

FAMILY PLANNING

# Rohingyas lack awareness

MOHAMMAD AL-MASIM MOLLA and MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAH from Cox's Bazar

Selina Begum, 22, started walking from Rohingya settlements in Thyanakhalhi camp to collect some relief goods with her two-year-old daughter yesterday.

The woman started feeling labour pain mid-way and went to Balukhali Health Sub Centre instead. About half-an-hour later at 2:15pm, she gave birth to a boy.

At least 551 Rohingya babies have been born at different medical centres in Ukha and Teknaf between August 25 and October 11. About 12 babies were born each day, according to Cox's Bazar civil surgeon office.

A similar, if not bigger, number of babies has been born in the settlements, officials at the civil surgeon office said,

adding that many Rohingyas women prefer to deliver at their shacks.

According to health ministry data, 18,523 pregnant Rohingya women, who have entered Bangladesh during the massive exodus, have been suffering from many health-related problems.

Officials are meanwhile struggling to distribute birth control tools among the refugees, majority of who are not willing to accept family planning.

"They are not interested at all in family planning. We often fail to convince them," Kalyan Pal, a field inspector of Department of Family Planning in Ramu, said.

At least 7,454 Rohingyas women took antenatal service and 1,452 infants neonatal care from medical health centres.

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Rohingya refugees dismantle their makeshift home to move to another camp at the Palangkhali refugee camp in Ukha yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# A baby born into chaos

APP, Kutupalong

Mohammed Jubayed came into the world shortly after midday in a baking hot military tent in the chaos of a vast refugee camp in Bangladesh, now home to nearly a million Rohingyas.

Just an hour earlier, a cycle rickshaw had pulled up carrying his young mother Hasina Aktar clutching her stomach and moaning in pain after the throes of labour with her second child.

The United Nations says pregnant or breastfeeding women account for one in 10 of the estimated 520,000 Rohingyas who have arrived in Bangladesh over the last six weeks after fleeing an upsurge in violence in neighbouring Myanmar.

Victims of one of the worst humanitarian crises of the 21st century, these women and their newborn babies are even more vulnerable than the most desperate conditions in the camps, where even getting food and clean water is a battle.

Many expectant mothers have walked for days to reach safety in



Doctor Mahzabin holding newborn Rohingya baby Mohammed Jubayed at a medical centre in Kutupalong refugee camp.

PHOTO: AFP

Bangladesh, often without adequate food or water.

Aid workers say some are bleeding to death in the camps, where most endure child birth without medical help.

Two older women help Hasina, 20, walk the few steps from the rickshaw to the tent, a makeshift delivery clinic that has just been put up by Bangladesh soldiers in Kutupalong, the largest of the camps on the border with Myanmar.

Inside, the heat is almost unbearable. Hasina lies on a single mattress on a lino floor, her hands gripping the side of the tent as she writhes in pain, small beads of sweat gathering on her skin.

One nurse holds her down by the feet when the pain becomes too much; another fans her with sheets of paper.

Hasina's mother-in-law Fatma, who is 40 but looks much older, is the only relative present.

She crouches by Hasina's side and strokes her hair to try to calm her.

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# Top UN official in Myanmar recalled

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yesterday called for national unity and said she created a committee that would coordinate all international and local assistance in Rakhine State, reports AP.

She acknowledged in a speech on state-run television that the country was facing widespread criticism over the refugee crisis, and called for unity in tackling the problem.

She said her government was holding talks with Bangladesh on the return of "those who are now in Bangladesh."

Suu Kyi did not use the word "Rohingya" in her speech, although she referred to several other ethnic minorities by name.

She said those who return from Bangladesh would need to be resettled, without providing details, and said development must be brought to Rakhine to achieve a durable peace.

The Myanmar state counsellor said she would head the new committee, the "Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine" and that it would coordinate all efforts to create a "peaceful and developed Rakhine state."

Suu Kyi said the government has enlisted UN agencies, financial institutions such as the World Bank, and others to help develop Rakhine, one of Myanmar's poorest areas.

## CONTRIVERSY OVER RENATA

Quoting the UN, the BBC yesterday reported UN Resident Coordinator Renata Lok-Dessallien in Myanmar would leave by the end of October.

It said in June that she would be rotated from her position but stressed then the decision had nothing to do with her performance.

Diplomatic and aid community sources in Yangon, however, told the BBC's Jonah Fisher the decision was linked to her failure to prioritise human rights. Since then Dessallien has remained in post with the government of Myanmar, rejecting her proposed successor.

