

## ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

# No good news anytime soon

Foreign minister tells parliament

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said the country was not going to have any good news anytime soon regarding resolving the Rohingya crisis through the repatriation of over 11 lakh Myanmar nationals.

Taking part in the discussion on the thanksgiving motion on the president's speech in parliament, the minister said, "Many of you [lawmakers] would ask me about the Rohingya crisis. We are doing fairly well with regard to our strategic stance [on the Rohingya issue]. I hope I will be able to give you good news about the Rohingya issue in the distant future."

However, Momen on Monday told the Jatiya Sangsad about various steps taken by the government in this regard. "It can be expected that the Myanmar authorities will create

a congenial atmosphere in Rakhine state and it would be possible to repatriate Rohingyas to their own country quickly."

Replying to a query from Jatiya Party lawmaker Mujibul Haque from Kishoreganj-3, he said any repatriation is a complex and lengthy process.

"Bangladesh is continuing its efforts, taking the world community along with it, to convince Myanmar to create an appropriate and congenial environment in Rakhine," the minister said in a scripted answer.

Yesterday, the foreign minister said Bangladesh's relations with India were not only "historic and idealistic", but also "very deep".

He said Bangladesh also has good relations with China. "We are maintaining a balanced foreign policy as dreamed by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."

## CASE AGAINST MYANMAR AT ICJ

## OIC to sit in April to mobilise resources

Bss, Dhaka

A meeting of senior OIC officials has agreed to convene a pledging conference during the upcoming Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) meeting to mobilise resources for the ICJ case against Myanmar on accountability for human rights violations against the Rohingyas.

The agreement was reached yesterday during the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) preparatory to the upcoming 47th CFM meeting to be held in Niger on April 3-4, said a foreign ministry press release.

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen led the Bangladesh delegation at the OIC Senior Officials Meeting held at the OIC General Secretariat in Jeddah on February 9-11.

The SOM welcomed the historic unanimous decision on January 23,

2020 of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordering provisional measures to prevent further acts of genocide against the Rohingyas in Myanmar, which sets a historical precedence in legal efforts in upholding the rights of persecuted minorities anywhere in the world.

The OIC delegates also agreed to Bangladesh proposals for continued support to The Gambia in the case at ICJ until a final verdict is issued, follow up on the ICJ's notification of its order of provisional measures to the UN Security Council pursuant to Article 41(2) of the Statute of ICJ and to contribute in the resources mobilisation efforts to ensure safe, dignified and sustained return and resettlement of the Rohingyas to their homeland in the Rakhine State of Myanmar.

Besides, the OIC General Secretariat

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## Thank you

FROM PAGE 1

many papers have and are losing their readers -- not only in our country but globally -- the loyalty shown by ours has given us the crucial strength that we needed to face the storms that came our way. We thank again each and every one of our readers for that.

Journalism is one of the most important professions to have emerged in the modern era. It came along with democracy. As peoples' voices began to be raised on various issues and as it became more and more important in the governance process of a democratic polity so a process emerged through which the ruler could hear what the ruled wanted to say. In fact, as democracy took root the very definition of the ruler and the ruled changed with the people becoming the sovereign authority and the government its mere agent appointed for a time to run its affairs.

Thus journalism was born to tell governments what their master -- the people -- wanted them to do and also to hear the criticism if and when a government failed to deliver on its promises or strayed away from its promised and legally bound path. As the voice of the people journalism became a powerful instrument of keeping governments in check and prevent them from taking a nation into situations that people did not approve of. That is precisely why journalism was called the Fourth Estate being the fourth branch of a modern state along with the legislative, judiciary and the executive.

This is the reason in every modern democratic constitution, including ours, media was given a special legal protection stating that a free media was to be guaranteed under law. In some countries, as in ours, this protection was made subject to reasonable restrictions.

The question we need to ask is why every constitution of democratic countries thought it necessary to protect the media through a special provision in the constitution itself? Reason is that experience proved the need for the existence and nurturing of critical voices in every society for the proper functioning of a democratic government. Experience also proved that such critical voices are seldom if ever, liked by the government and hence the need for their special protection under the purview of the constitution itself. Over the years, as democracies grew stronger and deeper rooted the laws guaranteeing freedom of media became stronger and more elaborate with the First Amendment of the US Constitution becoming its most enlightened version.

