

ATROCITIES ON ROHINGYAS

Nothing credible done to improve situation in Rakhine

Say Asean Parliamentarians as Myanmar set to submit first report today to ICJ in genocide case

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Myanmar has done nothing credible to improve the situation for the Rohingya in Rakhine state of Myanmar, said Asean Parliamentarians for Human Rights yesterday, a day ahead of the deadline for Myanmar, as asked by UN top court, to submit its first report today on actions taken to prevent genocide against the Rohingya.

"We have still not seen any credible evidence of Myanmar improving the situation for the Rohingya at all," said Asean (Association of South East Asian Nations) Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) in a statement.

Those inside Myanmar are still living in apartheid conditions and subject to the same – if not worse – restrictions they have lived under for years now, including those on their freedom of movement, access to health, education, and livelihoods, it said.

"After all the pressure Myanmar has faced on this issue, how are we still at this point?" said Charles Santiago, APHR Chair and a member of Malaysian parliament.

In the preliminary ruling of the Gambia versus Myanmar case on 23 January, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that there is a serious risk of genocide against the Rohingya and ordered Myanmar to implement provisional measures to prevent all acts of genocide.

It also requires Myanmar to preserve evidence of crimes that could amount to genocide. These provisional measures are legally binding and require Myanmar to provide a report on their progress by 23 May, and a follow-up every six months thereafter.

The Gambia filed the case against Myanmar late last year, more than two years after some 750,000 Rohingya fled a brutal military crackdown in Rakhine and took shelter in Bangladesh since August 2017.

Myanmar on April 8 issued two presidential directives to ensure that its staff, military or security forces

and others under its control "do not commit" acts defined in the Genocide Convention. The orders also prohibit destruction or removing any evidence of genocidal acts.

Charles Santiago said Myanmar's directives mean nothing if there are no concrete measures being implemented on the ground to dismantle the system of apartheid and discrimination against the Rohingya.

"If Myanmar is serious about complying with the ICJ, an absolute start point must be lifting the government-imposed internet blackout in Rakhine and Chin states," he said.

Presently, APHR said, all civilians living in Rakhine are caught in the midst of the intensifying conflict between the Tatmadaw and Arakan Army, in which hundreds have been killed and wounded, and more than 157,000 people displaced.

APHR has also called on Asean to urge Myanmar to protect civilians in the conflict, and tackle the root causes of the crisis by taking a rights-based approach and to implement the recommendations from the Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission on Rakhine.

Asean must urge Myanmar to cooperate with international accountability mechanisms to ensure justice for the Rohingya, APHR said.

"After decades of oppression, violence and restrictions on the rights of the Rohingya, the international community cannot continue to watch the Myanmar authorities act with impunity. It may be years before the ICJ comes up with a final judgment, so in the meantime, Asean leaders must urge Myanmar to implement genuine reform," said Chamnan Chanruang, an APHR member and former Thai MP.

Meanwhile, AP reported, Myanmar says it will submit a report due today outlining its claims of compliance with an order from the ICJ to protect members of its Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority, but refused to discuss its contents before submitting it.

Deaths, new cases

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said the Directorate General of Health Services.

Addressing the regular briefing on the Covid-19 situation, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of DGHS, said 1,694 people tested Covid-19 positive in 24 hours since Thursday morning.

Since March 8, some 30,205 people have been infected with the novel coronavirus in the country, she said.

Shafiu Shimul, an associate professor of Health Economics at Dhaka University, said if the current trend continues, the infection rate in the country will increase until the end of June.

An effective lockdown for at least two weeks can bring down the infection rate, he opined.

RISK FACTORS

The government, health experts, and campaigners have been asking people to maintain social distancing and hygiene, but it seems to have fallen on deaf ears as many do not follow it.

Dhaka city has the highest number of Covid-19 cases, and Jatrabari ranks as the second-most affected area where these quacks con people every day.

"They are fooling people. But what is more alarming is the crowd and the method used to treat jaundice patients," said Raju Ahmed, who was present at the spot near Shahid Faruque Road.

Raju, who works at an RFL showroom, said this increases the risk of spreading coronavirus.

Quack Alim said he has been treating patients for a long time and nothing has happened. "There is no possibility

of spreading coronavirus from here," he claimed.

People also go to salons -- which also carries the risk of spreading the virus.

Md Sumon, owner of a salon in Swamibagh, said he opened his shop last week. "I clean scissors regularly," he claimed when asked about maintaining hygiene.

