

Force Myanmar to take back Rohingyas

PM calls upon Commonwealth countries

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the Commonwealth countries to force Myanmar to stop persecution on its Rohingya citizens and take them back from Bangladesh at the earliest.

"I would like to request you all to discuss the Rohingya issue with utmost importance and exert pressure on the Myanmar government to stop persecution on its citizens [Rohingyas] and take them back at the earliest," she said.

The PM said this while officially inaugurating the 63rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) at the South Plaza on parliament premises.

She said, "Friendship to all, malice to none" is Bangladesh's policy in maintaining relations with foreign countries. "Especially, we're eager to maintain good relations with our neighbours."

Hasina, also the vice patron of the 63rd CPC, said Bangladesh resolved long-standing problems of Ganges water sharing and land boundary dispute with India through signing treaties. "Similarly, maritime boundary problem with India and Myanmar

was also resolved amicably."

But the PM said the inhuman persecution inflicted on the Rohingyas in Myanmar's Rakhine State and their forceful expulsion from their homeland has created instability in the region and beyond.

She said over 622,000 Myanmar nationals fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution. After 1978, another 500,000 Rohingyas entered Bangladesh at different times. "We've given temporary shelter to this huge number of people on humanitarian grounds."

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Jatiya Sangsad are jointly organising the conference with the theme: "Continuing to enhance the high standards of performance of parliamentarians".

The eight-day conference 2017 began on November 1 with the meetings of different committees and sub-committees of the CPA as well as conferences of small branches before the official inauguration.

Hasina said the main aim of the government is to build a hunger- and poverty-free Bangladesh through strengthening the foundation of democratic rule in the country. "Aiming to

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Solution

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Shannon noted that his country sees some "positive movements" including Myanmar authorities receiving members of international community in Rakhine State and holding talks with Bangladesh.

He made the comments just days after US lawmakers proposed re-imposing targeted sanctions and travel restrictions on Myanmar military officials over the treatment of Rohingyas.

Shannon was speaking at a joint press briefing, flanked by his Bangladesh counterpart Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque, at the state guesthouse Padma yesterday.

Before this, they co-led the sixth US-Bangladesh Partnership Dialogue, the premier forum between the two countries for further expanding and deepening cooperation on bilateral and regional issues.

During the meeting, Shannon thanked the government of Bangladesh for its generosity in responding to the refugees fleeing Myanmar, and expressed appreciation for its continued efforts to ensure assistance reaches the affected population.

"He noted that we call on Bangladeshi and Burmese officials to continue developing a framework for the safe and voluntary return of Rohingya communities to Burma and that we urge rapid and complete implementation of the Annan Commission's recommendations," reads a media note issued by the Office of the Spokesperson, US State Department, in Washington.

"CAPTURE THAT PROGRESS" Shannon, who arrived in Dhaka yesterday morning, also called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and had a meeting with Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali. He is due to leave for Colombo this morning.

The US diplomat said as dialogue is taking place between Myanmar and Bangladesh in regard to Rohingya crisis, Washington wanted to "capture that progress" and drive it towards a resolution without having to resort to other means.

He said they intend to work with the government of Bangladesh, international institutions and organisations like the UN to address the humanitarian crisis.

"Our focus is to solve the problem and we are going to pursue a diplomatic solution to this problem," Shannon said, adding "The focus is also to address humanitarian needs to those who fled to Bangladesh."

The Bangladesh foreign secretary appreciated the US for its role on the Rohingya issue as he found the US position "the strongest" on this.

"They are supplying humanitarian assistance and so far has taken 31 concrete measures in terms of making solutions," he said in his opening remarks.

Asked about the impacts of those measures, Shannon said because of those measures, their diplomats and international community have been allowed in Myanmar to discuss the issue. They were also allowed to visit Rakhine State, he said.

In his opening remarks, the US official said his country counts Bangladesh as a "close and reliable" partner in its endeavours towards free trade, sustainable development, the rule of law and universal values of democracy and human rights.