The UN Declaration of Human Rights made media freedom and global right an essential part of fundamental human rights.

Subsequently the specific laws concerning Freedom of Information and the Rights to Information, making it obligatory for government to share all information -- save some very specific topics -- were adopted by many countries. These developments greatly strengthened media freedom all over the world. Our present government also followed the global trend and passed its own RTI Act after returning to power in 2008.

This brief account amply justifies why the world holds media freedom to be so important.

As we celebrate 29 years of this paper's existence, we rejoice at the fact that with every issue that we published we tried to uphold the fundamental values for which journalism is respected throughout the world. We tried to speak truth to power, we spoke with an unbiased voice making sure that our tone was never shrill but supremely firm. We devoted our energy to upholding people's right, especially minority rights, fighting corruption and misuse of power. Our special focus was protection of the environment, especially our rivers.

We are delighted to share our future plans with our readers that The Daily Star website is becoming bilingual hopefully on the occasion of Amar Ekushey. Through this innovation we hope to reach a far wider audience and thereby serve a greater number of readers than before. We plan to revamp our digital section and make our online service much more varied and timely. We will introduce multi-media programmes which will enhance the quality of our news presentation. Our e-paper will also be modernised with greater reader-friendly features than now. We plan to totally reform our archives which will facilitate our readers to access our previous issues with far greater ease.

Dear readers, it is essential to remember that as Bangladesh forges ahead so must its journalism. Without an independent voice to tell the government the reality on the ground, without a dissenting voice to suggest alternative ideas to the policy planners, without that bold voice to tell the truth about corruption and waste of precious and scarce resource and without these voices operating without fear or favour Bangladesh's development will not be sustainable. For it is a truism that roads and bridges create wealth but only a free mind can generate wisdom and Bangladesh needs both.

We thank our readers, patrons, advertisers and well-wishers for being with us for the last 29 years and invite them to support us in our journey ahead which is likely to be both arduous and exciting.

-Editor



Liza Akhter, centre, who lost her younger brother Abir Ahmed to a road crash, speaks at a press conference at the Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh in the city's Segunbagicha yesterday. The programme was organised under the banner of "Forum of guardians who lost their children and relatives on roads", demanding justice for the victims of road accidents.

PHOTO: STAR

## Families cry for justice

FROM PAGE 1

said victims in road accident-related cases in the country hardly get justice. Legal procedures end only in a handful of cases and that too after massive protests.

A culture of impunity for the culprits is the main reason why road accidents are increasing, said road.

In January alone, at least 547 people, including 146 students, were killed and 1,141 others injured in 531 road accidents across the country, according to a report of Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, a platform working for passengers' welfare.

The Samity, which came up with the numbers based on newspaper reports, said at least 7,855 people were killed and 13,330 others injured in 5,516 road accidents last year. Around 900 of the victims who died were students. The previous year, road accidents had claimed 7,221 lives and left 15,466 others injured, said the platform.

According to police data, 4,138 people were killed in 4,147 road accidents last year. The previous year, 2,609 road crashes had claimed 2,635 lives. The data was prepared based on cases filed with different police station across the country.

Experts and road safety campaigners said unfit vehicles, faulty construction of roads, traffic mismanagement, pedestrians' callousness and poor enforcement of road rules were mainly to blame for the accidents.

Talking to The Daily Star after yesterday's programme, Tutul said one of his family members filed a general diary with Khilgaon Police Station on the day his son Tasin died. He claimed they wanted to file a case, but police told him they would do that themselves.

"A few days after the death of my son, I called the investigation officer of the case to know about the case's progress. He told me they could not arrest the bus driver. Besides, the vehicle was handed to its owner," he said.

In the last one year, Tutul, with help from different organisations, organised seven human chains and press conferences seeking justice for his son.

He said he wrote to the prime minister, the inspector general of police and the commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police. He also met the mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation thrice, he said.

