

War crimes committed against Rohingyas

Say visiting US senators, assure PM of all-out help to resolve the crisis

UNB, Dhaka

Describing Myanmar army's atrocities on Rohingya people in Rakhaine State as "war crime" and "basic violation of human rights", the visiting US senators have assured Bangladesh of extending all-out support to resolve the crisis.

The assurance came when a delegation of the US Senate, led by Senator Jeff Markley, met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

After the meeting, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters.

The delegation, which visited the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar on Saturday, condemned the "war crimes and ethnic cleansing".

The US delegation lauded the prime minister and Bangladesh for accepting the huge number of forcibly evicted Myanmar people and giving them food and shelter, saying more international efforts were needed in this regard.

The delegation members said they talked to the victims and listened to

their horrific stories when they visited the Rohingya camps.

The senators said the US wants the Rohingya people to be repatriated to Myanmar and rehabilitated there safely.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said her government gave shelter to the Rohingya people fully on humanitarian ground recalling the similar situation of Bangladeshi refugees who had taken shelter in India during the Liberation War in 1971.

Hasina mentioned that these refugees have reminded her refuge life after the brutal assassination of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975.

She said the government is feeding 160 million people of the country and they will share their food with the Rohingyas, if needed.

The prime minister said Myanmar should take their citizens back and ensure their security and rehabilitation.

She said international pressure should be mounted on Myanmar to implement

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Rohingya refugees walk towards a refugee camp after crossing the border in Anjuman Para near Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

PARADISE PAPERS

Independent MP demands investigation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An independent lawmaker in parliament yesterday demanded that the government probes the Bangladeshi businessmen whose names came up in the Paradise Papers.

Taking the floor on a point of order and referring to media reports, Rustam Ali Farazi MP said some 21 businessmen and organisations unlawfully invested in offshore companies.

He asked the government to make the names of the organisations and businesspeople public, release related documents, and give detailed information on them.

Farazi said, "The government should make public the names for the interest of the nation."

The lawmaker also recalled that he spoke in parliament after the Panama Papers revelations.

"At that time, the government had assured that it would make public the investigation report on Panama Papers but the report is yet to be published," he added.

"We are yet to know anything about the report [Panama Papers probe]. The report should be made public immediately," he said.

The Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday said it was yet to complete the investigation procedures.

The independent lawmaker said 14 names were linked to the Panama Papers while names of 21 businessmen came out in the Paradise Papers.

He said according to media reports, names of BNP Vice-Chairman Abdul Awal Mintoo, his wife, and sons along with names of some Bangladeshi organisations were mentioned in the Paradise Papers.

Own a dog

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"Dog ownership is associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease in single households and with a reduced risk of cardiovascular and all-cause death in the general population," the study said.

Reading between the lines: That's good news for single people with dogs. Single dog owners showed a 33% decrease in risk of death compared to single people who did not own a dog, said a statement by lead junior author of the study MwenyaMubanga, a Ph.D. student at Uppsala University.

People living alone have been reported to be more at risk of cardiovascular disease or death, Mubanga said.

"Perhaps a dog may stand in as an important family member in the single households," Mubanga said.

The researchers can't provide proof dog ownership actually causes a decrease in risk for cardiovascular disease. Other factors might come into play.

Dogs could alleviate social isolation, depression and loneliness, the study said. Dog owners also tend to spend more time outdoors and get more physical activity.

Single dog owners usually walk their dog more than those in households with multiple people. In addition, the study said it's "plausible that not all members of a multiple-person household interact with the dog as much as a single owner."

Europe stands by Bangladesh

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"We admire your [Hasina] wisdom and humanitarian action on the Rohingya issue," the press secretary quoted the EU representative as saying.

Mogherin said she would discuss with the Myanmar leadership at different levels on Rohingya repatriation in the ASEM meeting to be held in Myanmar today.

Wallstrom said that international solidarity was needed on the repatriation of Rohingyas.

She said people across the globe expected Aung San Suu Kyi to be "proactive" in resolving the Rohingya crisis.

Wallstrom said she would visit Myanmar and encourage the government there to initiate repatriation of the Rohingyas.

The Swedish foreign minister agreed with the prime minister that the refugees should be rehabilitated in Myanmar by ensuring safety, security and dignity under the UN supervision.

Meanwhile, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono has offered his country's help to repatriate the Rohingya population from Bangladesh.

EU Ambassador in Dhaka Rensje Teerink in a Facebook post said, "We had an excellent meeting with PM

Sheikh Hasina to discuss the Rohingya crisis."

Hasina said the Rohingya issue is a huge challenge for Bangladesh and that her government has ensured safe drinking water and sanitation for them.

The biggest problem is now child birth among the Rohingyas, she said.

Hasina also renewed her call for immediate implementation of the Kofi Annan Commission's recommendations to resolve the Rohingya crisis. "They've [Myanmar] to agree and take back their nationals."

