

Acute malnutrition among Rohingya children

They need urgent life-saving care

UNICEF has said on Friday that it found high levels of acute malnutrition among children in the Rohingya refugee camps. Although we will have a clear understanding of the situation after we get the data of its nutrition survey in November, the picture we get from its current data is no less daunting.

Unicef and its partners have screened a total of 59,604 children at the camps as of October 25, with 1,970 identified as "severely acutely malnourished" and 6,971 as "moderately acutely malnourished". And during the recent influx, among the 340 children screened by Unicef at the border, 33 were found to be severely acutely malnourished. According to Unicef, the combination of malnutrition, poor sanitary conditions, and disease in the refugee settlements will be disastrous for these children.

Although the government has carried out a massive vaccination programme against the diseases such as measles, diarrhea, cholera and pneumonia in the refugee camps, there have been reported cases of such diseases. And since diarrhoea and pneumonia exacerbates malnutrition, there is no alternative to continuing the vaccination programme. In addition, safe drinking water and sanitation must be made accessible to the refugees. At the same time, nutritious food should be made available for the infants and young children in the camps.

It's good to know that Unicef has already set up some nutrition treatment centres to treat the children who have been suffering from acute malnutrition. Other national and international organisations should also come forward to save the lives of the vulnerable children. Needless to say, acute malnutrition of children must be treated urgently, because if left untreated, the risk of death is high. Thus, we urge the government, Unicef and other organisations to provide the malnourished children with urgent life-saving care.

Century-old building being demolished

Why is it not on the heritage list?

MUCH to the dismay of preservationists, the century-old laboratory building in Dhaka's Khamarbari area is being demolished by the Public Works Department (PWD) as it is deemed to be a risky building. Strangely enough, despite it having historical value as it once housed the Cotton Development Board during the British-era, the building is not on the heritage list, a loophole that is being exploited for its demolition.

Proponents for preserving the building argue that that the building belongs to that era when the landscape of Dhaka began to take on an urban characteristic. Architects and activists argue that there are very few such old buildings standing and those that are left represent the history of yesteryears and should definitely be declared a heritage site. We would like to know why concerned authorities are not taking steps to preserve this historical building as is the practice in many cities of the world, instead of knocking it down. This is a publicly owned building that should be preserved not just for its history but also aesthetic value.

We understand that a move had been at the High Court to stop demolition work on October 26 and that the HC has instructed the attorney general's office to suspend demolition work till October 31. Apparently the PWD is free to continue with its work should it decide to do so after the deadline passes. Whatever may the decision be, we are sure the envisaged seven-storey building can be built somewhere else leaving the old structure where it stands. While the ancient building may not hold much value to authorities concerned, it does hold value to those who believe in preserving Dhaka's history.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Moral degradation of law enforcers

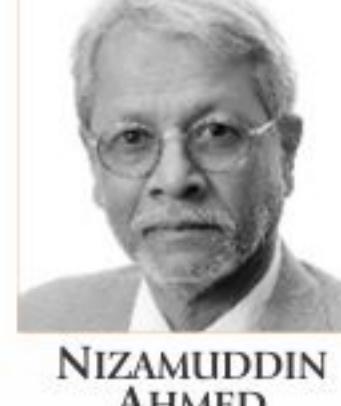
The news that six personnel of Detective Branch of Police were detained with Tk. 17 lakhs, which they extorted from the relatives of a man they had abducted, by the army men came as little surprise.

Such incidents involving the law enforcement personnel are nothing new. We all know about the seven-murder case in Narayanganj. Recently, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has filed a case against a former police super for amassing huge money illegally.

Such acts constitute a grave violation of their oath and morality. Those who are supposed to protect the public have become a threat to public security. Those who are assigned to uphold and enforce the laws are violating them. If our supposed protectors commit crimes against us, where will we go for safety? The authorities concerned must bring these culprits to justice in order to restore public's faith in the law enforcement forces.

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Lonely, yet we do not walk alone

CHINTITO
SINCE 1995

NIZAMUDDIN
AHMED

THE position of Russia is bullish at best because the Kremlin machinery does not have the eye to see the human destruction in the Rakhine State of Myanmar; yet there have been protests in Moscow, and arrests too, with Chechen Republic's Ramzan Kadyrov contemplating a nuclear strike.

China (playing the "internal matter" card to mask its Belt and Road Initiative) takes a little time, as it did in 1971, to understand the situation in Bangladesh because its radar, some say, is slow to detect friends. Interestingly, across China's border province of Yunnan, Myanmar's Kachin and Shan populations have been restive for over fifty-five years.

