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Open the border for Rohingyas



Bangladesh on 12th June turned away three boats carrying 1,000 Rohingyas. A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so.

The 1951 Geneva Convention is the main international instrument of refugee law. The Convention clearly spells out who a refugee is and the kind of legal protection needed, other assistance and social rights he or she should receive from the neighbouring countries on humanitarian grounds. Bangladesh sheltered so many refugees in the past and can shelter a few more who really qualify for the refugee status due to violence between Buddhists and minority Muslims in western Myanmar which has left at least 15 people dead and hundreds of homes burned. Bangladesh earlier said it sent back 11 boats with about 500 Rohingya Muslims in the past three days.

We urge the government to open the border for Rohingyas on humanitarian grounds.

Peter Rebelro
 Indira Road
 Dhaka

I am writing this letter in protest of the recent barbaric violence against the Rohingya Muslims. The treatment of Bangladesh government towards the Rohingyas is very appalling, for they are coming here with the hope that we being Muslims would help them out. But unfortunately, they are being pushed back. Rohingyas have been the inhabitants of this part of sub-continent since the 8th century. It is not that they have occupied that land, rather they are living in that part of land even before the emergence of the Buddhists. So the Myanmar government should take appropriate steps to ensure their security and rights.

Bangladesh being a Muslim majority country is never unjust towards its minority groups. Why don't the government of Myanmar learn something from its neighbour and help out the minorities to ensure peace in the region. What is Aung San Suu Kyi doing?

Through this daily I urge the Bangladesh government to be sympathetic towards the innocent refugees and the world leaders and the government of Myanmar to ensure basic human rights to the minority Muslims of Myanmar.

Anika Nawal Ahmed
 Dhanmondi
 Dhaka

Suu Kyi, are you listening?

It is really unfortunate that the Myanmar government considers the Rohingyas to be foreigners, while many of their citizens consider them illegal Bangalee immigrants. This notion is responsible for sparking deadly sectarian violence in western Rakhine state centering an incident of rape and murder of a woman.

About 8 lakh Rohingyas including many Muslims live in 3 districts of this predominantly Buddhist state Rakhine which is bordering Bangladesh.

We have learnt from news reports that at least 35 people have been killed and a further 41 people have been wounded in five days of unrest though rights organisations fear the number could be much higher and warn that the violence is running out of control. They call for international observers to be deployed in Rakhine state.

But the United Nations and many humanitarian groups suspended their activities there and evacuated their workers from Rakhine state for security concerns.

We hope Nobel Peace Prize laureate and popular leader of Myanmar Aung San Suu Kyi and President Thein Sein would visit the affected areas soon to bring peace to this region.

Mobarak Ali
 RK Mission Road
 Gopibagh
 Dhaka

Where will we go?

We the commoners are in serious problem. No matter who comes to power, the worse happens to us. The inflation has gone so high that people like us are finding it very difficult to cope with. The sudden rise in the electricity price has made our life miserable. We the commoners pay our bills, pay our income tax, vote for the betterment of the country, and in return all we get is immense suffering. Nobody listens to the common people. The sudden increase in the electricity bill has been the last nail on the commoners' coffin. The bill has become almost double, and yet we don't get electricity. There is load shedding on every alternate hour. Then why should we pay the augmented bills? Everywhere in the market the product quality and quantity have gone down, yet we are paying extra amount. It seems nobody listens to the common people but they are the people who elect a party to power and the people they elect do not even pay heed to their problems.

Where will we go?

Badal Hasib
 English teacher
 Dhanmondi
 Dhaka

Do not underestimate the people

The drama of April 9, 2012 involving former Railway Minister Suranjit Sengupta's APS and two railway employees carrying Tk 70 lakh on their way to the minister's house is still very vivid in our memory.

Suranjit Sengupta resigned or was asked to resign. But the next day his appointment as a minister without portfolio took us by surprise. People have their eyes and ears open; they have their own assessment; they think it is a waste of taxpayers' money.

Now we see Suranjit Sengupta speaking in a loud voice about many issues: he asked the opposition leader Khaleda Zia to resign from the parliament; on June 11, 2012 he said in the parliament that Sagar and Runi were murdered "to destroy the good relations between the present government and the press" and that the Saudi diplomat was murdered "in a bid to destroy the government's relations with Middle Eastern countries."

But people will not buy this sort of statements. To them it seems very strange that the law enforcing agents have failed to shed any light on the killings and they also failed to find out he disappeared BNP leader Ilias Ali, his driver and Ali Azam, the driver of the APS of former Railway Minister Suranjit Sengupta.

People do not and will not accept this failure of the government and the ut must not think that people will forget the incidents as time goes by.

Nur Jahan
 Chittagong

Poor quality papers in MRPs!

After much controversy for over a decade, the Department of Passports and Immigration finally started issuance of Machine Readable Passport (MRP) since last year.