The European Union and Germany would give a "strong signal" for solving the Rohingya refugee crisis during the two-day Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) beginning in the Myanmar capital today.

"That's the reason we are here ... to determine our role ahead of the summit with other colleagues from Japan, Sweden and the European Union. We are going to have discussions about the situation in Bangladesh in the ASEM summit," said Gabriel after visiting a Rohingya camp at Kutupalong of Ukhaia in Cox's Bazar earlier in the day.

"It's unbelievable what is happening here," said Gabriel at the refugee camp where the Rohingyas are living in squalid and tiny camps, reports our

Chittagong staff correspondent from Cox's Bazar.

The atrocities in Myanmar's Rakhine State forced over 620,000 Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh since August 25. The UN termed it ethnic cleansing, while rights groups defined the violence as crimes against humanity and genocide and accused Myanmar security forces of burning Rohingya houses, killing hundreds of men and raping women.

UN member-states on November 16 urged the Myanmar authorities to end the military campaign against the Rohingyas in a resolution adopted despite opposition from China and Russia.

Gabriel said Germany is determined to be more engaged in providing more aid for the refugees and local communities in Cox's Bazar.

"But it's necessary that there will be strong signal from the ASEM summit, together with European Union, that we have to find a solution for the refugees to go back to their homes and to rebuild their lives," he said.

Lauding the generosity of Bangladesh and her people, Gabriel said, "Thank God there is no turbulence between the people hosting and the refugees."

State Minister for Foreign Affairs

Shahriar Alam, who accompanied the foreign delegates, said they would put more pressure on Myanmar to take back the refugees in the upcoming ASEM summit, a political forum to enhance relations and various forms of cooperation between European and Asian countries.

He said the foreign delegates, along with the two countries, would look for a long-term solution to the crisis.

They would also ask countries to fulfil the pledges they made for emergency life-saving supplies for the Rohingya, Shahriar said.

Wallström, Kono and Mogherini also visited the refugee camps.

JAPAN EXPLAINS ITS STANCE

Japan abstained from voting on the UN resolution but it still supports Bangladesh and stands by it in its efforts to respond to the humanitarian needs and continuing dialogue with Myanmar to resolve the Rohingya crisis.

Abstention in voting does not mean Japan is opposing Bangladesh, Deputy Press Secretary Toshihide Ando of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan told a small group of reporters in Dhaka yesterday.

He said Japan shared its view that "further fact-finding would be needed in the Rakhine State. We think such

fact-finding would not be effective unless it is undertaken in the manner acceptable to the government of Myanmar."

He also said Japan's comments on the draft resolution were not reflected in the final resolution that was adopted, which was the reason behind it abstaining from voting, reports our diplomatic correspondent.

Japanese Foreign Minister Tarō Kōno visited Rohingya camps and called on Hasina and Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali yesterday before departing for Myanmar, said Ando.

He said Kono conveyed to Mahmood that Japan supports Bangladesh's efforts for lasting solution, including the repatriation of displaced Rohingyas.

CANADIAN MINISTER TO VISIT

Canadian Minister of International Development Marie-Claude Bibeau will travel in Bangladesh tomorrow to witness the impact of the Rohingya refugee crisis and assess best ways for Canada to assist them.

During her visit, Bibeau will visit refugee settlements and host communities and meet humanitarian agencies and civil society groups to gain a deeper understanding of the needs on the ground, reports our diplomatic correspondent.

Suspect gives

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His organisational name is Shahriar, said the DMP official.

According to law enforcers, Mozammel also took part in the double murder of LGBT rights activists Xulhaz-Tonoy and the murders of blogger Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy and publisher Faisal Arefin Dipon.

Tipped off, a team of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of the DMP launched a drive in the area and arrested him around 4:35pm, Masudur added.

According to the CTTC, Mozammel used to manage the Facebook pages Balakat media, Al Hikma media and Onusondhitsu media on behalf of his outfit.

According to DMP sources, he was involved in the militant outfit as its intelligence and media wing chief.

Ansar al Islam is said to be the Bangladesh chapter of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS).

Earlier, another Ansar Al Islam operative Abu Siddique Sohel alias Sakib alias Sajid confessed before a court that eight of its operatives took part in the murder in 2015 following the instruction of sacked and absconding army Major Syed Ziaul Haque, alleged military wing chief of the banned militant outfit.

Sohel, 34, was arrested on the night of November 5 from the capital's Mohammadpur area.

Major Zia also coordinated the attack on Avijit, said Sakib, from Lalmonirhat, also a member of the outfit's IT and intelligence wing, according to counterterrorism officials.

Law enforcers said Mozammel, during primary interrogation, admitted that he also took part in the killing mission as per the instruction of Major Zia. All these killings took place in 2015.

