

Concern over non-repatriation of Rohingya refugees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday expressed concern over the non-repatriation of Rohingya refugees for the last two years.

"We are concerned that no repatriation [of Rohingya refugees] has taken place since July 2005," he said while speaking as the chief guest at a seminar on 'Challenges relating to refugee protection' at the Supreme Court Bar Association in the city.

Over 95 percent of the refugees have already returned to their homeland voluntarily, while the remaining 25,000 are yet to be repatriated.

The adviser, however, hoped that repatriation of the remaining refugees will be completed at the earliest in cooperation with the UNHCR.

The Legal Education and Training Institute (LETI), Bangladesh Bar Council and the United Nations High Commissioner for the Refugees (UNHCR) jointly

organised the seminar.

"During my recent visit to Myanmar, I discussed the repatriation issue with the Myanmar authorities and they assured me of full cooperation and early resolution of the issue through bilateral negotiation," Iftekhar said.

Bangladesh has been providing shelter and protection to Myanmar refugees for nearly three decades in the spirit of upholding human rights and international humanitarian laws and never pursued forced repatriation, he said.

Referring to the demand for ratification of The 1951 Convention relating to the status of the refugees, the adviser said that though Bangladesh is not a party to the convention, it remained committed to the principle of international protection of the refugees.

Bangladesh believes that the permanent solution to any refugee issues lies in the repatriation of refugees to their homeland, he said, reiterating the country's commitment to voluntary and safe repatriation of the refugees as early as

possible.

Serious efforts should be made by all concerned, including the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar, UNHCR and the donor community, to this end, he added.

In his keynote presentation, Justice Naimuddin Ahmed expressed concern over the status of statelessness of Biharis living in the country.

"Pakistan says they are not the citizens of Pakistan. Bangladesh does not allow them to become its citizens. So, where will they go? What will be the status of the Biharis' children who were born here?" he posed a question.

He said there are over 50 million refugees across the globe, but UNHCR takes care of only 22 millions. Although UNHCR helps protect, rehabilitate and repatriate the refugees, the most important task is to remove the causes that contribute to forced migration.

Taking part in the discussion, Supreme Court Advocate Dr Naim Ahmed said Bangladesh should

accede to the 1951 Convention on the status of the refugees, because it will help the country solve the problems related to refugees and internally displaced persons.

Barrister Tania Amir said the refugee issue is now being addressed on an ad hoc basis.

"Once we accede to the convention, we can seek international cooperation in this regard," she said.

Expressing concern over the increasing number of refugees worldwide, UNHCR Representative in Bangladesh Pia Pritz Phiri said there are at least three million stateless people who should be included in the national process.

Bangladesh Bar Council Executive Committee Chairman Muhammad Yusuf Hussain Humayun, LETI Director (administration) Kazi Reazul Hoque also spoke at the seminar chaired by LETI Chairman Barrister Amirul Islam.



PHOTO: STAR

A mobile court seized construction materials during a drive against hill cutting at a place behind the Chittagong Medical College in the port city yesterday. The court also ordered a halt to the construction work there.



President apprised of budget

UNB, Dhaka

Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam yesterday apprised President Iajuddin Ahmed of the budgetary measures for the fiscal 2007-08, ahead of its approval on June 28.

Finance Secretary Dr Muhammed Tareq and National Board of Revenue (NBR) Chairman Badur Rahman accompanied the finance adviser at the briefing at Bangabhaban.

The national budget was proposed over radio/TV network on June 7 in the absence of parliament. It would be approved by the president by way of an ordinance under section 93 (1) of the Constitution.

"The finance adviser briefed the president on the budget," NBR Chairman Badur Rahman told reporters at the Ministry of Finance on return from the Bangabhaban.

The press wing of Bangabhaban earlier advised the media of a programme "Approval of National Budget 2007-08" for the media coverage. That ultimately proved wrong.

NBR chairman said the schedule for approval of the budget through ordinance is June 28 after approval by the Council of Advisers.

Officials hinted that the meeting of the Council of Advisers might be held on June 27.

"We will review the measures, if any, proposed in the budget that goes against the interest of the people," said the NBR chairman.

After proposing the budget, the government had invited recommendations from different sections of the society and bagged as many as 1,808 suggestions through e-mail, website and postal mails.

The Ministry of Finance extended the deadline for submission of proposals until June 17 amid demand from the business community.

The ministry has compiled the proposals and made necessary recommendations for the Council of Advisers.

