# Rohingya: The people with no land



**¬**HEY were once the residents state. Then they became victims of persecution. Then they turned into refugees, desperately crossing the Naf river to

seek refuge in Bangladesh. And now they have become a burden, who everyone sympathises with but no one bothers to support with meaningful action in their quest for a return to their homeland, except of course Bangladesh—the nation currently hosting them—and a handful of other nations such as The Gambia.

The protracted stalemate over the Rohingya refugees continues with Myanmar doing absolutely nothing to create a conducive environment for their return. On the contrary, over the last few years, Myanmar has bulldozed Rohingya villages in Rakhine state and established new installations and infrastructure. A recent report by Al Jazeera stated that the UN has said that Myanmar has erased the name of Kan Kya—once a Rohingya village-from its official maps.

According to the same Al Jazeera report, "Where Kan Kya once stood, there are now dozens of government and military buildings including a sprawling, fenced-off police base, according to satellite images publicly available on Google Earth and historical images provided to Reuters by Planet Labs... On maps produced in 2020 by the United Nations mapping unit in Myanmar, which it says are based on Myanmar government maps, the site of the destroyed village is now nameless and reclassified as part of nearby town Maungdaw.'

Kan Kya is just one of the more than dozen villages whose names have been changed or erased in Myanmar. And since 2017, more than 400 villages once inhabited by the Rohingya have been razed to the ground. The Rohingya refugees fear that this is a tactic by the Myanmar government to completely remove the possibility of the Rohingya refugees ever returning to Myanmar. If they have no roots, where will they

And this reclassification of villages is also going to make it legally difficult for the Rohingya refugees to go back to their land. Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, suggested

of unleashing horrific brutality on the helpless Rohingya population, and the country's visible lack of interest in taking the Rohingya back, its Minister of the State Counselor's Office, Kyaw Tint Swe, shamelessly went on to allege at the UN General Assembly recently that Bangladesh has been harbouring the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Arakan Army (AA) in Cox's Bazar.

To quote the speech text, "Efforts to prevent ARSA and its supporters in the camps of Cox's Bazar from hampering the bilateral repatriation process, through threats, violence or other illegal conduct, also need to be strengthened



Rohingya children at the Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh.

that the change in the legal status of the villages would add "an additional layer

of complexity" for the refugees But Myanmar seems to have lost all sense of justice. Despite all the proven allegations against the nation as such activities pose a risk to both Bangladesh and Myanmar."

As expected, Bangladesh rubbished the "unsubstantiated claims and undue accusations" by Myanmar, and called upon the country to open up Rakhine to

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international bodies such as the UN for observation, if it really intended to take

But given the lethargic attitude of Myanmar to address the issue of Rohingya repatriation—"We write to them [Myanmar government] regularly to resume the talks. Sometimes they reply, sometimes they don't. It's becoming difficult to bring them to the discussion table", revealed Delwar Hossain, director general of the Myanmar wing at Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to Arab News—and the lack of proactive efforts by the international community to push Myanmar to stop its genocidal activities and take back its people, the future looks bleak for the Rohingya.

The inertia of the international community to intervene in this matter comes as no surprise, given that most of them have heavily invested in trade and development ties with Myanmar. According to a Bangkok Post report released October last year, "A total of 106 enterprises from 18 countries and four local businesses have ploughed in USD 1.84 billion" in Special Economic

The list of countries include the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, France, Switzerland, Australia, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Panama, China, Brunei, Vietnam, Austria and the Netherlands, with Japan topping them all. And of course, there are extensive Indian and Chinese—the two major regional players—investments in Myanmar. One of these Special Economic Zones is in the Rakhine state itself: Kyauk Phyu.

So here we are, sheltering 1.1 million people for three years, even in the face of dwindling foreign aid, with no sign of their repatriation in sight—at least not anytime soon. Experts suggest political solutions to the problem of the Rohingya refugees, but without strong political will from the Myanmar government, how can we find such solutions to this problem? And with elections in Myanmar coming up next month, it is highly unlikely that the ruling party would want to disturb the equilibrium it has reached with the Myanmar army by going against popular sentiments, which unfortunately are highly anti-Rohingya. Even if the National League for Democracy is re-elected, chances are they would continue to cater to the priorities of their patrons and their people.