"I suffered a paralysis in 2017 but now I am recovering. With my poor health, I knocked almost all the doors but have failed to do anything for my son," he said.

Contacted, Ripon Kumar, the newly-appointed investigation officer, said police had filed a case in connection with the accident.

Last month, they submitted the charge sheet to the court against the bus driver, he said, adding that the accused was, however, on the run.

But Tutul said he was in the dark about the development. "I talked to the officer some 10 to 12 days ago, but he did not tell me anything like this. Rather, he asked me why we did not file a case ourselves."

'JUSTICE WE WANT' Abir Ahmed, an SSC examinee, was killed on January 27 this year when a Wasa water tanker ran him over near Wari High School in the capital. He had gone to the school that day to attend a farewell programme.

At yesterday's press conference, his elder sister Liza Akhter said although a case was filed and the driver arrested, they feared they would not get justice.

"Many are approaching us on behalf of the accused and telling us that running the case won't bring us anything good. They are discouraging us from continuing the legal battle," Liza said.

"We want justice. Our only demand is the highest punishment for the driver," she said, adding that reckless driving by the accused took her brother's life.

Nazim Uddin, elder brother of Saiful Islam, who was killed in a road crash in Sheora in October 2017, said they also filed a case with Cantonment Police Station.

The driver of the bus, which ran over and killed Saiful, was arrested only to be released later, Nazim said, adding that the vehicle was also returned to its owner.

"I am so frustrated right now that

I've stopped communicating with police for any update on the case," he said.

'EYES GETTING SHUT' The deaths of two students in a road crash on the capital's Airport Road in July 2018 triggered an unprecedented nationwide road safety movement.

In the face of the protests, different government bodies, police, and transport leaders made a raft of lofty promises. Lawmakers passed the Road Transport Act-2018, the Prime Minister's Office issued a 17-point directive, and police observed "traffic weeks" to bring discipline on road.

But it hardly changed anything. Violation of traffic rules and road accidents are still rampant. People are being killed on roads every day, said road safety campaigners.

Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, secretary general of Jatri Kalyan Samity, said the student movement was an "eye-opener" for the government. "But it shuts the eyes are gradually getting shut. Anarchy has returned to the road."

He said road crashes continued to claim lives as the authorities failed to hand justice to the victims.

He also criticised the government for its failure to implement Road Transport Act, 2018 properly.

Enzamul Haque, joint convener of Nirapad Sarak Andolon, formed after the road safety movement, said those responsible for the deaths of the two students on Airport Road were brought to book.

"The culture of impunity would end if all the perpetrators were treated the same way," he said.

Jyotirmoy Barua, a Supreme Court lawyer working on human rights issue, said families of many road accident victims did not file cases thinking that would bring little results. "They know the legal fight would be time consuming ... also in most cases, the accused belong to powerful [transport] associations," he told The Daily Star.

Families of victims getting justice is very rare, said Jyotirmoy, also a vice chairman of Road Safety Foundation, adding that the government must act promptly to prevent further loss of lives on roads.

## Treacherous journey ends in tragedy

FROM PAGE 1

They started the journey from Noakhali Para area beside the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf marine drive Monday night, said SM Zahidul Islam, Lt commander of navy's St Martin's Island station.

Navy and coast guard personnel were conducting the rescue operation till filing of the report at 9:00pm.

Navy's salvage vessel -- Durjoy -- joined the operation, he added.

Two navy helicopters also took part in the operation.

Survivor Khaleda Begum, 35, said her husband is now in Malaysia. That is why, she along with her son and daughter went on the journey.

"The trawler capsized early in the morning. I could survive by holding a part of the trawler. But my son and daughter died," said Khaleda, who lives in Kutupalong Rohingya camp in Ukhia.

The deceased's bodies and the survivors were taken to St Martin's Island jetty around 10:00am. The survivors were given primary treatment there. Around 3:30pm, the bodies and the survivors were sent to Teknaf Police Station, said coast guard officials.

Pradip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge of the police station, told The Daily Star that he received the bodies and the survivors around 6:00pm. The bodies were sent to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsies. A case will be filed under the anti-human trafficking law, and the survivors will be shown arrested in the case, the OC said.