He added that they "devoted special attention" to trade and prosperity agenda, security in the Indian Ocean region, combating transnational terrorist groups, North Korea's "dangerous and provocative" conduct and the Rohingya crisis.

He said this dialogue demonstrates that Washington and Dhaka collaborate on many important issues and share a long history of cooperation and a vision

for a tolerant, democratic Bangladesh that serves as a bridge for commerce between South and Southeast Asia.

"Bangladesh is an anchor for stability and prosperity in the region, and we appreciate the government's commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region."

Asked whether they discussed sending back of a convicted killer of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, staying in the US on political asylum, Shannon said, "I can assure you that in every meeting we have with Bangladeshi diplomats, the case is raised, and the foreign Secretary raised it and as did Bangladesh's ambassador in Washington."

PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUE

Earlier, in the plenary session, both sides discussed important issues of bilateral, regional and global interest and concern.

The safe, sustainable and dignified return of the forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals was discussed with utmost importance. Bangladesh side deeply appreciated Washington's strong political and humanitarian support on the Rohingya issue.

"Bangladesh underlined the fact that despite the claim from the Myanmar side that the violence has stopped, people from Myanmar are still crossing the border and coming to Bangladesh in hundreds and thousands every day narrating stories of atrocities that are contributing to the continued influx of Rohingyas from the Rakhine State in Myanmar to Bangladesh," according to a press release of the foreign ministry.

Bangladesh also elaborated on the initiatives undertaken by the government in temporarily sheltering the huge number of refugees, and providing emergency humanitarian assistance to them.

The US side also assured Bangladesh side of their continued political support and actions including financial assistance to address this man-made humanitarian catastrophe of nearly unmanageable magnitude.

Stalker stabs 13-yr-old to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A teenage girl was murdered by her stalker at Sarafdinagar village under Hariampur upazila of Manikganj yesterday afternoon.

The victim Brishti Akter, 13, is the daughter of Ramjan Ali of the Sarafdinagar village.

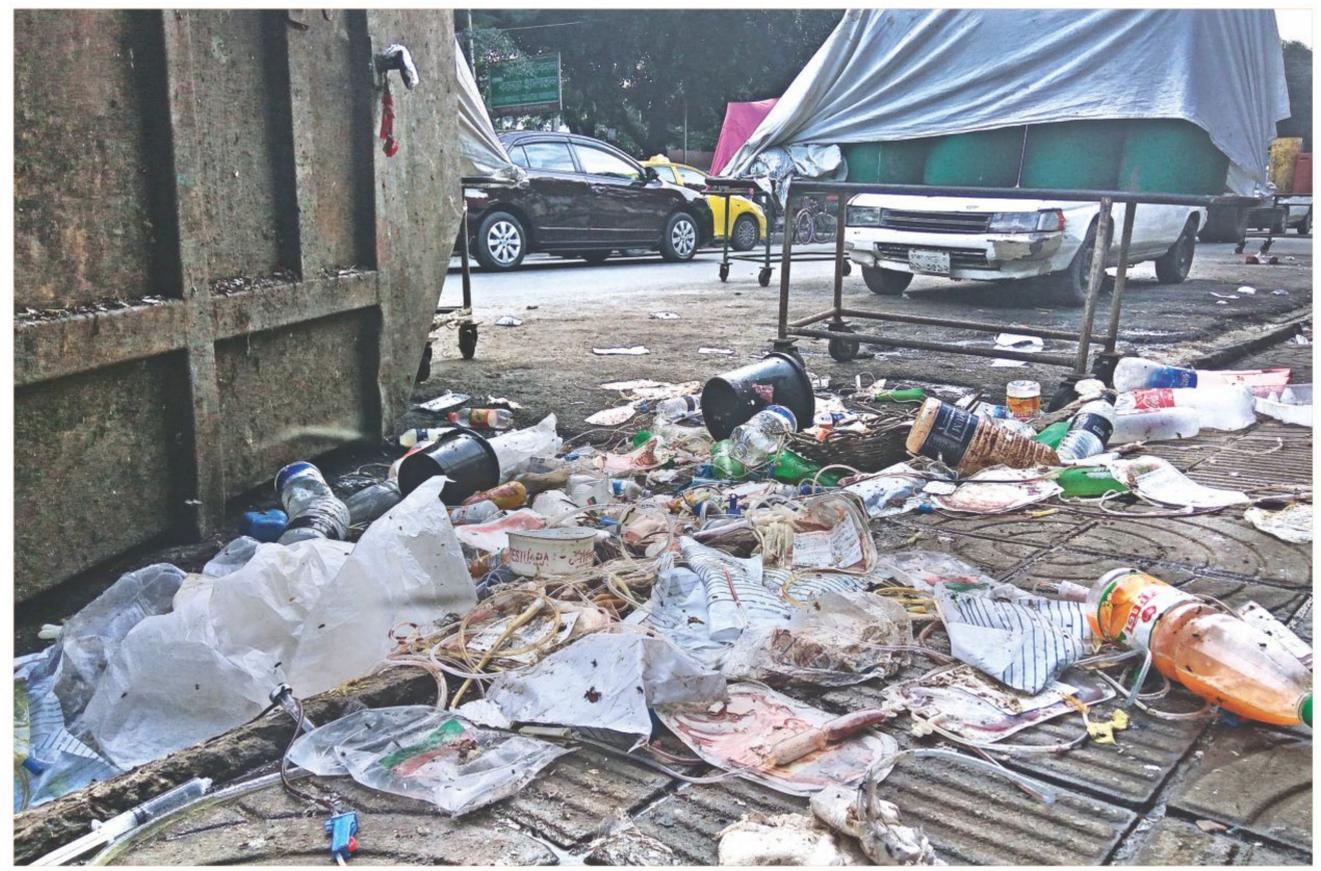
Abul, 35, a local rickshaw puller and son of Hasmat Ali of the same village, allegedly been stalking and harassing her. Locals claimed that the young girl had been ignoring Abul's continued advances.

