

## China shelves

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he said would ultimately connect Thailand.

When a Myanmarese journalist asked if China could do anything to convince Myanmar, Li said, "We could do some work to make the government of Myanmar understand the need for rail lines and how they would benefit from it but it is not our major responsibility. Rather it is the people of Myanmar who must tell their government of their needs."

If the Myanmar people realise this, their government might come forward, said the junior minister, adding that if the Chittagong-Kunming rail connectivity could be established, all three countries would benefit.

Meanwhile, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam told The Daily Star that they have heard that Myanmar had been opposing the construction of rail link. He said the work for the road connectivity would go on.

Ashraf said a road show would be held in Kunming and Dhaka soon to tell people about the business opportunities the connectivity would create in the countries.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had urged China several times to construct the rail and road links between the two cities, which are considered by many as the Chinese gateway to South and South East Asia.

In March 2010, Hasina visited Kunming and expressed her interest in road and rail links between Chittagong and Kunming via Myanmar.

After her visit, Governor of Yunnan province Qin Guangrong expressed his government's desire to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Bangladesh on road and rail communications between the two countries.

In October, 2010, Chinese Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs Liu Zhen in Beijing said China would construct road and rail links between Chittagong and Kunming via Myanmar to boost Sino-Bangladesh cooperation.

Bangladesh, the same year, made a plan to build rail lines and roads up to the Myanmar border by 2014 at a cost of Tk 1,852 crore. The government had aimed at making a corridor for the proposed Trans-Asian Railway and connecting to Kunming through Myanmar.

However, highly placed government sources claimed that the rail project had been shelved in the interest of India, which opposed Bangladesh becoming connected to its powerful neighbour in the Far East.

They said the Prime Minister's Office would try to convince Myanmar and India to allow construction of the rail line in the greater interest of the region.

## Urgent action needed fight cholera in Haiti

AFP, Port-au-prince

Global and local health authorities are not doing enough to fight a cholera outbreak that continues to claim lives in Haiti, Doctors Without Borders said Thursday.

"We are worried about the lack of support from the international community and the lack of action from health authorities in Haiti," Thierry Goffeau, head of the group's Haiti operations, told AFP.

Since the start of the epidemic in October 2010, 7,500 people have died from the disease that is spread through poor sanitation. This year alone, it has claimed at least 40 lives in the impoverished Caribbean nation that shares the Hispaniola island with the far wealthier Dominican Republic.

Doctors Without Borders has treated 9,800 cholera patients in special centers since early 2012, including 72 percent of cases in and around the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince.

## Asian workers

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they also face obstacles in complaining or seeking redress.

Other problems include exorbitant recruitment fees, which can take years to pay off, and routine confiscation of workers' passports by the employers.

The New York-based rights body asked Qatar to reform its laws and Fédération Internationale de Football Association (Fifa), football's world governing body, to ensure the rights of the expatriate workers.

Bangladesh government estimates its workers in Qatar at around 2 lakh.

Migrant workers comprise a staggering 94 percent of Qatar's total workforce. The country may recruit up to one million more migrant construction workers in the next decade, said the report "Building a Better World Cup: Protecting Migrant Workers in Qatar Ahead of Fifa 2022".

"Workers building stadiums won't benefit from Qatar's general promise to end the sponsorship system; they need a deadline for this to happen before their work

for the Fifa games starts," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at HRW.

Among the 73 workers interviewed by the HRW, all but four said they paid recruitment fees ranging between \$726 and \$3,651, borrowing from private money lenders at interest rates ranging from three to five percent per month to 100 percent interest on their debt per year.

"If I don't pay [my debt], the bank will kick my family out from my house," said Mahmud N, a 27-year-old Bangladeshi worker. He owed Tk 2,70,000 (\$3,298) in recruitment fees.

"We don't complain because if we complain for anything, the company will punish us," Himal K, an 18-year-old construction worker from Nepal, told the HRW.

"Until the Qatar government seriously enforces its laws to make sure it is the employers who are paying these fees, and imposes serious penalties on companies that look the other way, this problem is not going to just disappear," said the report.

## Pranab set

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The 77-year-old veteran Congress leader was named UPA's presidential candidate by Congress President Sonia Gandhi at a meeting of the leaders of Congress and the alliance partners, excepting Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress which stayed away.

Within minutes, Samajwadi Party led by Mulayam Singh Yadav, which had joined hands with Trinamool two days ago to propose the name of A P J Abdul Kalam for the top post, broke away and pledged support to Mukherjee, leaving the West Bengal chief minister totally isolated.

This was followed by BSP whose supremo Mayawati also extended her support, which will take Mukherjee close to the required vote value of 5.49 lakh in an electoral college consisting of members of parliament and states legislative assemblies with a total vote value of 10.98 lakh.