They will be produced before a local court today, and police will take steps as per the court directive, he

added. Coast guard official Delwar Hossain said four of the 72 survivors were members of a human trafficking syndicate.

One of them told the coast guard that they took Tk 30,000 from each person. They took the people on small fishing trawlers from different points in Teknaf. The people were then put onto a large trawler.

Police detained the four. Meanwhile, the district administration has directed the local civil surgeon to keep a medical team ready for treating the survivors, said Kamal Hossain, deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar.

Locals said the Noakhali Para area is considered a safe place for human trafficking as the area is located adjacent to the sea.

At least 80 people, mostly Rohingyas, were detained by police, BGB, and coast guard from different places of Teknaf and Ukhia between October last year to January 20 this year when they were trying to go to Malaysia illegally.

REACTIONS Different rights bodies yesterday expressed shock at the deaths of Rohingya refugees.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR in a joint statement expressed grief at the tragic loss of lives and said the two organisations were standing by to offer assistance to the government in responding to the needs of the survivors, be it food, shelter or medical aid.

In a statement, Athena Rayburn, Save the Children's humanitarian advocacy manager in Cox's Bazar, said

## Bangladeshi scientist wins L'Oréal-Unesco award

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladeshi scientist Dr Firdausi Qadri was announced the winner of the L'Oréal-UNESCO Women in Science Award (Asia-Pacific region) yesterday for her contribution to understanding and preventing infectious diseases affecting children in developing countries, and promoting early diagnosis and vaccination with global health impact.

Firdausi, head of the Mucosal Immunology and Vaccinology unit of International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease and Research, was selected as the best scientist in Asia-Pacific region during the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, said a media release.

She will be handed over one lakh euros at a ceremony on March 12, 2020 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris.

Four other female scientists also won the award in their regions. They are: Prof Abba Mehio Sibai of American University of Beirut, Prof Edith Heard of College de France, Professor Esperanza Martinez-Romero of Genomic Science Centre of the National Autonomous University of Mexico and Professor Kristi Anseth of University of Colorado.

They were recognised alongside 15 young women scientists from all over the world.

Every year since its creation in 1998, the For Women in Science programme has honoured and supported five outstanding women researchers from all regions, totalling 112 laureates to date.

It has also supported more than 3,300 talented young women scientists, including doctoral candidates and post-doctoral researchers, in more than 118 countries.

## Coronavirus

FROM PAGE 1

The virus, first identified in the city of Wuhan in central China on December 31, has killed 1,019 people, infected over 43,158 and reached some 25 countries.

WHO has declared it a global health emergency.

Participants at the scientific conference will also discuss the source of the virus, which is thought to have originated in bats and reached humans via another "intermediary" species such as snakes or pangolins.

WHO sent an advance team to China this week for an international mission to examine the epidemic.

It was unclear, however, whether the team would be able to visit Wuhan, which has been under lockdown after the outbreak was registered in a food and live animal market in the city.

There is no specific treatment or vaccine against the virus and WHO has repeatedly urged countries to share data in order to further research into the disease.

"That is especially true in relation to sharing of samples and sequences. To defeat this outbreak, we need open and equitable sharing, according to the principles of fairness and equity," Tedros told the scientific conference.

He said he hoped the scientists could agree a roadmap "around which researchers and donors will align".

The WHO said it was applying a so-called R&D Blueprint, which allows the rapid rollout of research and development activities during epidemics.

Several teams of experts in Australia, Britain, China, France, Germany and the United States are racing to develop a vaccine -- a process that normally takes years.

This week, a team of scientists at Imperial College London said they believed they had become the first to start animal testing of a possible vaccine in mice.

Efforts to come up with a vaccine are being led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), a body established in 2017 to finance costly biotechnology research in the wake of an Ebola outbreak in West Africa that killed more than 11,000 people.

Ultimately, however, scientists may end up in the same situation they were during the 2002-2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) -- it died out before a vaccine could be fully developed.

A close cousin of the new coronavirus, SARS spread around the world and killed nearly 800.



Dr Firdausi