

U.S. wants India on board to ease Rohingya crisis

Amid growing worries about the coming monsoon that could flood a third of the main Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh, Washington has offered to partner with New Delhi on joint efforts to assist Bangladesh.

Confirming the offer, a senior U.S. administration official said, "We think India also has an interest in seeing this situation resolved."

"We will look for ways to work with India to provide for the needs of the Rohingya in Bangladesh, but also to work together to create that pressure on Burma [Myanmar] to create the conditions required for their safe and voluntary return," added the official, calling India a "like-minded" partner.

The offer was made during a recent visit to the region by Deputy Assistant to U.S. President Donald Trump and the Director for South and Central Asia, Lisa Curtis, as well as Director for India and the Indian Ocean Basant Sanghera. Ms. Curtis, who travelled to Dhaka and Delhi during an extended visit that included Kabul and Islamabad, also visited the main Kutapalong-Balukhali camp in Bangladesh, which is now the world's single largest refugee camp, housing about 600,000 people.

Meets Foreign Secretary

After meeting officials of the UN Inter-sector Coordination Group (ISCG) and the Bangladesh government from March 1 to 4, the U.S. delegation met Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale and other officials on March 5, in an unpublicised visit to Delhi. Mr. Gokhale met Ms. Curtis and State Department officials during his visit to Washington last week, where cooperation on Bangladesh was discussed.

The Foreign Secretary is now expected to visit Dhaka in April, while a number of Ministers will visit Bangladesh in the next few months to "take the development partnership agenda to its conclusion", an External Affairs Ministry official said.

While the official accepted that the U.S. proposal for a joint effort to aid Bangladesh was being discussed at the Foreign Secretary level, the Ministry declined to comment on whether the U.S. and India would work on joint measures to "pressure" Myanmar to repatriate the Rohingya. While the U.S. has called the action of Myanmar authorities in driving nearly a million Rohingya men, women and children out of villages, a case of "ethnic cleansing" and threatened targeted sanctions against the officials responsible, India has been comparatively silent on the issue in an effort to keep its ties with Nay Pyi Taw intact.

The U.S. proposal to India may be seen as an attempt to counter China that had last year brokered a repatriation agreement signed by Bangladesh and Myanmar. The agreement, however, is yet to be implemented.

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