India's position is "clear haay" because of its heavy investment in Myanmar for its "Act East" policy. Modi shook hands with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi after her out-of-her-control army launched the bloody carnage, and Sushma Swaraj is jetting to and fro to keep intact, even if by cementing, Indira Gandhi's pledge of lasting Dhaka-Delhi friendship. In her most recent visit to Dhaka, the Indian external affairs minister said that "normalcy" can only be restored after all the refugees in Bangladesh return to Myanmar, not uttering "Rohingya", which should please Naypyidaw. Suu Kyi is a Jawaharlal Nehru Awardee and Bhagwan Mahavir World Peace winner.

Two are permanent members of the UN Security Council and the third is a contender, despite which for the first time in nine years the 15-strong council unanimously expressed on September 13 "concern about reports of excessive violence during the security operations and called for immediate steps to end the violence in Rakhine, de-escalate the situation, re-establish law and order, ensure the protection of civilians." One can vaguely read "the brutality of Burma" between those lines.

Holding on to her Nobel Peace Prize by the apology of tradition that the award has never been rescinded, the "military prisoner" has lost face. Oxford University's St Hugh's College has removed Suu Kyi's portrait from public display in a decision that followed students voting. She will also be stripped of the Freedom of the City of Oxford after the city council voted unanimously, saying it was "no longer appropriate" to celebrate the de facto leader of Myanmar.

UK decided last month to suspend all engagement, including training, with the Myanmar until military action against civilians in Rakhine State stopped. Notwithstanding Brexit, the European Union will cut back contacts with Myanmar's top generals in a first step to increase sanctions over the vicious army offensive. This follows an existing EU embargo on arms and equipment "that can be used for internal repression". Suu Kyi had been bestowed with European Parliament's Sakharov Prize.

The US has condemned atrocities against Rohingya Muslims and in late October was considering new sanctions

because the atrocities committed are tantamount to "ethnic cleansing", which the French President Emmanuel Macron has called genocide. Present and past Myanmar military leaders have also been barred from visiting the states, only one year after decades-long trade sanctions against the secretive and isolated regime were lifted to set the stage for democracy. Suu Kyi is a US Congressional Gold Medallist.

Professor Muhammad Yunus—among the first Nobel laureates to speak out against the atrocities being committed against the Rohingya—penned an open letter to the UNSC asking the latter to intervene. Archbishop Desmond Tutu also condemned fellow Nobel peace prize awardee Suu Kyi with the words "Silence is too high a price". Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai condemned the tragic and shameful treatment of the Rohingya. Suu Kyi is a recipient of the Swedish Olof Palme Prize.

In December last year, several Nobel laureates called for the "international community as a whole to speak out much more strongly" as "a human

beyond boundaries is evident even among world leaders. In fact, the people of Bangladesh can take a bow. Here we must add plaudits for our government officers who have done a splendid job thus far by managing the colossal task of providing for over six lakh additional people, sick and weary, hungry and homeless, in a few thousand acres of land, amidst the rain.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi was sent to Myanmar to urge the government to halt deadly violence against the Muslim-majority Rohingya amid growing anger in the world's most populous Muslim nation. She also visited Dhaka to assure Bangladesh of its humanitarian support.

In addition to Germany providing humanitarian aid, its Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said that Germany supports the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission under the leadership of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as a "good starting point". Suu Kyi has been honoured with the Norwegian human rights award, the Professor Thorolf Rafto Memorial Prize.

Malaysia was strongly vocal, saying that Myanmar had denied permission for the international community to provide humanitarian aid to the Rohingya Muslims and, more disappointingly, killed Rohingya women and children. Deputy Prime Minister Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said Malaysia could not accept the Myanmar crackdown on the Rohingya community and wanted the issue to be resolved democratically and by international standards.

Most recently, United Nations



Rohingya refugees line up for relief aid at the Nayapara refugee camp in Teknaf.

PHOTO: AFP

investigator Yanghee Lee acknowledged that there were "well-documented accounts of killings, rapes, burned villages and forced displacement" of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.

In spite of overwhelming global denunciation of Myanmar and yet disappointing international relief for the Rohingya, despite widespread condemnation of Suu Kyi and yet regionalised concern based on strategic self-interest, regardless of bravado verbalisation by world bodies and leaders, and yet no effective socioeconomic action plan, there is reason to believe we are not the only friends of a marginalised ethnic population. We do not walk alone.

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CHINA'S 19TH COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS

No change in policies

FROM A
BYSTANDER

MAHMOOD HASAN

IT was leadership selection (not election) time for the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the government of the country. From October 18-24, 2,336 delegates representing nearly 90 million party cadres from across the nation gathered in a well-disciplined manner at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing for the 19th National Congress of CPC. Evidently, the impresario of the conclave was CPC General Secretary Xi Jinping.