Withdrawal of proposed import duty on computer and computer accessories, textile machinery and increased duties on industrial raw materials and intermediate goods were at the forefront of the public opinion, finance ministry officials said.

Meanwhile, a Bangabhaban handout said the finance adviser handed over a draft of the proposed budget to the president and apprised him that the budget focused specially on poverty alleviation.

The president stressed the need for controlling the price of essentials during the holy month of Ramadan and asked the finance adviser to give special attention to keep the prices within the purchasing power of the common men.

The finance adviser apprised the president that the government is very much aware of the issues and sincere in this regard.

Debate contest begins in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The inter-department debate competition organised by Stamford Debate Forum has kicked-off on its Siddheshwari campus in the city.

Mohammad Jafar Iqbal, deputy registrar of the university, inaugurated the eight-day-long competition on Saturday.

General Secretary of Bangladesh Debate Federation Sanjib Saha attended the inaugural function as chief guest.

On the first day, debaters from various universities including Dhaka University, United International University and Stamford University took part.

A total of 38 teams will participate in the competition.

The final round of the competition will be held on June 30.

Apart from this team-based debate competition, the debaters will also take part in public speaking and open debate.

Help rehabilitate street children

Speakers urge affluent people

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday urged the affluent people in society to come forward to help rehabilitate the distressed children, especially street children.

They said the number of street children in the country continues to rise, but the government has no comprehensive policy for their welfare.

Although there is no official figure for the total number of

such children, it is generally assumed that the number is approaching 20 lakh, they said.

Plan Bangladesh and Nari Maitree in corporation with Media Aid Bangladesh organised the discussion on 'Duties of people in society to ensure the children's participation' and a cultural programme and prize giving ceremony at Sabujbag Buddha temple in the city.

About 100 hundred street children attended the programme.

The speakers said the street

children could contribute to the national development if they get opportunities, but the measures taken for their welfare are totally inadequate.

They also suggested providing vocational training for the street children and setting up a fund for them.

Dhaka City Corporation FM (DCC) Executive Officer Nazmul Hai said combined efforts of the government and NGOs are needed to rehabilitate the distressed children.

In urban areas, many street children work as domestic help, porters and street vendors, and are vulnerable to sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation, said Shaheen Aktar Dali, executive director of Nari Maitree.

According to the prosecution, Nesar was arrested from Sandip Hotel in city's Nalapara area with three AK-47 rifles and 40 rounds of bullets on August 30, 1998.

Police submitted charge sheet on April 20, 1999 accusing four persons, including Nesar.



PHOTO: STAR

Shefali Begum, a Baul singer, performs at a workshop at Bishwa Sahitya Kendra in the city yesterday. Palli Baul Samaj Unnayan Sangstha organised the workshop to search for new Baul music talents.

President, CA greet Croatian counterparts

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed have greeted their Croatian counterparts Stjepan Mesic and Prime Minister Ivo Sanader respectively on the occasion of the statehood day of the country.

In a message to the Croatian President, Iajuddin expressed his hope that the friendly relations between the two countries would be further developed in the coming years.

Japan keen to establish nursing school

Ambassador tells health adviser

UNB, Dhaka

Japan is keen to provide Bangladesh grant assistance for establishing a model nursing school and college in Bangladesh.

Japanese Ambassador Masayuki Inoue conveyed this offer of his country during a meeting with Health and Family Welfare Advisor Major General (Retd) Dr ASM Matiur Rahman at his office in the city yesterday.

The envoy said under the project, Japan will construct three buildings—nursing school and college, student dormitory, and faculties' residential building.

This will include provision of equipment and furniture for the three buildings and provision of power generator and safe water supply facility for the whole complex.

The estimated cost of the project is Tk 100 to Tk 150 crore.

The nursing school and the

college will be a leading model to stimulate the existing nursing schools nation-wide. In addition to, training courses for nursing teachers will be available.

The government of Bangladesh will select the land for the project in the capital area and prepare a project proposal through the ERD by the end of July this year. The nursing school and college is expected to get in operation by 2010.

Matiur Rahman said lack of nurses is one of the most serious problems in the health sector in Bangladesh. In such a situation, this grant assistance of Japan will have a tremendous contribution to our health sector, he added.

Like that of nurses we have acute shortage of paramedics, said the adviser adding that so, Japan as a real friend of Bangladesh may also provide grant assistance for establishing such a school for paramedics.

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