But the situation worsened to the point where her family complained to village elders. A village arbitration was then held in which Abul was issued a warning, the locals said, adding that the warning failed to deter Abul.

They claimed that Brishti's family recently had allegedly been trying to marry her off. Abul heard about it and got angry.

He entered Brishti's house yesterday around 1:00pm and hacked the girl with a sharp weapon, almost beheading her, victim's family members and calls said.

Officer-in-Charge Lutfar Rahman of Hariampur Police Station said the alleged killer Abul fled.



Medical waste, including some containing blood, is dumped across the street from the main gate of Dhaka Medical College Hospital with regular garbage. This sort of medical waste is supposed to be kept inside the hospital and taken away by a designated organisation.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Dumped dangerously

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corporation authorities take the rest later at night for dumping at a designated site.

Sources at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital said a syndicate of hospital employees direct the cleaners to throw the garbage into those containers. The syndicate members are paid by the ragpickers, who sell the reusable items to scrap dealers. Later, those items are sold without sterilisation.

Instead of dealing with such infectious waste very carefully, the hospital authorities seem rather nonchalant, putting people's health and the environment in danger.

THE HEALTH HAZARD

Doctors and health experts said dumping such medical waste out in the open could be hazardous for those exposed to them. These waste may spread several contagious diseases, including hepatitis B and hepatitis C, tuberculosis, and malaria. Infected syringes and scalpels could cause fatal diseases like HIV/AIDS.

"Such waste are highly infectious. The germs can travel through the air and such dumping can have serious impact on people's health," Prof Mahmudur Rahman, former director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, told The Daily Star recently.

"Those garbage must be handled with extreme caution," he added.

During a visit to the area in front of the hospital gate recently, these correspondents, however, saw 35-year-old ragpicker Abdur Rahman and two of his associates collecting recyclable waste from the trash container with bare hands. They had no masks on.

Later, the three sold some plastic bags to a scrap shop adjacent to the hospital.