Even counting out Trinamool, which has a vote value of 48,000, Mukherjee is short of just about 26,000 vote value and that gap is expected to be met with the support of other parties which may include Left parties.

So, Mukherjee, from West Bengal's Bankura district with 43 years of parliamentary experience, is all set to have a cakewalk in the event of a contest.

The presidential election will be held on July 19, five days before incumbent Pratibha Patil, India's first woman president, leaves office.

In 1996, late CPI(M) leader Jyoti Basu had missed out being the first Bengali prime minister after his party refused to support his candidature.

The nomination of Mukherjee for president, a largely ceremonial post with real executive powers resting with the prime minister, means he will resign as finance minister and is likely to step down on June 24.

Indian president is selected by an electoral college comprising MPs from both houses of parliament and state legislatures.

Immediately after being chosen as the UPA presidential nominee, Mukherjee expressed his gratitude to Sonia Gandhi and the other UPA leaders for the honour and said he accepted it with "altruism".

Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh reached out to other parties, including main opposition BJP, to seek support for Mukherjee.

After speaking to Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati, Singh called up BJP leaders in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley respectively.

candidate amid reports that JD(U) had reservations over supporting Kalam. It remains to be seen if NDA would choose to contest with its own candidate.

The only other candidate P A Sangma, former parliament speaker, is still insisting on contesting, recalling that he has been supported by AIADMK leader Jayalalitha and BJD Chief Naveen Patnaik.

Sangma's own party NCP, however, was pressing him to withdraw which he was refusing to do.

Mukherjee's nomination for the presidential race came at a time of growing criticism of his handling of India's economy.

"In our party there are number of people who can handle the difficult economic situation," Mukherjee told reporters after his nomination.

"The prime minister himself is an eminent economist and under his stewardship we will overcome the temporary crisis," he added.

## Arrests aim

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to arrest national leaders in false cases... it (government) has released some of the leaders and then rearrested some of them at the jail gate.

This is how the government is destroying democracy," Fakhrul said in his first press briefing following his release from jail after a month, reports UNB.

Thirteen opposition leaders, including Fakhrul, were released from different jails in Dhaka and Gazipur on Thursday, hours after a Dhaka court granted them bail until July 26 in a case for twin blast incidents at the secretariat.

About the current movement demanding restoration of the caretaker government system, Fakhrul said the government was creating such issues so that the opposition was left with no option but to carry on the movement.

"Our movement is on the right track... there's nothing to get us wrong seeing our two-month-long movement... we haven't retreated. We've given the government two months' time so that good sense prevails upon them," UNB quoted him as saying.

On the caretaker government issue, the BNP leader said, "The day is not far away when the government will be compelled to accept the demand. The sooner the government sits in a dialogue, the better for it."

Sought comments on Nazmul Huda's quitting the BNP, Fakhrul said, "He is a senior person... I would like to refrain from making any comment in this regard."

On the Rohingya issue, private television station Channel i reports quoted Fakhrul as saying that the government has stood against humanity by not allowing the Rohingyas to take refuge in Bangladesh.

In this regard, measures should be taken on national consensus, he observed.



Akbar Ali Khan



Harun ur Rashid



Ashfaqur Rahman



Prof Delwar Hossain

## Mount pressure on Myanmar

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Bangladesh has been preventing Rohingyas' intrusion in its territory and has taken a clear position not to allow any more of them because of resource constraints and security reasons.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni on Thursday told parliament that the international organisations or the friendly nations should, instead of pressing Bangladesh to allow the Rohingyas in, urge Myanmar to resolve the Rohingya issue.

In the past few days, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Dhaka, New York-based Human Rights Watch, US State Department and the Organisation of Islamic Conference urged Bangladesh to allow the Rohingyas into Bangladesh.

But foreign policy analysts say they support the Bangladesh government position.

"To be a refugee, one has to face persecution, which is not the case here. The state [Myanmar] is also not involved here. So, why there is a question of giving shelter?" said Harun ur Rashid, former ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Bangladesh has already sheltered many Rohingyas, but that did not solve Myanmar's internal problems, said the veteran diplomat, adding that the Western nations should press the

Myanmar government to find out the root cause for the Rohingya problems and help address it.

"Myanmar is returning to democracy. Its president is coming to Bangladesh in July. So we should not be doing anything that we are misunderstood [by Myanmar]," noted Rashid, also a barrister.

Several organisations in Rakhine champion the demand for a separate state, he said, adding: "Will it be right for Bangladesh to shelter anyone who might have links to separatist movement?"

He also criticised Myanmar's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi for not speaking against the rights violation in the latter's country.

According to Prof Delwar Hossain of Dhaka University, there is no compelling ground for Bangladesh to open the border for the Rohingyas.

Some may think that opening of the border would solve the problem, but in fact it will have a rather negative impact on Bangladesh, he observed.

