

## An end to CHT land dispute?

### Implement the Accord in full

THE announcement by the Prime Minister that she wants to put an end to land disputes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) gives a glimmer of hope that the most sensitive component of the CHT Peace Accord may be resolved under the PM's leadership. It is hard to understand, however, why even after 18 long years, the Peace Accord has not been fully implemented, especially since it was the PM and her government who had initiated this historic agreement.

During these years the ethnic minorities of the CHT have been living in uncertainty regarding the ownership of the land they have lived on for generations. Influential people have taken advantage of the situation and intimidated these communities in various ways. Allegations of human rights abuses have been regular. The Peace Accord had been a promise to these people that they would be treated as equal citizens and given the dignity of such a status.

The PM has referred to all the development work that has been done in the CHT to improve the lives of the people such as building roads, improving telecommunications and providing power supply, which is commendable. But the fact remains that land reforms are crucial for the stability of the region and unless they take place, taking into account the rights and demands of the ethnic minorities, there will continue to be fear, intimidation and uncertainty. This will be in contradiction to the spirit of the CHT Peace Accord. We hope that the words of the PM regarding finding a solution through dialogue will be brought to fruition soon – eighteen years is far too long a time for the ethnic minorities of this region to wait for the government's commitments to be entirely fulfilled.

## The misery of migrant workers in Malaysia

### The indifference must stop

REPORTS of Bangladeshi migrant workers falling victim to abuse, mistreatment, fraud and other maltreatment in the hands of their foreign employers are not new. The most recent incident to hit the headline is that of Miraj Munshi, an undocumented Bangladeshi migrant worker who was denied compensation for his injury as his employer had tricked him into lying to the authority. He is one of the thousands of Bangladeshi workers for whom life is synonymous with a daily, persistent struggle in a foreign land.

Even though the Malaysian government has offered a blanket amnesty on all Bangladeshi migrant workers, over two lakh Bangladeshis have still remained unregistered and thus unaccounted for in the country, making them the most vulnerable of the lot. Most of them do not have any job security, not to mention incidents of extortion and exploitation that they go through on a regular basis. They are neither entitled to legal protection nor covered by insurance.

We believe that it is incumbent upon the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment to take up Munshi's and other such cases to the authorities concerned in Malaysia. We also urge our mission in Kuala Lumpur to contact the undocumented Bangladeshis and make them aware of the pitfalls of working in Malaysia without any valid document. We hope that the ministry will probe into the incidents of abuse and death and will take concrete measures to ensure that our citizens work abroad in peace. Also, we earnestly plead with the government to open new avenues of opportunities for the migration of skilled workers.

## COMMENTS

### "Open campaign to kill Bangladesh professor"

(May 8, 2016)

▼  
Maamar Huq

The call for the killing is wrong. And so is telling people what they should or should not wear.

▼  
Ahmed Farhad Salim

People can't be killed just because they have a different opinion about something.

▼  
Simran Nova Siddique

What is the point of having a legal system if we allow some people to take law into their own hands?

▼  
Asif Zaman

In every country the majority of the people are peaceful and law abiding. It is only a few who spread hatred on the basis of colour, creed, gender and faith. We all have a responsibility to teach our children how to be more tolerant and broad minded.

### "Stop driving on wrong sides: HC"

(May 5, 2016)

▼  
Osama Rahman

It's not just the VIPs. Public university buses do it all the time. Laws should be equally applicable to all.



SYED MANSUR  
HASHIM

EVERYWHERE it is the same old story. Roads built get washed away after the first rains. Recently built bridges and culverts show cracks. Contractors contracted by the various divisions of the government take it for a ride with shoddy workmanship and budgets magically inflate many times over the project period. What is difficult to understand

is why the government's only project monitoring body, the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) formed in 1984 for ensuring strict monitoring and evaluation of public works is wilfully ignored by the ministries.