Another ragpicker was seen discarding blood from a packet into some stagnant rainwater in a pothole. He was quite casual about the matter.

EMPTY BARRELS

The DMCH has 70 wards and each of the room has barrels of seven different colours meant for different types of waste. For example, general waste has to be dumped in the black barrel and the infectious waste in the yellow barrel.

According to an agreement between the hospital authorities and Prism

Bangladesh, a non-government organisation, the barrels, once stuffed, should be put near a hospital room from where the NGO is supposed to transport the garbage to a treatment plant in the capital's Matuail. The DMCH pays Prism Bangladesh Tk 48,000 every month.

The move was taken as part of a project, titled Medical Waste Management Programme, taken up by the undivided Dhaka City Corporation and the NGO in 2005.

The city corporation initiated the project considering the poor management of vast amount to such waste in the city and its subsequent impact on people and the environment. The project covers around 800 more healthcare establishments in the city and Savar, said Mazharul Islam, deputy programme coordinator of the NGO.

Every day, the DMCH treats over 3,700 admitted and several thousand

and 240 admitted patients every day on average.

The scenario is similar in case of the other types of waste, meaning almost all the medical garbage of the DMCH is dumped in and around the two containers near the main gate of the emergency unit.

Prism Bangladesh Foundation officials said the ragpickers also take away a vast amount of the DMCH's infectious medical waste to separate the recyclable items from them. They said they wrote to the hospital authorities several times but it did not work.

"We wrote to the DMCH authorities several times and informed them about the anomaly, but to no avail," said an official of the NGO, adding that the last letter was sent around a year ago.

The sources in the DMCH said a hospital syndicate, which has eight to ten members, including a leader of the

here. What else can I do!" said a cleaner, who did not wish to be named.

Contacted, DMCH Director Brig Gen AKM Nasiruddin, who joined office recently, told The Daily Star that the issue had already come to his notice and that they would soon sit with the employees, dealing with the garbage.

Asked, a top DMCH official said they got the latest letter from Prism Bangladesh over a year ago. He said they asked the ward masters repeatedly to ensure that the garbage is not thrown here and there. However, the practice has continued unabated.

Talking to these correspondents, a ward master refuted the existence of the syndicate and claimed that the cleaners dump the waste in the open "only because of ignorance".

He said around 700 cleaners work at the hospital and almost 300 of them are not appointed by the hospital.

"These workers are tipped by the patients and their relatives. The hospital allow them to work due to the dearth of cleaners in comparison to the huge number of patients," said the ward master, claiming that those cleaners "are not properly trained for the dumping."

Talking to this paper several times before, former assistant director (admin) of the hospital Habibur Rahman, who has recently been appointed the civil surgeon of Munshiganj, admitted that they did not stop the "temporary workers" considering the "ground reality" because of the huge number of patients.

SIMILAR SCENARIO

These correspondents saw medical waste dumped near some other public hospitals in the capital, including Pangu Hospital, National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases and National Institute of Mental Health and National Institute of Kidney Diseases and Urology.

Most of the hospitals do not have any store room for garbage dumping and the cleaners throw away the rubbish carelessly at those spots, said sources at the hospital.

Ragpickers were seen taking away waste from dumps near the hospitals. There was no one to stop them.

AVERAGE MEDICAL WASTE COLLECTED DAILY IN JULY

Hospitals	Admitted patients	Infectious Waste kg	Recyclable Waste kg	Sharp Waste kg	Total kg
DMCH	3600-3800	130	2	6	138
Apollo	250-300	183	153	47	383
Square	380-400	540	57	48	645
United	230-250	340	31	33	404

SOURCE: PRISM BANGLADESH FOUNDATION

outdoor patients. According to Prism Bangladesh officials, the hospital should be producing at least 1,200kgs of medical waste, which can be divided into infectious, recyclable and sharp wastes.

However, the garbage barrels for Prism Bangladesh put near the hospital room remain almost empty. On the other hand, the cleaners are seen stuffing all sorts of waste in the barrels and keeping them near the large containers for the ragpickers.