China being the most populous nation and the second largest economy in the world, its monolithic political structure and policies of its leaders naturally draw great attention and focus from all across the globe. To many, the CPC Congress is an enigma, while others have projected distorted pictures of China's political system. Some have described the leadership reshuffle as a Game of Thrones plot.

The Congress had two broad objectives—first, to select the new party leadership, and second, to lay out the political agenda, the economic, foreign and military policies for the next five years.

When a single political party runs a country, intrigues, elbowing, purges and patronisation become an essential part of the struggle to get to the top of the power hierarchy. Selecting members for the main bodies of the CPC is not an open democratic procedure. The members for the three bodies—Central Committee, Politburo, and Politburo Standing Committee—are normally chosen behind closed doors long before the Congress. Since coming to power in 2012, Xi Jinping moved fast to consolidate his grip on power, through massive anti-corruption campaigns to neutralise rivals and securing total loyalty by creating new networks and liquidating the existing patronages.

The new Politburo Standing Committee, the highest decision maker of the party and the country, continues with Xi Jinping as General Secretary (64) and Premier Li Keqiang (62) and five new Xi loyalists.

Xi's "Chinese Dream" narrative has three broad

aspects—economy, military, and foreign affairs. Chinese economy continues to grow at an impressive rate of 6.5 percent and now contributes 15 percent of global GDP. The reason why growth has slowed down from the double digits of a decade ago is because of the rising external debt which is now USD 1.56 trillion. To address the supply side over production, Xi wants to maintain stable growth by balancing the situation through encouraging more domestic consumption. Xi has encouraged technology companies to drive China's economic growth. China today is proud of its high-speed rail, commercial airlines, space technology, etc.

One of the inconsistencies of the Chinese economy is its non-convertible renminbi (yuan). Though China continues to attract huge FDI, it is yet to make the yuan fully convertible on its capital account. China's foreign exchange reserve currently stands at USD 4 trillion and the People's Bank of China can easily make the yuan fully convertible. The reason for holding back on this is because China wants to make the yuan internationally acceptable first and then make it convertible. Xi called for more open, inclusive and balanced economic order. But to make the Belt and Road Initiative successful, a convertible yuan is necessary. Xi also wants a bigger say in international financial organisations.

On foreign affairs, Xi said, "China would uphold rather than overturn the existing international order, but under this system, China demands a status that befits its power and strength." Xi said China had entered a new era of foreign policy, engaging in "major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics". Clearly, China's economic might and military strength are influencing its foreign policy.

Will China's assertiveness in foreign affairs lead to Thucydides Trap with America? So far, Beijing has shown maturity in dealing with Washington despite provocative rhetoric from American leaders over South China Sea. China's geostrategic position has also discouraged America not to try a military solution over North Korea. However, Xi has made it clear that China will never give up on its legitimate national interest. Interestingly, Donald Trump's

visit to China in November 2017 comes at a time when America has withdrawn from the Paris Climate Deal with Xi Jinping strongly supporting it. Relations between the two powers will remain troublesome but unlikely to degenerate into a military conflict.

People's Liberation Army, the world's biggest military force, is an essential pillar of the CPC. Xi wants to make it the best in the world by modernising its weapons systems. He has restructured the military command and got rid of corrupt generals. Xi stated that China would never pursue military expansion. As Chairman of the all-powerful Central Military Commission, Xi is now the Commander-in-Chief of PLA.

Xi's Chinese Dream is the third phase of what Mao Zedong has begun in 1949. In the first phase, Mao Zedong made the Chinese nation to stand up. In the second phase, Deng Xiaoping in 1978 paved the way for China to become a wealthy nation. In the third phase, Xi Jinping wants China to become strong by the middle of this century. Xi has set two centenary goals: to build China into a prosperous society by 2021, when the Communist Party marks its centennial; and to make China strong by 2049 when it celebrates its centennial.

The Congress concluded on October 24 with an amendment to CPC Charter inserting Xi Jinping's dream under "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era." He now is considered a "core" leader that has elevated him to the ranks of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.

Interestingly, the Congress ended without designating Xi Jinping's successor, which is normally the practice followed by party Congress. Will Xi Jinping get a third term? Maybe.

For the next five years at least, the world has to watch and deal with Xi Jinping, who holds absolute powers holding the posts of General Secretary of Politburo, Chairman of the CMC, and President of PRC.

Despite all the hullabaloo, however, the 19th session of CPC Congress has ended without any dramatic change in policies.

Mahmood Hasan is a former ambassador and secretary of the Bangladeshi government.