Avijit, a Bangladesh-born US citizen, was hacked to death on Dhaka University campus when he, along with his wife Rafida Ahmed Bonya, were returning from a book fair on February 26 in 2015. Bonya was critically injured in the attack.

Avijit came to Bangladesh with his wife as his two books were published during that year's book fair.

Caught in labour trap

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However, "light work" has not been defined and this leads to children of this group, especially those living in city slums, being taken advantage of. They are often employed in low-pay work in small, non-compliant factories and workshops and as domestic help.

Eight-year-old Sabina Akhter walks a few minutes to her workplace from home in Bhashantek slum in the capital. She returns from school, gulps down some food and then rushes to the house, where she is employed to mop the floor and do the dishes. Sabina works there seven days a week except for any emergency.

In a gathering at the shanty next to hers, the girl with curly hair blushed as others praised her for the wonderful work she does with her tiny hands.

Hard-pressed, her family cannot take care of her without her pitching in.

A vast majority of the children like Sabina work in informal sectors and that also makes enforcement of the act challenging, the Unicef says in a June 2010 report.

The latest child labour survey by the BBS in 2013 raised the same concern, as, unlike other indicators, child labour in informal sectors increased to 94.9 percent from 92.9 percent in 2002-2003.

After children finish the government's compulsory education up to class-V at the age of around 10, many parents feel encouraged to put them into any kind of work that pays.

This happens more in city slums where the coverage of the social safety net programmes is scanty, adding to the concerns over children being abused at work.

Sabina's mother Shirin Begum, 30, explained why it was good that her daughter spent nearly five hours a day at work. "Sabina comes back home [by 3:00pm] from work around the same time I return from work. ... It is safer there [where Sabina is employed] ... We hear news of many things happening to girls in slums."

As she was trying to justify child labour, she talked about other issues that are intertwined with the cycle of illiteracy, child labour and poverty.

The overall national child labour situation seems improving, comparing the BBS 2002-03 report with that in 2013. The rate of child labourers of age 5-17 came down significantly from 7.5 percent to 4.3 percent.

Still, the number of child labourers is very high in the country and their highest concentration is in Dhaka, 0.69 million.

A National Human Rights Commission report suggested making a list of "light work" to protect children of 12-14 years, just like the government's 2013 list of hazardous activities forbidden for those below 18.

The International Labour Organisation that commissioned the study recommends that "light work" should not exceed 14 hours a week and should not hamper a child's education.

EDUCATION, SOCIAL SAFETY NET, AWARENESS

ILO's Munira Sultana, who works on the country's child labour issue, says the problem is deeply rooted in the society. Building awareness among those who are employing children is one of the best ways to address that.

Besides, the government is responsible for ensuring basic rights of all, including the slum population. With poor people's concentration increasing in cities, efforts should be made to ensure greater access to education and safety net programmes.

The national education policy 2010 raises compulsory education from grade five to grade eight and compulsory education age from 10 to 14, which, experts say, should be implemented immediately, as it would help curb child labour.

The government has adopted National Social Security Strategy in 2015 sketching out a life-cycle approach to better address poverty, says Prof M Abu Eusuf, chairman of the development studies department at Dhaka University.

The urban poor would have better coverage of the safety net if the NSSS comes into effect, he added.

Shirin was one among those of her time who had been left behind and her daughter Sabina is teetering on

the edge of a similar fate.

In her initial years of marriage, Shirin, from Shibla in Astagram upazila of Kishoreganj, was full of hope that with hers and her husband's income, she would be able to ensure the wellbeing of their family.

The first child, Jesmin Akhter, 15, studied up to class-IV. But as the number of family members increased, her education cost was the first thing Shirin had to cut.

Studying in a public school is free, but there are associated costs like that of purchasing stationeries. Besides, children in crowded classrooms in such schools often feel discouraged from learning. Parents, with no or little education but having desire to give their children education, often go for private tuitions.

When Jesmin was in school, Shirin was young and capable of working harder, and she and her husband could bear her expenses. But with the family having to cover ever-rising expenses, Jesmin had to drop out of school and join a garment factory two years ago.

Jesmin's 12-year-old brother Sagor, who works at a doctor's chamber as an assistant, is on the verge of leaving school as well, as, Shirin said, he had been failing in exams for two consecutive years.

Interrupting Shirin, her neighbour Taslima Akhter, of Shariatpur in Kishoreganj, explained why her three children -- two sons aged 10 and 14 and a daughter of eight -- were not studying anymore. She and her husband came back to Dhaka with the children only a month ago after suffering crop loss to floods that had caught them off guard in April.

Now the family is desperate for work.

Taslima said her children while studying in village public schools got financial support like stipends but in Dhaka they would not get those, making it even harder for the family to think about the children's education.

And even if the family settles in, time and struggle may unfortunately get their focus away from education.