

Myanmar's Suu Kyi says terrorism in Rakhine State a threat to region

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Myanmar leader and Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. (AP Photo/Aung Shine Oo, File)

Singapore: Terrorism remains a threat in Myanmar's Rakhine State and could have "grave consequences" for the region, the Southeast Asian country's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, said on Tuesday. In a lecture in Singapore, Suu Kyi did not mention by name the Rohingya Muslims, more than 700,000 of whom have fled the north of Rakhine state since an army crackdown that began a year ago after attacks on security posts by Rohingya insurgents.

The Aug. 25 attacks were launched by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), which Myanmar says is a terrorist group. "The danger of terrorist activities, which was the initial cause of events leading to the humanitarian crisis in Rakhine remains real and present today," she said.

"Unless this security challenge is addressed the risk of inter-communal violence will remain. It is a threat that could have grave consequences, not just for Myanmar but also for other countries in our region and beyond."

The Nobel peace prize laureate, once seen as the face of Myanmar's struggle for democracy, has been criticised for her failure to speak out against the military crackdown, which the United Nations has called "ethnic cleansing".

Buddhist-majority Myanmar and Bangladesh reached an agreement late last year on the repatriation of Rohingya, most of whom are stateless and subjected to restrictions in Myanmar.

Suu Kyi said spaces have been mapped out for the resettlement of people who fled to Bangladesh, where they live in refugee camps.

However, she said it was difficult to set a time frame for their return as the two countries had to work together to agree on the process, suggesting the onus was on Dhaka for the process to get started.

"The returnees have to be sent back by Bangladesh. We can only welcome them at the border," she said. "I think Bangladesh would also have to decide how quickly it wants the process to be completed."

Myanmar has rejected accusations of ethnic cleansing and dismissed most accounts of atrocities, blaming Rohingya "terrorists".

The Rohingya, who regard themselves as native to Rakhine State, are widely considered as interlopers by Myanmar's Buddhist majority and are denied citizenship.

- Reuters