

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA MONDAY OCTOBER 9, 2017, ASHWIN 24, 1424 BS

The cost of negligence

Why was the Rakhine report suppressed?

TO say that the report on the Rakhine situation, submitted to the UN in May this year and which was bottled up by the UN, is shocking, would be an understatement. And even more so given the fact that the Horsey study was commissioned by the UN itself. We are also perturbed by reports appearing in various media about the role of the UN leadership in Myanmar insofar as it relates to the Rohingyas and the human rights situation in Rakhine.

One wonders what the purpose of setting up the commission was if its findings had to be dumped. We understand that the report was shelved because the chief UN representative in Myanmar did not concur with the findings.

We know that to be forewarned is to be forearmed. The report provided ample warning of the likely development in Rakhine State and had also called for contingency planning to address that by formulating a coherent policy. But for the fate of the report, Bangladesh would not have had to face such a grave situation as we are facing at the moment. We cannot recall any situation where a country has had to take in, in less than two months, more than half a million persecuted refugees fleeing their homeland. And this was what was predicted too in the Horsey Report. Bangladesh can be rightly resentful that a humanitarian situation was deliberately neglected because some high UN official was not happy with the conclusions and recommendations of the report.

However, it would be unfair to point fingers at any one particular individual in the UN hierarchy. The UN headquarters cannot shrug off the share of its responsibility in the matter. UN's credibility as a protagonist of peace and human rights has been sullied. It calls urgently for an inquiry into the episode and hold those responsible to account. After all, they are also to be partly blamed for the plight of the Rohingyas because of their act of deliberate suppression of a UN report.

Horrors of human trafficking

Govt's attention needs more focus

THE horrific exploitation of human beings by traffickers, as detailed in a report published by this newspaper yesterday, calls for increased vigilance against this menace. The report describes how a 23-year-old Bangladeshi man was held captive and tortured mercilessly in Libya by a group of human traffickers, who were luckily apprehended by the authorities.

The traffickers had seized the man's passport, filmed torturing him and used the videos they had captured to force his brother to repeatedly pay them exorbitant extortion fees in return for his release which was never to come. What is worrying is that numerous other similar stories have come to light recently, which gives the impression that the problem has only been metastasising over the years, perhaps in the absence of proper government monitoring and lack of preventive measures.

This is, at least, what was opined in the US Human Trafficking Report 2017, which downgraded Bangladesh to the Tier 2 Watch List as its government did not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The observation of the report that "official complicity in trafficking crimes remained a serious problem" needs urgent attention. Regrettably, the government has not rehabilitated the victims as per their specific needs and did not even provide rehabilitation for adult male victims.

As mentioned before in this column, human trafficking will continue to thrive until the government takes measures to stop it. There are a number of recommendations in the US Human Trafficking Report 2017, which the government should consider to end human trafficking for good and to bring the perpetrators of such a barbaric practice to justice.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Control lab test charges

It is a common practice for most doctors to advise the patient to conduct diagnostic tests. The number of tests that is usually advised sometimes makes the patients wonder if they are all necessary. Even worse, many doctors get hefty commissions for sending their patients to diagnostic centres. That said, there are of course doctors who are not involved in this malpractice but they seem to be the minority. The Bangladesh Medical Council needs to look into these allegations.

A couple of decades ago, the government fixed charges for diagnostic tests. The charges should be updated and enforced accordingly. The present diagnostic charges at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) may be considered standard. The charges fixed by the government should be publicised in print and electronic media. Any violation should be dealt with firmly. Md Ashraf Hossain, *By email*

Who to blame for the failure in the latest Test?

The Daily Star has recently published a front-page report titled "Tigers fail to learn." I believe it's not only the Tigers who had failed to learn; many commentators and the cricket board should also share the blame. They rejoice too much when a victory is achieved, although they have little understanding of the inherent strength of our team in bowling and batting.

The reason why the Tigers opted to field after winning the toss in the first and second Tests against South Africa was nothing but a fear of being bundled out quickly. The truth is, they don't have the stamina to play for five days in a row. The pace bowlers do not get the opportunity to learn in home condition, as the Test pitches are generally prepared for spinners. Unless we focus on building capacity for our cricketers, we should not expect anything better. Luthfe Ali, *By mail*

Has UN failed the Rohingyas?