Two weeks ago the UN secretary-general said he had full confidence in Dessallien but the BBC said that now appears to be in doubt.

Renata was the focus of a BBC investigation last month in which she was accused of suppressing internal criticism on Rohingya Muslims. A statement from the UN in Myanmar, in response to a BBC inquiry, however, defended Dessallien's handling of the Rohingya issue.

The Guardian newspaper on October 5 reported the UN-commissioned report that criticised its strategy in Myanmar and warned it was ill-prepared to deal with the impending Rohingya crisis was suppressed.

The review, written by a consultant and submitted in May, offered a

highly critical analysis of the UN's approach and said there should be "no silence on human rights".

The report accurately predicted a "serious deterioration" in the six months following its submission and urged the UN to undertake "serious contingency planning".

"It is recommended that, as a matter of urgency, UN headquarters identifies ways to improve overall coherence in the UN's system approach," wrote Richard Horsey, the report's author.

"Security forces would be "heavy-handed and indiscriminate" in dealing with the Rohingya, said Horsey in the report.

However, a source close to events, who asked not to be named, told the Guardian that the report was "spiked" and not circulated among UN and aid agencies "because Renata didn't like the analysis".

## UN UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL TO VISIT MYANMAR

UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman, who is visiting Myanmar during October 13-17 October, will focus on building a constructive partnership between Myanmar and the UN to tackle the underlying issues impacting all communities in the affected areas of Rakhine, said a UN statement yesterday.

The visit follows UN's repeated calls for an end to the military opera-

tions and violence in Rakhine and unfettered access for humanitarian support and the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of refugees to their areas of origin.

UN Security Council, which met late September but failed to adopt a resolution against Myanmar because of opposition from China and Russia, will hear former UN chief Kofi Annan, will hear former UN chief Kofi Annan.

Annan in late August presented the final report of an advisory commission on Rakhine that he chaired at the request of Aung San Suu Kyi, reports AFP.

France and Britain requested the meeting with Annan as the council weighs its next steps to confront the Rohingya crisis.

Britain has been working on a draft Security Council resolution that would call for the return of the Rohingyas, but negotiations with China, a supporter of Myanmar's former ruling junta, have been slow, diplomats said.

## WORLD BANK READY TO SUPPORT

World Bank said it is ready to support Bangladesh addressing the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh.

"While we hope the refugees can safely return home soon, it is important that the international community support them and the host communities in the near term with basic services," said Annette Dixon, vice president at the World Bank for the

South Asia Region in a statement after a meeting with Finance Minister AMA Muthib in Washington.

The amount of the support has yet to be decided, but it could include expanding access to health, education, water, sanitation, and roads.

After the meeting on the sidelines of World Bank-IMF annual conference, Muthib told reporters that Bangladesh would seek assistance formally from the World Bank for about 10 lakh forcibly displaced Rohingyas.

He did not talk of any amount, but said half of the amount was likely to be grant. Muthib also said Bangladesh needed about \$2 billion for the Rohingyas refugees.

## HOME MINISTER TO FOCUS ON REPATRIATION

Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal will go to Myanmar on a four-day visit on October 23 to discuss the repatriation of the Rohingyas, reports UNB.

The Bangladesh delegation will include two secretaries of the home ministry, high officials of Border Guard Bangladesh, Coast Guard, Department of Narcotics Control, the police boss and foreign ministry officials.

"The objective of the visit is to repatriate the Rohingyas who were forced to flee into Bangladesh," the minister told reporters at the secretariat yesterday.



The rundown buildings of Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Its old buildings have not been retrofitted so that they could survive earthquakes making experts worry as to how the hospital would serve emergency patients in the event of a major tremor.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

# Hospitals in grave peril

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much bigger as many of the country's healthcare facilities are ill-equipped to handle the aftermath of a major earthquake.

A recent fire department survey found as many as 174 out of a total 433 healthcare providing establishments surveyed to be highly risky (with no fire safety necessities), 248 risky (with some fire safety measures installed) and the rest satisfactory (mostly compliant with some minor lapses).

Experts said neither DMCH nor Mitford has an effective evacuation plan, fire exits or ramps. The decades-old structures, despite numerous modifications, have never been refurbished or strengthened in any way.

Government and hospital officials also agree that the hospitals themselves were vulnerable and were ill-prepared, ill-equipped with untrained manpower to deal with such a disaster.

Brig Gen Ali Ahmed Khan, director general of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said most of the state-run hospitals in the capital were vulnerable to earthquakes and there was a serious lack of fire-safety and evacuation system.