Indeed, going by newspaper reports, we are continually confronted by projects that not only miss completion deadlines, but whose original budgets keep getting revised upwards. The IMED has been dubbed a "dead horse" as it remains both understaffed and its evaluation reports are routinely ignored by the various government bodies that commission hundreds if not thousands of projects every fiscal year. According to a report published in The Financial Express on May 8, we learn that while government development projects have increased many times over the last few decades, IMED's manpower has not, which in effect renders it ineffective as a watchdog body. The numbers actually speak for themselves. The division has 240 people working for it with a mere 92 Class I officials, and it is up to this paltry number to evaluate hundreds of development projects under the current annual development plan – which has a little over 1,200 projects with a budget of Tk 970 billion.

So if we are to go by those figures, it is estimated that every official must monitor 23.36 projects in a year. How on earth is an official to do qualitative assessment for so many projects in one year? It will take a few weeks just to prepare a report on a monitoring and evaluation of a single project. What it all boils down to of course is that the investigation needed to see whether the project has been satisfactorily completed is not done and blaming the IMED or its officials for a shoddy job is not possible, since they are simply understaffed.

Naturally, a toothless government watchdog body only goes to strengthen the hands of unscrupulous contractors. A stark example of that happening came through in a recently unearthed case of shoddy workmanship falling under the Department of

Agriculture, where the contractor was saving 5 kilograms of mild steel (MS) rods in the construction of a two-storey biological research centre at Damurhuda upazila in Chuadanga. If that is the level of graft going on, we shudder to think what is happening with large infrastructure projects, like the numerous flyovers being constructed in Dhaka city.

That public funds, which are in effect tax payers' money, are being misspent and the government cannot find enough money to equip IMED with requisite staff is not unfortunate, it is ludicrous. Quality assessment is a prerequisite for any public works project because the lack of proper oversight will and does lead to graft and low

monies that are allocated to pay for staff salaries, benefits and keep logistics up and running.

We keep hearing about the zero-tolerance approach towards graft. Now if this is the situation with IMED and its inability to properly evaluate projects, where its recommendations in the form of reports gather dust on bookshelves, precisely how is public money being well spent? And what quality of work is the government getting for the billions of taka it is spending annually for much-needed public works. These are all valid questions which will undoubtedly go unanswered as is the custom in Bangladesh, where accountability is a word found only in the dictionary.



Bamboo, not iron rods...

PHOTO: STAR

build quality, especially in a country where there are contractors who have no problems stuffing bamboos in place of iron rods in construction. According to one IMED official (as per the report published in The Financial Express) "We recommend for the line ministries to conduct proper investigation into any specific corruption or misappropriation of funds, the ministries in most cases do not follow our report." And if we take that statement at face value, we must conclude the public agencies involved with project work are getting away scot free. Then what is the point of having IMED around in the first place? Why not simply disband it and save the public exchequer

Given that the government is spending significant resources to upgrade the infrastructure of the country in terms of road, rail, port and other links, it only goes to its own benefit to have a well-staffed and equipped division whose primary responsibility is to be its eyes-and-ears on the ground that will look after the quality aspect of state sponsored projects and make policy recommendations on which actions will be taken by the relevant ministries. A failure to do so will manifest itself when commissioned works break down before date of expected expiry.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

# Refugees and migrants: A crisis of solidarity

BAN KI-MOON

THIS September, the United Nations General Assembly will bring together world leaders to address one of the leading challenges of our time: responding to large movements of refugees and migrants.

War, human rights violations, underdevelopment, climate change and natural disasters are leading more people to leave their homes than at any time since we have had reliable data. More than 60 million people – half of them children – have fled violence or persecution and are now refugees and internally displaced persons. An additional 225 million are migrants who have left their countries in search of better opportunities or simply for survival.

But this is not a crisis of numbers; it is a crisis of solidarity. Almost 90 percent of the world's refugees are hosted in developing countries. Eight countries host more than half the world's refugees. Just ten countries provide 75 percent of the UN's budget to ease and resolve their plight.

With equitable responsibility sharing, there would be no crisis for host countries. We can afford to help, and we know what we need to do to handle large movements of refugees and migrants. Yet too often, we let fear and ignorance get in the way. Human needs end up overshadowed, and xenophobia speaks louder than reason.

Countries on the frontlines of this crisis are struggling every day to meet the challenge. On September 19, the General Assembly will hold a high-level meeting to strengthen our efforts for the longer term. To help the international community seize this opportunity, I have just issued a report, "In Safety and Dignity", with

recommendations on how the world can take more effective collective action.

