

Rohingya refugees exposed to diseases

Coordinated relief efforts necessary

THE humanitarian response of the administration to the plight of the Rohingya refugees has been commendably proactive, and we think that the plan to allocate a specific piece of area to shelter, and register them, is judicious. However, the situation in the areas where Rohingyas have taken refuge is grim and getting grimmer by the day.

With the influx of around three lakh Rohingyas in these areas since August 25, aid agencies and government workers are overwhelmed with the task of trying to attend to these desperate people, many of whom are sick and in need of immediate medical care. Providing sanitation and safe drinking water has become a major challenge posing a major threat to the health of these people. Diarrhea, dysentery, pneumonia and other serious diseases are afflicting the weak, hungry, malnourished refugees. Many of them are women and children. In this miserable scenario, an epidemic is very likely to erupt which will only worsen an already untenable situation.

The daily reports coming in from the media show that there is a crying need to accelerate the humanitarian aid efforts in a systematic, organized way. Many of the refugees have been unable to get shelter even in the makeshift camps and are forced to stay under the open sky exposed to the elements. All the Rohingya refugees must be settled in specific camps so that necessary facilities like water and sanitation can be arranged for them. More medical teams with medicine and necessary equipment have to be on the ground to attend to the sick and wounded. Most of all, a concerted effort of the government, NGOs and international bodies is needed to deal with this humanitarian crisis.

2nd submarine cable launched

Make it cheaper and easily accessible

THE government should be congratulated for inaugurating Bangladesh's second submarine cable which, if properly used, will ensure faster Internet connection speed for the consumers. The undersea cable, joins another submarine cable set up in 2005 as well as six other cables connected through India. This surely is good news for the people who hunger for seamless flow of data, thanks to the popularity of information and communications technology. As promising as that looks, there are problems that need to be taken care of before any significant benefits can be derived from the new cable.

Industry experts have expressed guarded optimism about the new cable, saying that with a capacity of up to 1,500 Gigabytes per second (Gbps) bandwidth it will not bring immediate benefits to end-users as the inland cable network set up by BTCL is not capable of supporting full use of the bandwidth. There will be no substantial addition to the country's current bandwidth use of 450 Gbps—of which 260 come from India—if the existing inland network is not improved.

Price is another area of concern for the users. The state-run BSCCL charges high bandwidth prices compared to imported bandwidth. Local Internet service providers may not be interested to buy BSCCL-provided bandwidth if it fails to come up with a competitive price tag. The fact is, the days of bandwidth monopoly are long gone; Bangladesh needs to understand the changing market reality and update its strategy to tap into the vast potential of Internet connectivity by removing the barriers and making the cables more easily accessible and less pricey.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Rise above politics

International communities are not doing enough for the Rohingya community, the tormented minority of Myanmar. The world community should have stood beside the world's most persecuted community. In reality, many have chosen to stay silent, while two Asian giants—India and China—sided with Myanmar's narrative for their own economic and political interests.

For the sake of humanity, countries should put aside their individual interests and take a collective and unified stance. If the international community mounts pressure on Myanmar, it is humanity that will emerge as the victor.

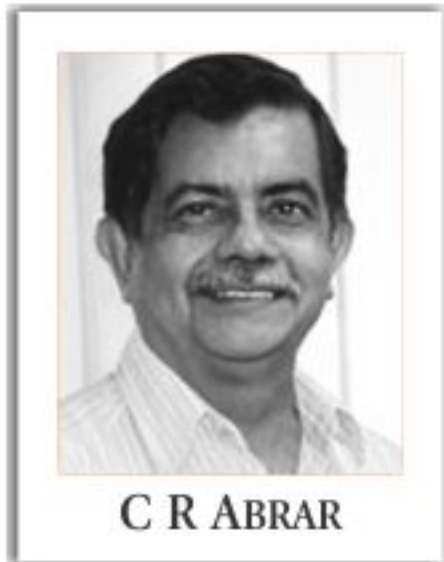
Rashidul Hasan, Jagannath University

Corporal punishment in schools

The Supreme Court's ban on corporal punishment of students in school is not thoroughly complied by the teachers around the country. Newspapers continue to report incidents of severe physical punishment of students by teachers, but cases of mild but regular physical or mental punishment go unreported. Such punishments may cause serious psychological damage to these students. This practice raises some serious questions as to why teachers resort to such punishments. Do they beat students out of their frustration? These areas demand an immediate investigation so that the issue can be addressed scientifically and the court's ruling properly implemented.

Md. Maruf Hossain, By email

Refugee protection, Rohingyas and Modi-fied India



follow." He rightly noted "India with its history, culture, traditions, is today an example of generosity in the way it has opened its borders to all people who have come looking for safety and sanctuary."