The Rohingya refugees—stuck in the crosscurrents of geopolitical and economic manoeuvres—it seems, are here for the long haul. The stalemate is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. Bangladesh has been pretty much left on its own to fight this battle for the cause of the persecuted Rohingya. At least, that is how the state of affairs look right now, and will continue to remain so for the foreseeable future. The fate of the Rohingya remains as uncertain as ever.

Tasneem Tayeb is a columnist for The Daily Star.

## Locally tailored policies and improved patient care systems are necessary next steps for Bangladesh during the pandemic



Country Office in China picked up a media statement—"a cluster of viral pneumonia was found in Wuhan, China".

last day of

**L** 2019, when

In the next nine months, that small cluster spread across the world to become a global pandemic, killing over a million and affecting billions of lives. The first case in Bangladesh was identified in early March, 2020. As of vesterday, there have been 370,132 cases identified and 5,375 recorded deaths. Each of these numbers carries a tale of tears—a tale of pain, frustration, agony and the loss of

We have lost so many people primarily because there is no effective cure, treatment or a vaccine for this disease. While the medical and research communities are rushing to find one, so far the most effective strategy against Covid-19 is "social distancing" and "safe hygiene"—maintaining at least six feet distance from each other, using face masks, isolating the affected people and washing hands. The Bangladesh government emphasised on such practices and strictly implemented some from the very beginning. The initial response by the Bangladesh government was identified as one of the strict responses across the world based on indicators such as school closures, workplace closures and travel bans (according to the index created by scientific online publication Our World in Data, Bangladesh was placed at 80.09, with 100 being the strictest).

Most of the people in Bangladesh cooperated with the authorities and followed the guidelines in the early

days. According to Our World in Data, the mobility trend in Bangladesh during the pandemic shows a significant drop in public movement. This ultimately slowed down disease transmission and provided the authorities with enough time to build healthcare infrastructure to fight the disease. The number of testing locations have been raised from one to 94, and there are now 30 hospitals for Covid-19 patients. Public policy and awareness, in addition to increased testing and treatment capacity, helped to reverse the trend of Covid-19 transmission even after lifting the lockdown in early June. A decrease in the percentage of positive cases was observed in August, according to a WHO update, while the number of daily tests remained consistent.

The overall downward trend in the daily Covid-19 cases is a good sign. However, in a country of 170 million people, it is critical to look at the trends at regional levels to identify any highrisk clusters in this massive population base. A locally tailored approach based on associated risks is necessary, especially during the reopening of the country, to prevent further outbreak and a possible second wave. In Bangladesh, one of the many regions that warrants such locally tailored policies is Mirpur, especially Pallabi in Dhaka city. Mirpur carries a significantly higher percentage of Covid-19 cases and Pallabi was found to follow a rapidly increasing trend while other areas in Mirpur observed some sorts of flattening curves. It is highly critical to identify such high-risk zones across the country and impose certain levels of local lockdowns while the other areas gradually reopen.

Besides the prevention strategy, it is also important to improve the patient care management system. Despite the downward trend in Covid-19 cases, the daily death toll remains consistent. In recent weeks, the number of weekly

new cases decreased by 13.8 percent, however the weekly death toll increased by 10.8 percent. Chattogram was found to have the highest hospitalisation rate (27.4 percent) and highest relative death rate (21.6 percent death rate against 13.8 percent case rate) at the divisional level. A locally tailored healthcare approach based on stratified patients might also be helpful to identify the root causes behind such a high fatality rate and optimise

asked global leaders in the recent UN assembly to treat the vaccine as a "global public good" and stressed timely and equitable vaccine access. The In a country of 170 million people, it is critical to look at the trends at regional levels to identify any high-risk clusters in this massive population base. A locally tailored approach based on associated risks is

