

Letter from Cox's Bazar

"Don't send us back to death"

by S Bari

When Abdul Rashid was a student, his friend Anwar was captured by the Myanmar military and tortured. They tore the hair off his arms and chest," Rashid remembers, "and sentenced him to 20 years in prison. I never saw Anwar again." The two friends had participated in Myanmar's ill-fated pro-democracy movement in 1988.

Nearly four years later, Rashid is now a refugee. He fled his homeland in the violent aftermath of the student demonstrations. In Cox's Bazar, Rashid, 22, helped establish the Rohingya Refugee Relief and Welfare Committee. The effort was one of the first attempts to coordinate and organize the jostling crowds tumbling across the border and settling into chaotic misery on the tree-stripped hills.

As we wander through the meandering alleys of a camp, Rashid talks with fellow refugees, all of whom warm to his smile and quiet conversation. With no trace of fear or diffidence, women talked to him about their problems with breast-feeding, about rape stories, about the lack of privacy. Children run up and smile at Rashid. Men in beards and prayer caps complain to him about camp management.

"Many of them know me because the committee has been working here for some time now," Rashid says. "Most of the committee members are students, or should I say ex-students. I was studying for a degree in mathematics, but all that is behind me now, left back at home."

Home, for Rashid, is Mung Dow, in the province of Arakan. Recalling the years during which the campaign against the Rohingya minority escalated, Rashid says, "They would come to the village and tell us we were Bengalis, that we should go home where we belong." Then still in high-school, Rashid was puzzled

by the Myanmar soldiers' words. "I talked to my grandparents and other village elders, I looked up books, and found out that my own family had been in Arakan for at least two hundred years, which was as far back as I could get any information. But the soldiers kept telling us we had all arrived after Partition," Rashid remembers bitterly. "Although everyone knows there was an Arakan Muslim kingdom here once."

Rashid theorizes that the Burmese are now trying to clear Arakan for military cantonments, and driving out the Rohingyas in the process. According to him, the strategy is to maintain that the Rohingyas do not really belong in Myanmar. Says the student refugee, "They are trying to uproot our ethnic and religious identity."

Tales of persecution have followed in the wake of the refugee influx. When asked how much is hearsay and how much he has seen himself, Rashid is quick to answer. "I have personally seen the army arrive in a village and demand a ransom in order to leave us alone. They ask each family for one bag of rice, 50 kyats (Burmese currency) and one young girl. At least, that was the rate when I left."

Being a largely illiterate population, and still stunned under the impact of their experiences, the Rohingya refugees are not an emotional lot, nor do they reminisce. But Rashid admits with tears in his eyes, "How can I tell you what it is to leave one's home in fear? I have a brother, a mother and father, and I still do not know if I will ever see them again." Some mornings, Rashid gazes across the Naaf river to the other side. A hazy green riverbank beckons, tantalising. "Don't send us back to death," he says as we pull out of Teknaf, "but help us talk sense into the Burmese. We want to go home."



Abdul Rashid: Once a student, now a refugee.

British Air Chief due tomorrow

British Air Chief Sir Peter Harding arrives in Dhaka on March 3 for a three-day visit, reports UNB.

This will be the first ever visit by a British Air Marshal to Bangladesh. Peter Harding will be accompanied by his wife Lady Harding.

On March 4, the British Chief of Air Staff will lay wreaths at the Shikha Anirban and review a guard of honour by the Bangladesh Air Force.

Peter is scheduled to call on the President, the Prime Minister and all three Chiefs of Staff the same day (March 4).

The following day's programme includes a meeting with the Defence Secretary, air trip to Jossore to visit Bangladesh Air Force Academy and Bangladesh Air Force Base Matur Rahman.

Hindu Samaj Sangkar Samity confce March 5

A two-day national conference, '92 of Bangladesh Jatiya Hindu Samaj Sangkar Samity will begin at Bangladesh Shiksha Academy, on March 5 at 10 am, a press release of the Samity said, reports BSS.

Sherkh Razzak Ali, Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad will be the chief guest on the occasion, Shih Sankar Chakrabarty, President of the Samity will preside.

JAGPA starts Berubari long-march today

Jatiya Ganotantrik Party (JAGPA) will hold a rally today (Monday) morning at Panchagarh district town prior to staging a long-march to voice the demand for the return of 'Berubari Enclave' to Bangladesh, reports BSS.

JAGPA Chief Shaful Alam Pradhan said though Berubari originally belonging to Bangladesh had been handed over to India, yet 'Tin Bigha' corridor in exchange 'has not been handed over' to Bangladesh.