He said fundamental safety provisions that the two hospitals lack include evacuation plan, fire exit plan, fire detection and alarm systems, hose reels, safe refuge assembly space, trained in-house firefighting team, fire escape route, fire lift, access road and water reservoir.

During a visit to the hospitals, many areas of the buildings were visibly worn out and staircases and corridors were full of patients. There was no disaster evacuation preparedness whatsoever.

Brig Gen Brayan Bankim Halder, director of Mitford Hospital, said they had made a project proposal on constructing a 16-storey building and demolishing the risky medicine building.

"Mitford itself is at a big risk [in the event of an earthquake] as it has some old buildings, main building and a dedicated rescue team, adding a hospital is overburdened as everyday it has to deal with around 4,000 out-

door patients, 1,200 indoor patients and 50 surgeries. We have limited resources and capacity, even after that we make people aware sometimes and practice standard procedures. But I doubt whether the standard procedures will work when a big disaster happens."

The DMCH has a 28-member mass casualty management committee to deal with disasters and the committee has many sub-committees.

AKM Nasiruddin, director of DMCH, said the old buildings of the hospital were risky and those might collapse if there was a big one.

"If the hospital is affected, then we will shift to the new building and health services would be provided out in the open. The outdoor complex will start giving initial healthcare services to about 300 patients at a time."

When asked whether the hospital officials were prepared and equipped for facing a big one, he said, "Our major problem is that we cannot do drills like other organisations because it might create panic among the patients and might create another disaster. Our people are aware..."

He said even the hospital would need more portable equipment, like portable X-ray machines, portable beds, and portable operation lights.

The hospital conducts disaster-preparedness training but most staff members have not been trained to deal with a catastrophic quake. He said a major disaster would be a national issue requiring a national response.

The fire services DG said they have sent letters to almost all hospitals asking them to strengthen their emergency services as they would provide the basic support if any emergency situation developed.

"Hospitals should have a huge blood bank because after any disaster a lot of blood will be required. Hospital services have to be decentralised and hospitals should have mobilised hospital facilities," he said.

# Homes heedless of tremor risk

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"A few years ago, there were frequent earthquakes. I spoke to my structural engineer and he suggested retrofitting my house. I did it accordingly and now I feel more secure," Tauqir told The Daily Star, adding, "I believe now our building does not shake as much during tremor."

This measure is very crucial for Dhaka as experts say the city is highly vulnerable to earthquake disasters as preparedness to tackle them still remains somewhat average.

Bangladesh could be sitting atop an active megathrust fault, the same kind of geologic feature responsible for a 9.0 magnitude earthquake in Japan in 2011, a Geographic Information System (GIS) study found.

The findings of the study, published in the Nature Geoscience journal last year, mean that a 250km area may be spring-loaded with significant levels of tectonic strain that had been accumulating for more than 400 years.

If or when that energy is released, Dhaka could face catastrophic consequences as the sediments on which the city is built on might amplify the seismic waves. The calamity could be

more. The project is being funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica).

"Under this project, we will construct the headquarters of fire service in Mirpur where base isolation technology will be introduced for the first time in Bangladesh," Syed Mahfuz Ahmad, the project director, said.

Meanwhile, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartarpakkha (Rajuk) has also taken up a project, styled "Urban Resilience Project", to identify risky buildings in its first phase and to retrofit the most risky buildings in the second.

According to the Rajuk project, financed by the World Bank and scheduled to end in June 2020, preliminary vulnerability assessment would be done on schools, colleges, hospitals and important establishments like airports, Bangladesh bank building and others.

The project plans to do rapid visual screening (RVS) of around 10 million square kilometres, said Abdulatif Helaly, the project director.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Housing and Building Research Institute along with Jica is developing a local technique of retrofitting for cost optimisa-

tion.

HBRI Director Abu Siddiq said, "We follow Japanese techniques for retrofitting in Bangladesh. But every country has some unique characteristics of building structures. With the fund of Jica we are customising the retrofitting technique to make it suitable for Bangladesh."

He said most of the four to five-storey buildings were built over 30 years ago and are made of bricks. These buildings usually are not earthquake resilient. "If the retrofitting cost is more than 50 percent of the total building cost, we suggest demolishing the building and construct it afresh."

He said retrofitting enhances life-line of a building by 100 years.

"The issue is still not familiar to common people. The retrofitting issue is still heavily relying on donors' funds and government initiatives. House or apartment owners should come forward to assess their buildings to avoid earthquake hazards," said Abdul Malek Sikdar, former deputy chief engineer of PWD.

He also said there were manpower and resource limitations and those should be overcome immediately.