Besides, people were also seen violating social distancing directives at some kitchen markets in the capital. Eid shoppers also ignore the directive.

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former adviser (Southeast Asia Region) of the WHO, said awareness campaigns were not being conducted properly.

"We could not motivate and convince them to maintain hygiene and social distancing," he said.

He suggested following the social distancing directive strictly.

BRIEFING

During yesterday's briefing, Prof Nasima asked people to act responsibly and refrain from visiting relatives during Eid.

"It's a war-like situation. We need to show mental strength," she said, adding, "When you are travelling to your near and dear ones, you are also increasing their risk of being infected."

Some 9,727 samples were tested in the past 24 hours, she said.

Around 588 more people have recovered.

Of the 24 dead, 15 breathed their last at hospitals and eight at home. One died on the way to a hospital. Thirteen were from Dhaka division, nine from Chattogram, and one each from Barishal and Mymensingh.

Dozens die as Pak plane crashes

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The plane had developed a technical fault, interior minister Ijaz Ahmad Shah said, adding that the pilot issued a mayday call after the craft lost an engine.

PIA spokesman Abdullah Hafeez said there were 91 passengers and seven crew on board the flight, which lost contact with air traffic control just after 2.30pm (0930 GMT). An aviation authority spokesperson said the number of crew on board was eight.

"The aeroplane first hit a mobile tower and crashed over houses," witness Shakeel Ahmed said near the site, a few kilometres short of the airport.

The Airbus A320 was flying from the eastern city of Lahore to Karachi in the south just as Pakistan was resuming domestic flights in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, according to the aircraft tracking website FlightRadar24.

The crash happened on the eve of the Muslim festival of Eid, when Pakistanis traditionally travel to visit relatives.

The plane was on its second attempt to land after cancelling a previous one in a routine manoeuvre known as a go-around, one person familiar with the investigation said.

The pilot told air traffic controllers he had lost power from both engines, according to a recording posted on liveatc.net, a widely respected aviation monitoring website.

"We are returning back, sir, we have

lost engines," a man was heard saying in a recording released by the website. The controller freed up both the airport's runways but moments later the man called "Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!".

There was no further communication from the plane, according to the tape, which could not immediately be authenticated.

Residents near the scene said their walls shook before a big explosion erupted as the aircraft slammed into their neighbourhood.

"I was coming from the mosque when I saw the plane tilting on one side. The engines' sounds were quite weird. It was so low that the walls of my house were trembling," said 14-year-old witness Hassan.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said he was "shocked and saddened" by the crash, tweeting that he was in touch with the state airline's chief executive.

"Prayers & condolences go to families of the deceased," he wrote on Twitter.

Pakistan has a chequered military and civilian aviation safety record, with frequent plane and helicopter crashes over the years.

In 2016, a Pakistan International Airlines plane burst into flames after one of its two turboprop engines failed while flying from the remote north to Islamabad, killing more than 40 people.



Locals repair an embankment on the Khulpetua river in Satkhira's Shyamnagar upazila yesterday, a day after Cyclone Amphan damaged the structure.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Farmers happy, yet experts worry

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In Mymensingh, the price of paddy has gone up to as high as Tk 800 per maund, said Ali Asgar, a farmer of Chargobindapur of the district.

"The price of Boro paddy is around Tk 600 to Tk 700 per maund depending on variety. It was around Tk 400 to Tk 450 last year," said farmer Abdul Gani of Dolua Dogachhi village of Nilphamari Sadar upazila.

However, farmers of Moulvibazar and Netrokona are not getting very high prices yet.

"In local bazaars of Moulvibazar, the price is ranging between Tk 550 to Tk 600 per maund," said Mosabbir Ali, a farmer of Bhukshimol of Kulaura upazila in the district.

In Netrokona's remote areas, buyers are deducting the cost of transportation from the purchase price so farmers are getting less money, said Dilip Talukder of Chakua village in the district's Khaliaghuri upazila.

Abidur Rahman Kayes, a rice trader of Kazirbazar in Sylhet, said, "The price of new rice from the fresh Boro harvest is ranging between Tk 1,400 to Tk 1,500 per maund and is increasing because of the rising paddy price."

Compared to last year, the price of new rice is higher, he added.

WHAT MILLERS SAY

"Millers, wholesalers, middleman, small traders -- everyone with money is buying paddy now to make profit as the demand is likely to increase due to the

coronavirus pandemic," said Ashrafur Rahman Chowdhury, general secretary of Sunamganj Rice Mill Malik Samity.

