government forces—who have been advancing on the port for months—receive a green light from the Saudi-led coalition that provides essential air and ground support. The coalition carries out more than a dozen air strikes on Houthi positions on the outskirts of Hodeida; 22 rebels are killed while three pro-government fighters die in an ambush, medical sources say. UN envoy Martin Griffiths, leading talks to ensure the continued functioning of the vital port, urges all sides to "exercise restraint and to give peace a chance." Britain requests a UN Security Council meeting and Russia warns of "catastrophic consequences" for the entire aid-dependent country.

## Heavy clashes

There is intense fighting on the second day of the offensive, with Saudi-led coalition warplanes and Apache helicopters providing "continuous" air support, although the government advance is hampered by sniper fire and mines. Medical sources said that 30 rebels and nine pro-government troops are killed in fighting near Hodeida's defunct airport, which serves as a rebel base.

The UAE announces that four of its troops died on the first day of the offensive, when Houthis said they had struck a coalition ship with two missiles. Sweden calls for the UN Security Council to demand "an immediate freeze" to the assault to allow time for talks on a rebel withdrawal and avert a humanitarian disaster. But UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash insists "it is clear that for the UN-led political process to succeed, the situation on the ground must change".



**AL HAJJAH, Yemen:** Displaced Yemenis from Hodeida sit in their shelter at a make-shift camp for displaced people in the northern district of Yemen's Hajjah province yesterday. — AFP

## Rebel leader defiant

After meeting behind closed doors, the UN Security Council does not demand a halt in the offensive but says the port must remain open. Saudi ambassador Abdallah Al-Mouallimi warns that the Houthi rebels could "blow up part of the port" during a retreat. The Houthis will be given safe passage to the north if they withdraw from the city, the UAE ambassador says. But rebel chief Abdulmalik Al-Houthi urges his men to fight on, promising reinforcements. On June 15, government forces come under attack on the coast road south of Hodeida, leaving around 12 dead and disrupting a vital supply line.

## UN envoy leaves

The UN envoy holds four days of talks in the rebel-held capital Sanaa in a bid to avert an all-out battle for the city but flies out on Tuesday without announcing any breakthrough. The Yemeni government and its allies have insisted that the Houthis must fully withdraw from Hodeida and turn over the port to UN supervision. The rebels agree only to share control of the port with the United Nations. — AFP

## Japan dreams of jackpot with legal casinos

**TOKYO:** At a casino school in Tokyo, croupier-in-training Takuto Saito settles behind a green table and reaches for the roulette wheel, addressing a group of imaginary punters: "Spin up. Place your bets." The 24-year-old has never set foot in a casino, but he is gambling that new laws opening up the lucrative sector will soon create plenty of jobs for croupiers in Japan.

Opening his palms to fake surveillance cameras on the roof to show there is nothing up his sleeves, Saito says he enjoys watching how players make their moves and the tense atmosphere around the gambling tables. Owner Masayoshi Oiwane says interest has skyrocketed in his casino school, where would-be croupiers learn to deal baccarat games, spin the roulette wheel and supervise betting on the green baize tables. "Our enrolment has doubled from last year," he said. "We are seeing an unprecedented level of momentum."

Japan was long the only developed nation that banned casinos but passed legislation in 2016 paving the way to make the industry legal. And on Tuesday, the lower house of parliament passed a bill allowing the construction of three "integrated resort" (IR) facilities combining casinos, convention centers, hotels, restaurants and entertainment venues. Japan is often viewed as the Holy Grail of gaming in Asia due to a wealthy population, proximity to China and appetite for other forms of legal gambling, including horse racing and pachinko, a slot machine-style game.

Economists estimate the casino industry could bring in takings of 2.0-3.7 trillion yen (\$18 billion to \$34 billion) a year, and national and regional governments are set for a jackpot of a combined 30-percent tax on gaming revenues. Japan's government hopes they will become tourist draws, local versions of Las Vegas or Macau that will be a shot in the arm for a stagnant economy and attract business travelers and new tourists. It has brushed aside opposition from activists, including those concerned about Japan's already well-documented problem with gambling addiction. — AFP

## News in brief

## Iran lawyer arrested

**TEHRAN:** An Iranian defense lawyer has been arrested after claiming a man executed this week for killing three policemen was innocent, Iran's Fars news agency said yesterday. Zeinab Taheri was taken into custody after an arrest warrant was issued against her for making "false statements" and because of "her lies propagated online claiming (the defendant) was not guilty," the conservative-linked agency said. It did not specify the date of her arrest. "The female lawyer who recently claimed to be the defendant's lawyer and who has gone hoarse saying he is innocent was basically not this person's lawyer," Tehran's chief justice Gholamhossein Esmaili said, according to the agency. Mohammad Reza Salas was hanged on Monday for driving a bus into a group of police officers during February clashes with security forces, killing three of them. — AFP

## 10 killed in Zambia

**LUSAKA:** At least 10 subsistence miners were killed when a mine dump known locally as Black Mountain collapsed in Zambia's second-largest city and copperbelt mining hub Kitwe yesterday, police said. The vast mound of dark earth in the country's northeast has become an economic lifeline for thousands of people who make a living from activities that local media report have been partially legalized. "So far we have retrieved 10 dead bodies and seven bodies of those injured," said Copperbelt Province police commissioner Charity Katanga. Operations to retrieve bodies were ongoing, she added. Local media reported that miners were forced to step in last month after small-scale miners began using explosives to extract copper from the mine dump, damaging nearby properties and possibly dislodging the mound. — AFP

## Cyber attack targets jets

**TEL AVIV:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on governments worldwide yesterday to join forces to defend against cyber threats that he said could even bring down military and civilian aircraft. Cybersecurity also represents an enormous business opportunity, Netanyahu told a cyber conference at Tel Aviv University, adding that Israel receives about 20 percent of global investment in the sector. "We cannot go back to the world of levers, pulleys and couriers. Since we are going forward, we are absolutely vulnerable. Our airlines can be brought down, our fighter planes can be brought down," he said. While Israel monitors attacks at its cybersecurity centre in the southern city of Beersheba, Netanyahu said there was "no silver bullet". — Reuters

## Macedonia name deal

**SKOPJE:** The Macedonian parliament ratified yesterday a historic accord with Greece to rename the small Balkan nation the Republic of North Macedonia in a bid to end a 27-year row between the two neighbors. "We have a deal that clearly defines our identity, our Macedonian language for ever," Prime Minister Zoran Zaev told lawmakers ahead of the vote, urging them to back the agreement. A total of 69 MPs in the 120-seat assembly supported the accord, while the nationalist opposition deputies were not present during the vote. The agreement's adoption by parliament clears the way for a referendum to be held at a later date. If the public back the name change, the government will then have to change the constitution—a key Greek demand before its own parliament is asked to ratify the deal. — AFP