On an average, the cleaners, everyday in July, dumped only 2kg of recyclable waste in the barrels meant for Prism Bangladesh, show data from the NGO.

During the same month, Apollo Hospitals gave 153kgs of recyclable garbage, Square Hospital gave 57kgs and United Hospital gave 31kgs of recyclable rubbish to the NGO. The private hospitals treated only 290, 390

fourth-class employees, two or three ward masters and three to four sweepers, dump several hundred barrels of garbage, mostly the medical waste, in the open through the cleaners.

"The ragpickers share the profit with the syndicate members," a staff of the hospital told The Daily Star preferring anonymity. He added it also exposed the poor garbage management by the hospital authorities.

Visiting several scrap shops near the hospital, these correspondents saw that each kg of plastic waste was being bought there for Tk 40. For waste like papers it was Tk 4 but it was Tk 120 for old and discarded X-ray films and Tk 30 for sharp wastes.

Talking to The Daily Star, several cleaners claimed they don't get any share in the money, which is taken by the syndicate members and the ragpickers.

"I am asked to dump these garbage

CPA lawmakers stand by Dhaka

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More than 550 delegates from 144 national and provincial parliaments of 44 countries joined the eight-day conference that ends on Wednesday. The CPA has 52 members.

At the briefing session in the afternoon, Bangladesh Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali urged the CPA members to take a united stand against all discriminatory policies and activities that run counter to human rights.

After his speech, the floor was given to the delegates. More than a dozen spoke and lauded Bangladesh for its role.

The CPA members said the association should play a stronger role over the issue. It should adopt a resolution supporting Bangladesh's stance and put pressure on Myanmar to take back Rohingyas and ensure their safe rehabilitation.

In the concluding speech, CPA Chairperson Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury said the proposal for

adopting a resolution would be considered very seriously.

She also called upon the delegates to take initiatives for adopting resolutions on the Rohingya issue in their parliaments, and said this would help Dhaka's efforts to resolve the crisis.

The delegates from a number of countries strongly criticised the Myanmar government for persecution of the Rohingyas in Rakhine.

"We have seen genocide in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia. We can think of it never again. Genocide is happening in Myanmar and the world is watching..." said Salma Atallahjan, a senator from Canada.

"We appreciate what the Bangladesh government has done, they have done a lot. We know you have your own issues with the flooding, you had horrible flood this year," she further said.

Amid thumping of desk by delegates, she said the global community can no longer keep quiet.

Dr Mohd Hatta Md Ramli from Malaysia proposed that the CPA arrange a trip to Cox's Bazar to express solidarity with Rohingyas. "If it is not possible to arrange a trip for all of us, at least a delegation should visit [Cox's Bazar] to express our solidarity with Rohingyas."

He strongly recommended adopting a resolution over the issue.

Ramli also urged the Myanmar government to give Rohingyas their legitimate rights.

Yasmin Ratansi, a member of the Canadian parliament, criticised the international community for not doing enough to resolve the crisis. "It seems that the world has forgotten them [Rohingyas]. It is a huge issue."

She also advocated identifying Rohingyas as refugees. "I promise that my country will remain beside Bangladesh."

Angelo Farrugia, speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta, said, "We need to send a strong mes-

sage like we did in IPU [Inter Parliamentary Union]. We are completely in solidarity with Bangladesh."

In its 137th general assembly in St Petersburg on October 15, the IPU adopted a resolution titled "Ending the grave human crisis, persecution and violent attacks on the Rohingya as a threat to international peace and security and ensuring their unconditional and safe return to their homeland in Myanmar."

Pakistani lawmaker Nafisa Shah said her country supports Bangladesh over the Rohingya issue. She also slated the Myanmar government for carrying out "genocide" against the Rohingyas.

She called upon the Myanmar authorities to take back the Rohingyas to their own country and give them citizenship with equal rights.

More than six lakh Rohingyas have entered Bangladesh since the Myanmar military launched a brutal crackdown on them on August 25.