He said around 4,500 millers under the Samity are buying at least 500 maunds more rice than last year.

Although a bumper harvest of the Boro paddy is expected this year, Md Tareq Anam, national sales manager (rice) of Rashid Group, one of the biggest rice millers in the country noted that recent rainfall affected the crop in some areas in Jashore.

Besides, harvest is not yet complete because of labour shortage, he added.

"The supply of rice has reduced in the market because of humanitarian aid by individuals and groups. Some consumers are also stockpiling fearing uncertainty. As a result, traders are refilling their stock," he said.

KM Layek Ali, general secretary of the Bangladesh Auto Major and Husking Mills Association, said millers are buying paddy to supply to state godowns as per the contract with the government.

Besides, cultivation of fine grain appears to be less this year compared to the previous season. As a result, millers, who market fine rice such as miniket, are buying more to build stock for the whole year.

GOVT MEASURES NEEDED

Although the government doubled its paddy procurement quantity this year and has started buying eight lakh tonnes of paddy, 10 lakh tonnes of

parboiled rice and 1.5 lakh tonnes of sunburnt rice, experts opine it should be increased further.

"The government is purchasing around 10 percent of the total production of Boro. But to influence the market price during the pandemic, the stock must be increased," said Professor Jasim Uddin Ahmed, chairman of Agricultural Economics and Policy department of Sylhet Agriculture University.

This year, the targeted production of Boro paddy is 2.04 crore tonnes from 47.54 lakh hectares of land, as per the Department of Agriculture Extension.

"As the government can't build new storage overnight, they should rent unused buildings. The more paddy in government storage, the more the market will be in control," said the professor.

However, Md Amzad Hossain, director of Supply, Distribution and Marketing Division of the Directorate General of Food, said,

"We are facing an unpredictable situation due to the coronavirus pandemic and some people are buying paddy to stockpile for profit."

He added, "It is too early to comment on what will happen in future as it all depends on how long we will be in such a pandemic situation."

[Our Nilphamari Correspondent EAM Asaduzzaman, Mymensingh Correspondent Aminul Islam and Moulvibazar Correspondent Mintu Deshwara contributed to this report]

Friend in need is a friend indeed

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assistance or wealthy people's financial help have hardly reached them. Having exhausted meagre savings and loans from relatives, they're bracing themselves for the seemingly inevitable.

But, hope and help manifest in many forms and in unexpected ways. Nearly 3,000 drivers were able to keep their families afloat amid this crisis after a little-known private foundation (SAAF) of businessman Anis Ahmed and his wife Suhana brought them under its wings.

"I couldn't look my children in the eye. There was no food at home for three days," recalled Ramzan Ali, who lives at Shahjahanpur Colony with his family of five, to The Daily Star on Thursday.

Though not solvent, the 45-year-old used to live a decent life with a daily average income of Tk 800, driving CNG three-wheelers for Obhai, a ride-sharing start-up popular among the lower-middle income group. But whatever comfort he had, it went out the window within two weeks of the shutdown which started on March 26.

"I wish no parents have to see their little children starve."

It was in those desperate times that he got a phone call from the foundation, telling him that Tk 3,750 had been sent to his bKash account as donation. "A divine act, isn't it?" asked Ramzan.

Mohammad Ripon, a CNG driver in Chattogram, yesterday got the second instalment of the support from the foundation, Tk 7,500 in total. Financial

crisis was not much of an issue for his family of five due to the additional income from his wife Ayesha Begum, a garment worker. The young couple spent what they earned. So, they were soon to see the other side of the coin.

Support is the hardest to get when everyone is mired in a crisis. "[House] rent is not paid; but we could eat with this help," said Ripon over the phone, adding that he would send some money to his mother in Noakhali for the first time after two months.

Driver Rafiqul Islam, on the other hand, had the additional responsibility of supporting his elderly parents. They had been compelled to cut back to one meal a day when he received the call of support in April.

"I could not believe something like this could happen. Today, I have food to provide for my family, and can afford a peaceful night's sleep," said Rafiqul, expressing his gratitude to the foundation.

In Sylhet, Mohammad Manik could not even believe this could happen after getting the financial assistance from the foundation. "A very big help for us to pass this crucial time," said Manik. "We can have an Eid meal too!"

The 25-year-old believes that the critical phase of this crisis is now over, and he would soon be able to go out with his three-wheeler and be on his own.

There are hundreds of other drivers of the Obhai ride-sharing start-up who

felt like Manik: a timely intervention by the foundation kept them afloat.