'Berubari' was handed over to India following an agreement reached between the then Bangladesh Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1974.



BABA artistes performing a geeti natya (opera) 'Nakshi Kanthar Math' at the concluding ceremony of Tourism Week '92 at National Museum in the city, Sunday. — Star photo

Confusion about Liberation War lamented

'Proper evaluation can help nation identify its position in history'

The 18th National History conference began in Dhaka Sunday with a call for writing a proper history in the interest of the nation and for the benefit of the posterity, reports BSS.

Prof. Moniruzzaman Mia, Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University, inaugurating the conference said, the study of history is very valuable and essential for any nation for knowledge of the past is needed to solve the present day problems.

He said proper guidelines for solving national problems could be found only in the light of the past.

Held at the auditorium of Dhaka Museum, the inaugural session, chaired by Abul Kalam

Mohammad Zakaria, was also addressed by Professor Salauddin Ahmed and Dr Habiba Khatun, president and general secretary respectively of Bangladesh Itihaas Parishad and Prof Wakil Ahmed, Pro-Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University.

Over hundred and fifty delegates from different parts of the country are attending the two-day conference organised by Bangladesh Itihaas Parishad.

The 24th annual general meeting of Bangladesh Itihaas Parishad is also being held simultaneously.

Messages from Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and State Minister for Cultural Affairs Prof Jahanara Begum were read out on the occasion.

Prof Moniruzzaman Mia lauded the role of the Parishad in enlightening the people of their past heritage through holding of meetings and seminars.

He said the Liberation War of 1971 had added a glorious chapter to the country's history. While lamenting the confusion created about the Liberation War only within two decades, the Vice Chancellor opined that historians must evaluate the events in the greater national interests. He said only through proper evaluation the nation would be able to identify its position in the annals of history.

Prof Wakil Ahmed, in his welcome address, dwelt on the formation of the Itihaas

Parishad in 1966 and the contributions made by late Prof Abu Mohammad Habibullah. He laid stress on writing a neutral history based on facts and supported by independent analysis.

Prof Salauddin Ahmed called upon all be on guard against any design to distort history for anybody's advantage.

Zakaria cautioned all against fabrication of history and at the same time assured that none can stop the real history to come out. He, however, said willful or deliberate distortion is a criminal offence.

The conference has been split into seven sessions and the first one was devoted to Abu Mohammad Habibullah Memorial Lecture.

Biswas stresses specialised education system for deaf, dumb

President Abdur Rahman Biswas Sunday called for changing the outlook of the society towards the deaf and dumb and urged all to appreciate the problems of the retarded from humanitarian angle, reports BSS.

Inaugurating the 'Welfare fortnight for the deaf' organised by Bangladesh National Federation of the Deaf at its headquarters at Bijoy Nagar, in the city, the President said while the deaf and dumb have been given full freedom to live as normal citizens in other countries, they are being deprived of their rights in our society. The society must do something for them, so that they could live like normal citizens, President Biswas stressed.

Presided over by Rear Admiral M I Khan (Retd), President of the Federation, the function was addressed, among others, by former Presidential Adviser Alamgir MA Kabir, Executive Vice President Amina Bilqis and a deaf student of the federation Nurul Momen.

The President said the deaf and dumb were our own children and they have the rights to enjoy all facilities of the state. Unfortunately we only give them sympathy, but do not discharge our social responsibility toward them, he added.

He stressed the need for concerted efforts, by the voluntary organisations and enlightened sections of the society to supplement government efforts in this regard. He also appreciated the role of the federation in creating job opportunities for the deaf and called upon the voluntary organisations to come forward in this regard.

President Biswas felt the urgent need for creating specialised education system for the deaf and dumb, saying that only by imparting education this retarded section could be made a productive force. He reminded the people of their human and civic responsibility to create greater scopes for the retarded people.

Rear Admiral M I Khan, President of the Federation, placed a six-point charter before the government for carrying out effective rehabilitation programme for the deaf. He demanded regular programme in the electronic media to spread the education for the deaf and recreation for creating public awareness.

The charter included formulation of special curriculum designed to suit the deaf's aptitude, establishment of special deaf schools and audiometric training programme and special financial assistance for deaf education.

He said the federation was giving top priority to improving the quality of the deaf edu-

cation. Nurul Momen, the deaf student, whose speech was translated by a teacher of the Deaf School, appealed to the President as well as the society to give humanitarian attention to their problems. He said the deaf were ready to work and live like normal citizens, but they only need support from the state.