"This is because many Rohingyas are already here. Around 29,000 are in the refugee camps and a few lakh outside those camps. This has not solved any problem, but Bangladesh is facing many troubles," said Prof Delwar, who teaches interna-

tional relations.

This apart, Myanmar is on the road to democracy, which means the Myanmar government will gradually accommodate all its ethnic minorities. "How Myanmar deals with the recent violence is also a test for the international community to see," he added.

Opening Bangladesh's border at this juncture will prove even more difficult for the repatriation of the existing Rohingyas in Bangladesh, he said, adding: "This can also have a negative impact in Bangladesh-Myanmar relations."

So far, the international community has not played their due role in addressing the Rohingya issue, the professor said, urging the world leaders to do more to ensuring a lasting solution there.

Former ambassador Ashfaqur Rahman said Myanmar's domestic politics was to blame for the ethnic and communal problems facing the Rohingyas, and Bangladesh had no role in it.

"During Bangladesh's liberation war, many of our citizens took shelter in India, but we returned home after nine months. But in case of the Rohingyas, there were influxes earlier too and we allowed them in. Still, the problem is not getting solved.... The Rohingyas continue to stay here. So, what is the point of opening

the door again?" he said.

"Before the Myanmar president comes to Bangladesh in July, Bangladesh should go for a robust diplomatic effort to mobilise the international community's opinion so it keeps up pressure on Myanmar," Rahman added.

Akbar Ali Khan, adviser to a caretaker government, however, said Bangladesh could "temporarily" shelter some Rohingyas if their lives were "really in danger" in Myanmar.

The intrusion of Rohingyas has been a common feature of the bordering area at Teknaf since their first influx in 1978.

At least a hundred Rohingyas have fled into Bangladesh every month over the last three years and about 50,000 of them now live at Teknaf alone, local officials say.

Amir Ahmed, 55, president of the association of imams in Teknaf, said, 50,000 to 1 lakh Rohingyas came to Teknaf in 1978, and another 2.5 to 3 lakh in 1991.

The figures, however, could not be independently verified.

The recent violence in Maungdaw and Sittwe of Myanmar has led to the increase in Rohingyas heading for Teknaf.

Locals and officials expect such attempts will stop soon.

## Teknaf prays for peace

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The 55-year-old man also said he warned people against any sort of violence that might hamper peace in Teknaf.

"As we came to know that Myanmar government pledged to solve the problem and ensure justice for the recent persecutions, I told our Muslim brothers that the only thing we have got to do now is pray for peace."

Meanwhile, rumours go around in Teknaf due to communication gap with Myanmar, locals and officials say.

"We don't have much knowledge of the intensity of the violence. We are getting scary reports. Some people are campaigning on the internet, showing pictures of the brutality in the Rakhine state," said another imam, preferring anonymity.

"We don't know whether the reports and pictures are authentic, but they influence people's minds."

The local administration is on alert and has taken measures to prevent any conflict, ANM Nazim Uddin, upazila nirbahi officer of Teknaf, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh and police are deployed near almost all the mosques in Teknaf. There are roughly 450 mosques in the upazila.

Apart from around 50 thousand illegal Rohingya immigrants, 2.60 lakh Bangladeshi people live in 388.68 square kilometre area of Teknaf, two-thirds of which

is covered with forest.

Although the daily life in the locality appeared to be normal, as a precaution, local administration deployed BGB and police in the Rakhine dominated areas and near pagodas.

The Border Guard Bangladesh personnel have been patrolling the Rakhine areas since June 10, said Ching Ching, 56, a businessman and residence of Chowdhury Para.

Lt Col Zahid Hasan, commanding officer of BGB 42 Battalion in Teknaf, said, "We are ready to combat any steps from any quarter with an ill motive. We have a strong surveillance everywhere."

Mahbubul Haque, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, said since the bordering area in Myanmar erupted into violence, they have been keeping in touch with local Rakhine community.

The largest Rakhine area in Teknaf is Chowdhury Para at Hnila union, around 18 kilometres off the upazila headquarters and home to some 110 Rakhine families.

Over 50 Rakhine families live in Kharankhali area, 30 in the upazila headquarters, 13 in Hnila Bazar and a few in Sabrang Bazar and Damdam area.

Mong Ching Aung, president of Rakhine Welfare Association (Hnila-Chowdhury Para unit), told The Daily Star yesterday that they were living in peace so far.

"But it is natural to be anxious a bit following the last

week's bloody clash between Rakhine and Rohingyas in Myanmar."

Mong said every Rakhine family is offering prayer for immediate end to the crisis and they hope the tension of one side of the border would not affect the other.

Law enforcers are positioned also in the Rohingya areas.

Some locals who maintain contacts in Maungdaw of Rakhine state said authorities there took steps yesterday to avoid violence as it was another Friday (June 8) when Rohingyas and Rakhines clashed after Juma prayers in the town.