Although not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, since independence, India embraced a diverse range of refugees fleeing persecution in their own lands. It provided shelter to 80,000 Tibetans who followed the Dalai Lama after the abortive uprising in 1959. Subsequently, more than 150,000 Tibetan refugees came and of them 120,000 remain in India today. The Indian government extended support to the Tibetan refugees to settle in the country pending their return to Tibet, which never happened. In 1971, in the wake of Bangladesh's Liberation War India again experienced influx of about ten million Bangladeshis. It opened the border, sheltered the refugees and appealed for international assistance. Within a year almost all returned home following the liberation of Bangladesh and defeat of the Pakistan occupation army, an event in which India played a seminal part for which we are grateful. Again, during the civil war in Sri Lanka in the 1980s and 1990s, tens of thousands of Tamils sought shelter in the southern Indian states. 64,000 have remained in India. The reputation of India as safe sanctuary attracted the Afghans during their troubled times. India still hosts about 10,000 Afghan refugees. Likewise, the policy of military solution to the Chittagong Hill Tracts problem led to the inflow of 55,000 hill people into Tripura. The peace accord in 1997 created conditions for the return of the hill refugees to Bangladesh.

Although India's treatment of various groups of refugees varied, the country earned international accolade for keeping its door open to the persecuted. Hosting refugees with different cultural backgrounds and faiths often in economically depressed regions was not an easy task. The astute liberal political leadership rose to the challenges; including those often posed by the

hostile host population, and defended the refugees. At certain points when that was deficient the National Human Rights Commission and the higher judiciary stepped in to protect refugees. Recent developments centring the Rohingya, however, signal a departure from this elevated stand.

Over a period of time a number of persecuted Rohingya refugees found their way to India. They entered the country from western Arakan state, some after a stint of stay in Bangladesh. The series of atrocities committed by the Burmese security forces and the militant Buddhists in recent years led to the swelling of their ranks. Many have settled

the UNHCR, India, filed the plea.

A day later as Prime Minister Modi began his maiden visit to Myanmar, a junior minister of Home Affairs informed the local media "whether the Rohingyas are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees or not, they are illegal immigrants in India...as per the law they stand to be deported." Media reports inform that in April senior government functionaries discussed plans for the "detection, arrest and deportation" of Rohingya.

Such developments heightened the insecurity of and occurrences of discrimination against the Rohingyas. The scope for securing any form of legal

Principle of Non-Refoulement that proscribes deportation of people to a country where they may face threats to their lives. They sought that Rohingya people be provided "basic amenities to ensure that they can live in human conditions as required by international law."

It appears that Rohingya refugees in India have become convenient scapegoats in a polity where reason and tolerance are increasingly losing ground to hatred and prejudice. It may also be the case as Ravi Nair notes, "Out manoeuvred on the influence imprint in Myanmar by China at every point of engagement India's only diplomatic



Several Rohingyas have entered India, which shares a long and porous border with Myanmar .

PHOTO: AFP

in Jammu, Hyderabad, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi-NCR and Rajasthan. The Indian government claims the number to be 40,000, while the UNHCR puts the figure at around 16,500.

On September 4 the Additional Solicitor General, representing the central government, reportedly informed the Supreme Court that it will not give any assurance to Rohingya refugees that the government will not deport them back to Myanmar. This response came when the apex court probed the government's stand on a petition challenging its decision to deport Rohingyas in irregular status to Myanmar. Two refugees registered with

status for these hapless Rohingyas in India appears to be shrinking fast. Increasingly they are being branded as "illegal immigrants".

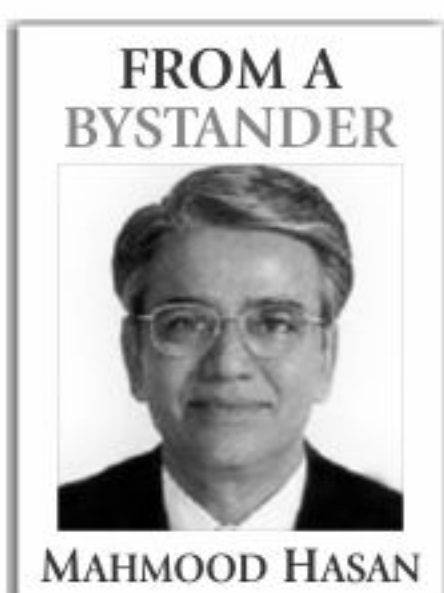
Jurists have noted that the proposed deportation would be contrary to the constitutional protection of Article 14 (right to equality) and Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty) of the Constitution of India. The deportation order would also be in contravention of the Principle of Non-Refoulement, widely recognised as a standard of international customary law. The petitioners reminded the government that India ratified and is a signatory to various conventions that recognise the

ploy is security rabbit it pulls out of Islamophobic terrorist threat campaign (*Indian Express*, September 7)." Members of Rohingya community, both in Arakan and in India, have thus become dispensable pawns in such reckoning.

One wonders sitting in his UN Plaza office in dreary wet evening what crosses the mind of the now UN Secretary General Guterres as he learns India's turnaround in refugee protection, a country on which once he lavished his praise.

C R Abrar teaches International Relations at the University of Dhaka.

Where is the international outcry?



THE situation on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border is extremely volatile. Thousands of refugees are streaming into Bangladesh following fresh crackdowns on Rohingyas led by the Myanmar army. Hundreds of Rohingyas have been killed so far.