What surprised me most is the quality of these MRPs. The pages of these passports are so thin that it is in no way of international standard, particularly the page containing the holder's photo and personal details. It is very obvious that the company that has got the contract to supply the security papers for the passport pages is either making good profit or recovering the loss that it may have incurred as the lowest bidder of the project. I am sure that the officials at the passport office are aware of the quality of international passports of other countries since they also handle these for issuing visas and extensions to foreigners living in or visiting Bangladesh. The authorities concerned should look into the matter as to why such thin papers have been provided in passports.

By the way, was it necessary to print our national anthem in MRP passports?

Ziauddin Ahmed
 On e-mail



The worst health hazard

Dhaka has secured a position among the least liveable cities across the globe because of pollution, mainly in air and water. The number of brick fields is increasing gradually at a time when air pollution turned into a serious health hazard. Wood or abandoned rubber tyres, instead of coal, is being used to burn bricks. The influential owners collect earth from anywhere and use those for making bricks. They have been continuously polluting the environment by taking advantage of the poor execution of laws, making huge profits during this time of rapid urbanisation. The mega brickfields around Dhaka are a major contributor to air pollution. The law, however, clearly states that such brickfields cannot be set up within three kilometres of municipal areas or forests. But the government seems to have turned a blind eye to this important issue.

S.M. Shamim-Ur-Rashid Tushar
 Department of Business Administration
 Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, Sylhet



'Miracles' we are tired of

Rationalists have long claimed that miracles never happen. I beg to differ. In Bangladesh, miracles happen not only every day, but every hour.

When we get electricity, it is a miracle. When we get water, it is a miracle. When we come back home in one piece, it is a miracle. I spent a week in Bangkok in the middle of a raging flood, and there was no power failure, no water shortage. What a dull place without miracles! When will our country get rid of miracles, and become dull? The Lord only knows.

Iftekhar Sayeed
 On e-mail

Avoiding wastefulness and pomp

A report from Johannesburg published in a local English daily on 12th June is a very good example of state austerity and modesty shown by the new president of Malawi and that is in line with the country's financial position.

This should be an example for us, also to follow. Unnecessary show of pomp is nothing but an 'empty vessel' that needlessly seems to sound much! It is the personality and capability of the person and his or her moral character that brings admiration and respect from people, and not the position of the incumbent.

Regarding air travel, as far as possible, our head of government should try to avoid special Biman flights for travel. They should try always to travel wherever possible, by normal commercial flights. Special air craft and fancy motorcars, particularly for a poor country like ours, is an unnecessary waste of wealth, and can be avoided, whenever possible. Our expenses should be commensurate with our resources and income.

A citizen
 Dhaka

READERS respond

Here are some comments that came in response to Sunday's The Daily Star news report headlined "Electricity bill shocking"

Kamal Chowdhury

We demand the previous system.

Zakir, Narsingdi

Government should increase electricity production.

Monir

It is difficult to pay this exorbitant bill. The increase is not 50 percent; it is more than 100 percent!

Badal Hasib

People are the ultimate victims.

Turja, Canada

Promote energy conservation. Still the rate is very low compared to the other countries. A large number of connections are still illegal. Government should be aware of this as it cannot afford to pay more subsidies.

Arman Aziz

The load-shedding problem of the country cannot be solved by giving high subsidies. Households that are using more than 400 KW per month fall into upper middle class or upper class segment. Tk. 3000 monthly bill should be affordable for them. I personally fall in this category and my monthly bill has increased three fold in last three months. But I support the new tariff structure.

Nasarullah

This unethical rise of price has put many of us under acute financial crisis. But electricity comes and goes, there is no stability. We are also paying higher rate for running generators.

Shawkat Osman

The way electricity charge is being increased every month, very soon people of limited means would have to cut down or totally stop their consumption or even go back to the days of lantern. This might give the government a chance to meet the demand as the total demand will fall drastically.

Kushal

The price is affecting me personally. But I understand that the government can not continue to give subsidies. The price of oil and subsequently the price of power are rising all over the world. People who are consuming more than 400 units must be either a big family or a family who use such luxuries like AC, washing machine etc. They should pay for the luxuries they enjoy.

Ataur Rahman

I think this is justified. With subsidy in electricity who gets the benefit? It is mostly the privileged population who enjoy electricity supply. I think 60% of the country's population will not bother as they always live in darkness.

Ali

Electricity bills for the last six months are ever increasing! The rise is not shocking but killing, when the prices of all other items in the market for daily use (food in particular) are already highest ever! The government has to be more creative in its policy. Mere subsidies are not enough. There has to be a long term survival plan chalked out and implemented for a real solution.

Anonymous

It is said that power tariffs in Bangladesh were the lowest in the sub-continent. True, and that is why we should not complain about high electricity prices. Those who keep track of international economic conditions will know that oil prices are high and as such it has a hand in driving up electricity charges. The government is actually doing well to keep our unit price low while reducing load-shedding. A productive alternative for consumers might be to be creative in reducing electricity costs (by introducing e.g. solar panels, energy saving lights, LCD screens, floor fans, hand-held air conditioners).