Myanmar declared a state of emergency in Rakhine on Sunday.

Yesterday, Harun Rashid, a 40-year-old trader in Teknaf, said only allowing Rohingyas to enter Bangladesh will not do any good. It would rather create problems for both sides.

"The Myanmar government has to find a permanent solution to the problem for peace on both sides, and international community can play a role in this regard."

ANOTHER GROUP SENT BACK

BGB and coast guard teams pushed back a group of 44 yesterday.

The coast guard intercepted 43 Rohingyas who tried to enter Bangladesh through Saint Martin's Island on a trawler on Wednesday, reports our Chittagong corre-

spondent.

The trawler could not be pushed back immediately as it was damaged while trying to moor in gusty wind and rain.

Meanwhile, a baby was born on the boat Thursday morning.

The BGB and coast guard provided the intruders with a new trawler and sent them back around 4:30am yesterday.

The country's border force is on high alert as the government on Tuesday decided not to allow any refugee from Myanmar and asked the administration and law enforcement agencies to beef up vigilance.

## Tiger cubs

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his elder son Masud are now absconding.

Meanwhile, the shifting of the cubs from Hatirpool was delayed until 10:00pm as the owner of the mini zoo, Abdul Wadud who illegally possesses some wildlife, was unwilling to hand them over. He claimed that the condition of the cubs had improved ever since they were placed under his care.

He requested the authorities concerned to keep the cubs at his mini zoo until they become ready for the wild. "If necessary, the authorities can call foreign experts here at my zoo to take care of the cubs," Wadud said fearing that the tigers might die if taken to the botanical garden.

## Bridge

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around 23km away from Sylhet city. Firemen, police and locals conducted the rescue operations.

The deceased was identified as Abdul Haque, 40, of village Ghoramara of Companyganj. The injured were sent to Companyganj Upazila Health Complex and to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, said Companyganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Saiful Islam.

Erfan Ali, fire service deputy director of Sylhet division, told The Daily Star that the rescue operation ended around 12:40am today.

"Our three divers searched the area for around one hour. But police personnel and locals rescued all before we arrived at the scene," he added.

He said the canal is around 8-9 feet deep where the vehicles fell.

Police said traffic started queuing on both sides of the bridge following the collapse.

UNO Saiful, who had been overseeing the rescue operations, told The Daily Star that the bridge had been in a dilapidated condition for a long time.

Over 2,000 trucks use that stretch of road every day carrying stones and boulders from Bholaganj stone quarry, the country's biggest quarry.

Shah Mohammad Musa, superintendent engineer of Roads and Highways Department, Sylhet Circle, said the 100-feet double-lane steel bridge was built in 1996.

Work order for the construction of a new concrete bridge was issued a few days ago, he said, adding that the contractor had been asked to start work after the monsoon.

Nine bridges out of 10 on the road have been reconstructed recently.

NEW BRIDGE BY A WEEK

The engineer, however, said they would start building a new Bailey bridge at the accident scene today morning (Saturday). "It will take one week maximum to complete the job," he added.

The official said due to unusual rise in trucks carrying stones and boulders from Bholaganj quarry, the road has become very busy in the recent years.

Nobody bothers with weight restrictions. The 10-wheel trucks sometimes even carry 50 tonnes of stones, he claimed.

## Provide safe

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security forces turning back arrivals by boat," said spokesman Andrej Mahevic.

"There are now a number of boats adrift in the mouth of the Naf river" with women, children and wounded onboard, he said adding, "It is vital that these people are allowed access to a safe haven and shelter."

Sectarian bloodshed has displaced tens of thousands of people, left dozens dead and many homes destroyed, in the western state, reports AFP.

"UNHCR recognises that, for years, Bangladesh has been bearing the brunt of the forced displacement caused by earlier crises in Myanmar," said Mahevic.

"The latest events pose new challenges and UNHCR hopes that Bangladesh will respond in line with the country's long history of compassion and solidarity," he said.

Agency workers visiting areas of unrest on Wednesday and Thursday to assess the situation witnessed "smouldering villages", he said.

"The situation is still tense." "We hope that law and order will be re-established soon -- that would allow us to redeploy the staff that we had to move from the area temporarily as a precaution," he added.

Meanwhile, Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has requested the Myanmar and Bangladesh governments to make arrangement of temporary settlement for refugees fleeing sectarian violence in Rakhine state, reports our staff correspondent.

In a statement, Wong Kai Shing, executive director of Hong Kong-based rights body, also urged the two countries to cooperate with each other in ensuring secured access of international agencies so that they can make arrangements for the necessary provision of emergency relief supplies.

Mentioning that the process of recovery and redress of the violence will take long time, the AHRC executive director said it (process) must begin with cooperative actions aimed at meeting the immediate humanitarian needs of all persons affected.