On August 25, 2017, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) simultaneously attacked 30 security posts and military bases in Rakhine. Over 100 people were killed in the attack including soldiers, policemen, civilians and militants. The Myanmar government has designated ARSA as a "terrorist organisation".

The timing of the attack is significant, first, because Myanmar's military operation against ARSA was imminent and second, because of the release of the Annan Commission report on August 23, 2017. ARSA said its attack was in self-defence and was aimed at pre-empting an escalating military crackdown on both the

nor did he say that they were Myanmarese nationals (deprived of citizenship). It warned of the radicalisation of Rohingyas if they were continued to be denied basic rights.

Clearly it is a wishy-washy report, tailored for Suu Kyi's narrow political purpose. What else could one expect from a Commission of 9 members—6 of whom were handpicked by Suu Kyi? She thought she could deflect international criticisms by saying that Kofi Annan was working on a peace plan for Rakhine, while the international community gradually lost interest in the plight of the Rohingyas.

The report now is as good as dead—its recommendations cannot be implemented under the current circumstances. The junta probably also welcomed the attack—as it gave them a potent excuse to get rid of the Rohingyas from Rakhine. But the way the junta is going about expelling Rohingyas has rather invited international condemnation.

Soft peddling against an immoral xenophobic military clique is folly. This crisis has been simmering for decades, particularly since 2012. Bangladesh has lost

backed by China, blocked the draft statement. Brandishing the Annan Commission report, Myanmar succeeded in persuading the Russian, Chinese and other P-5 delegations to block any statement. Bangladesh should have called for the UNSC meeting long ago and lobbied with the permanent members to censure Myanmar. Only a UNSC Resolution condemning Myanmar junta's operations against Rohingyas can stop the carnage.

Surprisingly, UN Security Council members, particularly America, continues to support Aung San Suu Kyi with the hope that she will strengthen democracy and set things right. Unfortunately, Suu Kyi cannot stop the massacre of Rohingyas against the decisions of the military junta.

It is not baffling to see India continuing to support Myanmar. With anti-Muslim Hindutva on the rise, Narendra Modi, instead of condemning the atrocities, has planned to deport 40,000 Rohingyas living in India. Modi, while visiting Naypyidaw (September 5-7) told Suu Kyi, "We share your concerns about extremist violence (meaning Islamic terrorism) in Rakhine state." Modi did not have the courage to ask Suu Kyi to stop the carnage in Rakhine. China too has been silent on the issue because of geostrategic interest and massive investments in Myanmar.

What is most worrying is the rise of ARSA—an insurgent group led by one Ataulah Abu Ammar Junjuni (40). It calls itself an army, equipped with modern weapons. ARSA rejected any link with transnational jihadi terror groups, and said it was committed to securing citizenship and basic human rights for the Rohingya Muslims.

Myanmar is already at war with more than a dozen insurgent groups along its borders. But the emergence of ARSA will be a game-changer for Myanmar. Islamic militants from al-Qaeda, ISIS and other jihadi outfits will most likely infiltrate ARSA and pose serious threats to Myanmar's security. ARSA's cross-border activities may also pose a security threat to Bangladesh. Myanmar's air force helicopters have already violated Bangladesh's airspace several times during the past weeks. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres rightly warned that ethnic cleansing of Rohingyas could lead to regional destabilisation.

Myanmar has started a non-military aggression against Bangladesh. It has created a situation that can destabilise Bangladesh socio-economically. This is an issue which should have united all the political parties of Bangladesh (of all conviction) to demonstrate that Bangladesh is united against the persecution of Rohingyas. A politically divided country is not a strong nation. Adversaries always take advantage of such weaknesses. At this critical moment, the government should call for an all-party conference to condemn the atrocities against Rohingyas and figure out how to handle the situation.

The key to resolving the current crisis lies with the Myanmar junta, not Aung San Suu Kyi.

Mahmood Hasan is former Ambassador and Secretary.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

rebels and Rohingya civilians.

The ARSA attack has actually brought back the issue to international focus, showing that the Rohingya issue cannot be settled with the Annan Commission recommendations and that the military junta is guilty of crimes against humanity.

Among the 30 recommendations made by the Annan Commission, the most important one relates to the citizenship of "Muslims in Rakhine", which is the main cause of repeated violence between the Rakhines (i.e. Buddhists) and "Muslims". The Report recommended the review of the 1982 citizenship law. The Report does not mention the words "Rohingya" or "Bengali", as instructed by Aung San Suu Kyi. Annan neither said that the "Muslims" were from Bangladesh

the discourse by accepting Myanmar's terminology of Rohingyas as "Muslims of Rakhine". The term "Rohingya" has wide connotations—giving these people historical legitimacy and ethnic identity as a race that has political and human rights. By calling them "Muslims of Rakhine" Bangladesh has divested them of their ethnic identity. Myanmar has used two indicators to expel the Rohingyas—they speak the Chittagonian dialect and are Muslims.

Two UN Security Council meetings were called for by Britain—on 17 March and also on 30 August—to discuss the UN Human Rights Council's accusations that Myanmar's military was committing crimes against humanity. Both meetings failed to issue a formal statement as there was no consensus. Russia,