Contacted, Anis Ahmed, the co-founder of the Suhana & Anis Ahmed Foundation (SAAF), wrote back through WhatsApp, stating that they have so far disbursed Tk 1.84 crore to 2,953 drivers in the last two months.

Although not new to charity, the foundation had entered serious public discourse earlier in the month when it teamed up with the Bidyanondo Foundation, pumping in Tk 1.05 crore fund to provide support to 22,000 families in the rural areas.

In a way, the foundation's support for the riders might appear as a family affair to some critics since the Obhai start-up is a subsidiary of MGH Group, a conglomerate owned by Anis Ahmed.

However, the riders are not employees of Obhai, which, like Uber and Pathao, only arranges trips for them. And, the reality of the is that employees are generally not being fully looked after by their employers.

"We could have chosen so many other charitable paths. But [it is] very satisfying is that we've chosen this one and acted in time. We provided them help when they needed it most," said Anis.

Legally, drivers are not the responsibility of Obhai. Yet, unlike its famed fellow ride-sharing companies Uber and Pathao, Obhai found a way to stand by those who served it before this unprecedented crisis.

80-yr-old man arrested for raping child in Narayanganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Police arrested an 80-year-old man on the charge of raping a six-year-old in Narayanganj Sadar upazila early yesterday.

Chan Mia was arrested from a market nearby to his house, said Shahadat Hosen, inspector of Fatulla Model Police Station.

He said Chan lived on the ground floor and the girl lived on the third floor of the same building.

The girl had been living with her grandmother for the last couple of days as her parents went to their village home in Chandpur and could not return due to the lockdown, the police official said.

On Tuesday, when she was playing in front of the building, Chan lured her with Tk10 and took her to his flat and allegedly raped her.

As the girl narrated everything to her grandmother, the elderly woman informed the matter to the landlord -- but to no avail.

Later, she filed a case against Chan with Fatulla Model Police Station yesterday morning.

Chan has confessed to the crime during the primary investigation, SI Shahadat said, adding that the girl was sent to Narayanganj General Hospital for medical tests.

'Serial rapist' killed in gunfight with Rab in Gazipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

An alleged serial rapist was killed in a "shootout" with Rapid Action Battalion at Madhumita rail track area in East Tongi at Gazipur early yesterday.

The deceased Abu Sufian, 21, hailing from Faridpur district, used to reside at a rented house in Tongi, said Lt Commander Abdullah Al Mamun, company commander of Gazipur Porabari camp.

Sufian was an accused in several rape cases, including one filed with East Tongi Police Station for killing and raping a seven-year-old, Rab personnel said.

On information that a group of terrorists were staying in front of Madhumita rail track area, Rab-1 team conducted a drive there around 12:30am to arrest them, said the Rab official.

Sensing presence of Rab, the terrorists opened fire on the elite force, prompting them to retaliate, the officer said, claiming, Abu Sufian died on the spot receiving bullet injury.

Sufian's associates, however, managed to escape, Mamun said. Rab recovered a pistol and three rounds of bullets from the spot, he added.

Sufian and Kishor Niloy took the seven year old girl behind a brick heap luring her with chocolate and raped her on May 15, said the Rab official.

When the child lost sense, they strangled her to death, Mamun said.

After the incident, police recovered her body the spot and victim's father killed a case with Tongi (East) Police Station in this regard, he added.

Earlier, Rab arrested the other accused Niloy, 15, son of Omar Faruq of Kumri village under Pakundia upazila in Kishoreganj, from Tongi Rail Station (East) area on May 18, he said.

She also said they did not get any relief and fresh water in the last two days. They have to drink saline water.

Contacted, Mohammed Masud Alam Siddique, deputy commissioner of the district, said, "Reaching relief materials to such remote areas is a challenge. We, with the help of navy, are trying our best to provide them with food and water."

Replying to a query, Shah Kamal, senior secretary at the disaster management ministry, said it takes time to clear and repair damaged roads and restore utility services whenever a fierce natural calamity like Amphan hits.

"You know roads have been damaged, many villages are still under water. So, it takes time to reach relief to people," he said. "We must have patience."

Shah Kamal claimed that the stock of relief materials in the affected areas was adequate.

"The problem is our people cannot go the affected people as roads are damaged and villages inundated."

"Our main challenge now is to restore the disrupted communication and remove fallen trees from roads," he said, adding, "We hope the situation will improve tomorrow or the day after tomorrow."

(Our correspondents from Barishal and Khulna Divisions contributed to this report)