We need to begin by recognising our common humanity. Millions of people on the move have been exposed to extreme suffering. Thousands have died in the Mediterranean, on the Andaman Sea, in the Sahel and in Central America. Refugees and migrants are not "others"; they are as diverse as the human family itself. Movements of people are a quintessentially global phenomenon that demands a global sharing of responsibility.

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Second, far from being a threat, refugees and migrants contribute to the growth and development of host countries as well as their countries of origin. The better new arrivals are integrated, the greater their contribution to society will be. We need more measures to promote the social and economic inclusion of refugees and migrants.

Third, political and community leaders have a responsibility to speak out against discrimination and intolerance, and to counter those who seek to win votes through fearmongering and divisiveness. This

is a time to build bridges, not walls, between people.

Fourth, we have to give greater attention to addressing the drivers of forced displacement. The United Nations continues to strengthen its work to prevent conflict, resolve disputes peacefully and address violations of human rights before they escalate. One powerful new tool is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a blueprint agreed last year by all 193 members of the United Nations that includes a strong focus on justice, institutions and peaceful societies.

Fifth, we need to strengthen the international systems that manage large movements of people so that they uphold human rights norms and provide the necessary protections. States must honour their international legal obligations, including the 1951 Refugee Convention. Countries where refugees arrive first should not be left to shoulder the demands alone. My report proposes a "global compact on responsibility sharing for refugees".

There is a pressing need to do more to combat smugglers and traffickers, to rescue and protect people en route, and to ensure their safety and dignity

at borders. More orderly and legal pathways for migrants and refugees will be crucial, so that desperate people are not forced to turn to criminal networks in their search for safety.

The number of migrants is expected to continue to grow as a result of trade, labour and skill shortages, the ease of travel and communications, rising inequality and climate change. My report proposes important measures to improve global governance in this area, including through a "global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration".

Refugee and migrant crises are far from insurmountable, but they cannot be addressed by states acting alone. Today, millions of refugees and migrants are being deprived of their basic rights, and the world is depriving itself of the full benefits of what refugees and migrants have to offer.

The World Humanitarian Summit I am convening in Istanbul on May 23 and 24 will seek new commitments from States and others to work together to protect people and build resilience. I expect the September 19 meeting of the General Assembly to point the way toward solutions to the most immediate refugee and migration challenges, and commit world leaders to greater global cooperation on these issues.

Human beings have moved from place to place across the millennia, by choice and under duress, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Only by upholding our duty to protect those fleeing persecution and violence, and by embracing the opportunities that refugees and migrants offer to their new societies, will we be able to achieve a more prosperous and fairer future for all.

The writer is Secretary General of the United Nations.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### To discipline means to teach, not to punish

On May 7, 2016, the 155th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore was celebrated across countries. Tagore, who was a prolific composer with 2,230 songs to his credit, began his climb to fame and his lifetime journey into the annals of Asian history, as a mere lad of eight when he penned his first poem. From there he graduated to short stories and dramas, which contributed to his international acclaim. This was confirmed in 1913 when his masterpiece Gitanjali won the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature.

Among the countless words he wrote and the wisdom he expressed therein, the eight words that are still alive and known to most school pupils

today, although over a century later, are: "To discipline means to teach, not to punish." Tagore abhorred corporal punishment. Not only is the horrific act unlawful and morally wrong, but deplorable and grossly insulting to the great man that his teachings should be beaten-in to children through corporal punishment at schools. He would never condone it.

If only some parents and some teachers were to learn that single lesson taught by Tagore over a hundred years ago, Bangladeshi society would benefit enormously.

Sir Frank Peters  
A foreign friend of Bangladesh

### Lessons from Mother's Day

Every year in most countries of the world, the second Sunday of May is celebrated as the Mother's Day denoting the universal and individual love and respect for mother. Children show their love and appreciation by giving their mothers flowers and gifts or by staying with them for a whole day.

Unfortunately, in many societies, children do not take proper care of their mothers when they are old. They are even sent to old homes. Keeping in mind the sacrifice mothers make for us, children should be more caring and respectful to them till their last breath.

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