Census of stranded Pakistanis begins

The census of stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh began in Dhaka Sunday morning at Muhammadpur Geneva Camp, a big concentration of stranded population.

The census is being organised jointly by the representatives of Pakistan government — Rabita al Islami and Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC)

Red Cross Societies assure allout help for Rohingyas

A thirty-member delegation of the International Federation of the Red Cross Societies, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies called on President Abdur Rahman Biswas at Bangabhaban in Dhaka, Sunday, reports BSS.

The team was led by Chairman of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society Syed Shahidul Huq Zamal, MP.

The members of the delegation exchanged views with the President and assured their fullest support and cooperation to the humanitarian task of BRCS.

They informed the President that they were

shocked to see the plight of the Rohingya refugees and assured allout assistance to help the refugee.

During discussion, the RCS representatives of the USA, Canada, Sweden, Britain, The Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Japan and Norway made strong commitment in giving more financial and material support to BRCS in its humanitarian projects and activities including setting up of more cyclone shelters in the coastal belts of the country.

Welcoming the delegation, President Biswas said the international world was now united to face the challenge of

humanitarian problem through working together and by expressing common concern.

The President appreciated the gesture shown by the delegation in providing necessary assistance to Bangladesh in implementing different projects undertaken by the BRCS.

He also informed them of the man-made problem of Rohingya refugees and thanked the international organisations for coming forward to mitigate the sufferings of the refugees.

The President also lauded the role played by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the task of post cyclone rehabilitation in the coastal areas that hit last year.

He hoped that the cooperation of the International Red Cross Societies with BRCS would be enhanced so that they could work together for teeming millions.

Mohamed Asaduzzaman, MP and Ataul Haq, Secretary to the President were present in the meeting. Red Cross representatives of China, Germany, Italy and Finland were also present.

Tk 2.21 cr bank money defalcation

Cases filed against tannery MD, 4 others

CHITTAGONG, Mar 1: Chittagong office of Anti Corruption Bureau has arrested and filed cases against Hasan Ali, Managing Director, Messrs Ali Tannery Ltd of Chittagong for alleged misappropriation of over Taka two crore 21 lakh from Sonali Bank, reports BSS.

The bureau also filed cases against four officials of the bank for their alleged involvement in misappropriating the

Punishment to killers of Ctg BCL leader demanded

CHITTAGONG, Mar 1: Chittagong city chapter of Bangladesh Chhatra League today demanded punishment to the killers of student leader Hasanul Karim Chowdhury (Manki), reports BSS.

Addressing a press conference at the Press Club here, chapter President Mafizur Rahman said if their demand was not met within 45 days they would go for a greater movement.

VOA Bangla Service chief meets Huda

Iqbal Ahmed, Chief of Bangla Service of Voice of America (VOA), Washington, called on Information Minister Nazmul Huda at his secretariat office Sunday, reports BSS.

They exchanged views on various aspects of expansion of areas of co-operation between the VOA and national mass media of Bangladesh.

Monday

- Special Session**
3.15am Opening announcement
3.30am 5th World Cup Cricket: Sri Lanka vs South Africa
- Evening Session**
5.00 Opening announcement Al-Quran, Programme summary
5.10 News in Bangla
5.25 Cartoon: The Great Space Coaster
6.00 Ovinandan
7.05 Debate
8.00 News in Bangla
8.30 Apnar Shasthya: Programme on health
9.00 Surer Bhuban: Songs programme
10.00 News in English
10.30 Film: Rescue
11.30 Khabar/The News
11.40 Tuesday's programme summary
11.45 Closing

Weather

Thundershower likely

By Staff Correspondent

Rain/thundershower are likely to occur at a few places over Chittagong division and one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka and Khulna divisions till 6 pm today (Monday), according to Met office.

Day temperature is likely to remain nearly unchanged over the country.

The maximum temperature in the country, 32.2 degree Celsius, was recorded at Sathkira while the country's minimum, 13.8 degree Celsius was reported from Dinajpur Sunday.

The sun sets today (Monday) at 6:02 pm and rises tomorrow (Tuesday) at 6:19 am.

The maximum and minimum temperature and the percentage of humidity recorded in some major cities/ towns Sunday were:

Cities/ Towns	Temperature		Humidity
	Max	Min	
Dhaka	30	18.5	91
Chittagong	27.2	20	82
Rajshahi	30.6	16	98
Khulna	31.4	22.4	85
Sylhet	26.5	16.6	90
Rangpur	27	15.2	78
Mymensingh	29.6	16.6	85
Comilla	28	18	91

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