MOHAMMAD ZAMAN

ENDLESS streams of Rohingyas have crossed the Naf River into Bangladesh. The deaths of children at sea stand out most vividly. Rohingyas have left behind everything they had once known in the face of the Myanmar military's brutalities against their own people.

And this has all happened because of the collective failure of the UN members to prevent and/or stop the carnage. The Rohingya crisis has steadily deepened resulting in one of the worst human catastrophes in recent history. More than half a million people have already crossed the border into Bangladesh in less than two months.

This is an unprecedented tragedy in human history. Yet, it was in the making for several years. Long before the recent burning and killings started, the warning signs were already there, building upon decades of persecution of the minority by the Buddhist majority in Rakhine State.

The state media continuously attacked the identity of the Rohingya Muslims, and falsely claimed that Rohingyas were "outsiders" and "illegal" Bengali migrants to Rakhine State despite historical evidence of their presence in the Arakan region since the pre-British period. According to some observers, the hatred and violence unleashed against Rohingya Muslims is an eerie reminder of Rwanda before the genocide there. When some Rohingyas took up arms to fight back against their decades-long persecution, the Myanmar military mounted a disproportionate response leading to the burning and looting of Rohingya villages, and indiscriminate killings of the Rohingyas—forcing them out of their own country. Rohingya men, women and children who survived the atrocities and crossed the border to Bangladesh shared consistent accounts of Myanmar soldiers surrounding Rohingya villages, burning homes to the ground, stabbing and shooting Rohingya villagers, and committing mass rapes.

According to Refugees International, the attacks and displacement that began in late August are of an entirely new scale and level of inhumanity. In addition to the more than half a million who have fled to Bangladesh, an estimated 200,000



PHOTO: AFP

According to Refugees International, the displacement of the Rohingya that began in late August is of an entirely new scale.

people have been internally displaced in Myanmar's strife-hit Rakhine State. It is shameful that this tragedy happened under the leadership of Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi, now branded as one of the "great ethnic cleansers."

The responses to date by the UN as a world body can at best be described as dismal. The condemnation by the Secretary-General has not helped in any form or shape. Instead, an early response from the UN Security Council could have changed the tragic outcome in Myanmar. The Security Council, particularly two of the veto-wielding permanent members—China and Russia—should get the lion's share of the blame for the lack of any decisive action. The failure of the Security Council has simply emboldened the Myanmar regime to continue its abuses against the Rohingya civilians. This is amply demonstrated, according to Refugees International, by the refusal of the Myanmar regime to allow access to the UN fact-finding mission to investigate human rights abuses and unfettered access to humanitarian organisations for relief and rehabilitation in the Rakhine State.

The ASEAN countries have also equally failed the Rohingya refugees; the only response to the crisis has been a statement expressing "concern" over the situation. It has failed to take a stand against one of its member states carrying out a violent campaign of ethnic cleansing and for crimes against humanity. Amnesty International accused ASEAN of "failing" Rohingyas and asked the member countries to uphold the commitments to human rights enshrined in the ASEAN Charter. Finally, the US State Department recently expressed concerns that the Myanmar crackdown on the Rohingyas may destabilise the region and could draw international terrorists. However, there was no word on any punitive actions and whether the Trump administration would impose targeted sanctions against Myanmar's military.

The situation on the ground in Bangladesh demands urgent attention and support for Rohingya refugees. Measures by the UN, the United States and international community should include: (i) all-out pressure on Myanmar government, including targeted sanctions by the US government; (ii) immediate cessation of atrocities and abuses against

Rohingya civilians in Rakhine State; (iii) full access for a UN fact-finding mission to investigate the atrocities; (iv) a plan for repatriation of the Rohingya refugees under UN supervision; and (v) robust international humanitarian aid efforts and support to Bangladesh.

This will require a lot of hard work by the UN and multilateral systems and a willingness to invest political capital by regional powers such as China, India and other SAARC countries. Myanmar's neighbours, allies and the larger international community should appropriately deal with the violation of human rights, death, and destruction perpetrated by the Myanmar regime. Otherwise, this may not be the last human tragedy of its kind.

Sadly, there seem to be too many similarities between the UN failures in Rwanda and Myanmar. The Rohingya tragedy should be a wake-up call to the international community to step up their efforts and solve the problem as quickly as possible. Otherwise, history will likely repeat itself.