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corner in the world. The government is

mainly relying on the vaccine allocation

plan COVAX, which is led by GAVI, the

WHO and CEPI to vaccinate around 20

percent of the world population once

a vaccine is available. Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina, who was recognised

as "Vaccine Hero" last year by GAVI,

the patient management system

a possible second wave.

accordingly. Patient care and public policies are currently the key strategies to fight this pandemic. These might help us survive during the waiting time to get to an effective vaccine. Typically, it takes more than a decade to develop a vaccine, however for Covid-19, the number of vaccines were moved to different stages of trials in less than a year. Extraordinary efforts have been put in place to collaborate among countries, academia, industry and health authorities to ensure vaccine availability whenever and wherever it is produced. The Bangladesh government has assured us on several occasions that its people will receive vaccines as soon as one becomes available at any

government and local drug companies are also reaching out to potential vaccine manufacturers to get priority access to upcoming vaccines (if any) as well as to participate in clinical trials and research.

Vaccines have saved billions of lives throughout the history of mankind, not only protected the immunised people but also everyone else by preventing disease transmission. However, vaccines are just one of many strategies to fight infectious diseases like Covid-19. After 40 years of HIV infection, the world is yet to find any effective vaccine and HIV is far better managed and fatality rates are much lower today compared to earlier days. The primary strategies of self-containment, social distancing, lockdowns, patient care, hygiene and

most importantly, public awareness, help tremendously to fight Covid-19. These approaches combined are found to reduce viral transmission and save lives. Some of these approaches, such as lockdowns, have been criticised for negative effects on the economy; however, saving lives or saving economies is a false dichotomy. No countries were able to minimise the impact on the economy at the expense of peoples' lives. In contrast, the economy followed the death tolls in a similar trend. The relative decreases in GDP were found to be highest in the countries that failed miserably to protect their people.

We have a long journey ahead with Covid-19 and "trust" is our safest and strongest boat to sail. No vaccine or policy is effective unless people have the trust to take it or follow it. In order to raise public trust in vaccine efforts, the leaders of the vaccine manufacturers have recently signed a safety pledge to follow strict safety protocols in the rush to vaccine development. The Bangladesh government has initiated various outreach efforts to educate, train and enlighten people and create public awareness. It's imperative to maintain and strengthen such efforts to ensure peoples' trust on the strategies and willingness to help each other in following healthcare guidelines. There is no alternative to working together as "No one is safe, unless everyone is safe' in this pandemic. It does not take much to wear a mask and ask others to do so to save their nearest and dearest ones.

As we move forward together, we will learn more about the disease, treatment, vaccine, policies and healthcare guidelines. The future will depend on how we can leverage these learnings to save peoples' lives.

Md Anik Alam is a Senior Scientist, R&D at Pfizer, US. The opinions in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of Pfizer. Email: anikalam\_bd@yahoo.com

### QUOTABLE Quote



CORETTA SCOTT KING (1927-2006) American civil rights activist

The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.

#### **CROSSWORD** BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS** 1 Beach creature 5 Little rascals 9 First Lady before Michelle 10 Fixes, as holey socks 12 Command 13 French farewell 14 Floor-board sounds 16 Catch 17 Smooch 18 There are 13 in a hand of bridge 21 Filming site 22 Vestiges 23 Brother's daughter 24 Work week's

finish

26 Chemist's place

29 "Jeopardy!" host Alex 30 Bill of fare 31 Longing 32 Says something 34 Assesses

37 Protractor measure 38 Approves 39 You're reading them 40 Whole lot 41 Foot parts

**DOWN** 1 Stephen King book 2 Least polite 3 Regions 4 Seal sound 5 Lupino of film

6 Furious

7 Royal heir 8 Furtive ones 9 Canal parts 11 Long sandwiches 15 Runs in the nude 19 Risqué

22 Ocean motion 23 Pen point 24 Flips out 25 Tourist's car

20 Water cooler

26 Sports group 27 Low joints 28 Tour carriers 29 Beginner 30 Edison's — Park 33 Treaty 35 Pupil's place 36 Direction opposite NNE

#### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS FUNDS EMAIL SORE T R A M S E A T U P

UPNA EDS MOLDER D A I R Y M A I D
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