Mohammad Zaman is an international development specialist and Advisory Professor, Hohai University, Nanjing, China. Email: mqzaman.bc@gmail.com

The DUCSU conundrum



NAZMUL AHASAN

IT'S been 27 years since the last election of the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU) was held. First held in 1924, DUCSU elections have taken place even under the most arduous circumstances, during the Pakistani rule and even with the military regimes in power in independent Bangladesh. Ironically, the practice of election in this most

stronghold of democratic consciousness stripped of an element—election—that defines any democratic entity? The Dhaka University authorities have come under repeated criticism for their failure to hold the election over the years. Even President Abdul Hamid emphasised the importance of holding the election—"DUCSU election is a must"—while addressing the 50th convocation of Dhaka University, although it is generally assumed that it's the government that does not want an election. The proponents of DUCSU election contend that since the student union

organised protests demanding a DUCSU election. They argued that a vice-chancellor election without representatives from the DUCSU was illegal under the university rules. Their protests faced interventions from the university's proctorial body, and a scuffle followed.

In March, the High Court issued a ruling asking the DU authorities to explain why they should not be directed to hold an election within a stipulated timeframe to form the DUCSU, but the authorities have failed to come up with a response to this day. Over the decades, successive VCs of

has been the same, and quite logical at that. They argue that since they are unlikely to be allowed to stay and campaign on the campus prior to the election, a level playing field cannot be ensured.

The other reason is that the university authorities cannot possibly hold an election without prior approval from the government. But the government fears that the student union of the most important university of the country with an electoral mandate may pose a political challenge to the ruling establishment. And they can't also expect to control the outcome of the election if it's held in a credible manner.

Today, with a nearly non-existent opposition in the country, the government of the day enjoys absolute power and influence. The student organisation of the ruling party, Chhatra League, has no meaningful opposition on the campus either. In the current environment, Chhatra League will certainly win if an election does take place. So, what is stopping the government and the DU authorities from holding a DUCSU election?

The university authorities, and perhaps the government too, wish to maintain the status quo. Even Chhatra League does not appear to want an election, because it fears that an elected DUCSU committee, even if dominated by its own party activists, would emerge as a parallel political force, undermining its sole dominance and even triggering intra-party fighting.

DUCSU and other student unions are among a number of institutions that are legally bound to hold elections periodically, including bar associations, university teacher associations, press clubs, etc. In most cases, the ruling party-favoured panels and candidates win in these elections.

It is true that a democratically elected DUCSU leadership may ideally focus on the national and student interests. But if the results of other institutional elections are any indication, it would be somewhat naive to think that a DUCSU leadership would fight for the interests of the students even if it means defying the authorities or the government. At a time when elections have become a political tool for selecting chosen people to the public office, a potential DUCSU election is quite likely to meet the same fate.

Nazmul Ahasan is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star. Email: nazmulahasan@live.com



Students trying to break through the gate of the DU VC office, protesting the absence of students' representatives in the senate and demanding DUCSU polls.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

prestigious student body of the country was brought to a halt after our ascent to democracy in 1991.

One of the most significant contributions of DUCSU was to produce a number of high-profile student leaders who later emerged as national leaders. Most importantly, DUCSU leaders led some of the most important political movements in our history—the language movement in 1952, mass uprising in '69, the liberation movement in '71, and the anti-autocracy movement in '91. So why was such a powerful

democratic movement in the country, its continued operation may strengthen the basis of our nascent national democracy. However, given the prevailing state of our democratic institutions, culture and environment, one wonders whether a DUCSU election will really bring about a meaningful change.

About a month ago, when the then-vice-chancellor of Dhaka University, AAMS Arefin Siddique, was reportedly preparing to have a re-election, the students and activists related to progressive student organisations

Dhaka University have failed to hold the election mainly due to two reasons. First, there was a persistent disagreement between the two dominant student wings of the two major political parties, Bangladesh Chhatra League and Bangladesh Jatiotabadi Chhatra Dal. Their position in support of or against the election has always depended on whether their parent political party happened to be in power. For example, BNP being an opposition party now, Chhatra Dal would characteristically oppose the election. The opposition's argument against holding the election