

# The whole world stands by you

The president tells Rohingyas assuring them of safe, dignified return to Myanmar

BSS, Cox's Bazar

President Abdul Hamid yesterday assured the Rohingyas of their safe and dignified return to their homeland in Myanmar's Rakhine State.

"Bangladesh government stood beside the displaced Rohingyas on the humanitarian grounds . . . Not only that the whole world stands by you," the president said while distributing relief goods to the displaced Rohingyas at Kutupalong in Ukhiya of Cox's Bazar.

The president witnessed the conditions of the Rohingyas, spoke to them and listened to stories of their plight during his visit. President's Press Secretary Joyнал Abedin told journalists yesterday evening.

Abdul Hamid also visited a Rohingyas health camp and a biometric registration centre run by the Bangladesh army at Balukhali Math of Kutupalong. The president reached Kutupalong

Rohingya camp around noon yesterday as part of his two-day visit there.

President Hamid was accompanied by Disaster Management and Relief Minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury, secretaries concerned, senior civil and military officials among others. His visit came high on the heels of a deal signed by Bangladesh and Myanmar for Rohingyas' repatriation.

More than 620,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh since the August 25 army crackdown in Rakhine. Most of these forcibly displaced people are traumatized, hungry and some of them are with injuries caused by gunshots, shrapnel, fire and landmines.

On several occasions, 400,000 Rohingyas had been forced to take shelter in Bangladesh. Altogether Bangladesh is currently hosting over a million Rohingyas.

President Hamid will inaugurate a programme of Bangladesh navy "Indian

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President Abdul Hamid talking to a sick Rohingya woman at the healthcare centre of a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

## Father of 2 'rapes' schoolgirl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

A schoolgirl from Melandah upazila was lured to the capital with the promise of marriage where she was raped.

The traumatised girl is a class-VIII student of a local school.

One Muzammel, 35, father of two children of her locality, developed a relationship with the girl. He allegedly took her to Dhaka promising to marry her on November 22 and raped her there, said police quoting the victim's family members.

On Saturday Muzammel along with the girl left Dhaka for Melandah on a train after she had fallen severely sick, alleged the family members.

They got down from the train at Durmuth Station in Melandah in the afternoon. Muzammel left the ailing girl alone and escaped, police said.

On information, police rescued the girl and admitted her to Melandah Upazila Health Complex. She was later shifted to Jamalpur General Hospital as her condition deteriorated, said Mazharul Karim, officer-in-charge of Melandah police.

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# DU student on hunger strike demanding Ducsu polls

DU CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka University student has been on hunger strike since Saturday afternoon demanding Ducsu elections within December 16.

Walid Ashraf, an evening master's student of the Institute of Social Welfare and Research, is holding the protest on the premises of Memory Eternal on campus.

The last elections to the Ducsu or Dhaka University Central Students' Union took place 27 years ago. Student organisations, especially the left leaning ones, demanded the polls on numerous occasions but hunger strike by any student is rare.

"I will continue the strike till my death if the authorities don't pay any heed to my demand," he told this correspondent yesterday.

Referring to a court directive of October to the DU authorities to form a full-fledged senate (the highest policy-making body of the university having five elected representatives from Ducsu) within six months, Walid said it was the duty of the authorities to hold the polls within that time.

Due to the absence of the Ducsu, which played a vital role in all democratic

movements of the country, the students are being deprived of their rights, he said.

DU Vice-Chancellor Prof AKhtaruzzaman meanwhile suggested that the protester asks authorities to meet the demand, rather than going for a strike.

On July 29, during the VC panel election, a group of DU students demonstrated in front of senate building,



demanding inclusion of student representatives in the senate through holding of the Ducsu polls.

They engaged in a brief scuffle with some teachers when the teachers barred them from entering into the senate building. The incident sparked an outcry in the social media.

The last election to Ducsu was held on June 6, 1990.

## Pope to reach Myanmar today

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Roman Catholic — was made after Pope Francis met Aung San Suu Kyi, the south-east Asian country's defacto leader, at the Vatican in May to mark the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

Vatican officials said the six-day trip aimed to send a message of "reconciliation, forgiveness and peace" that is in keeping with the pontiff's focus on boosting the church in impoverished and often politically unstable parts of the world.

However, the visit was planned before Myanmar's military crackdown on Muslim Rohingya, which began in late-August and has sent more than 620,000 people fleeing into Bangladesh after their villages were attacked and burnt by troops and armed civilians. The UN and the US have described the operation, ostensibly targeting Rohingya militants, as "ethnic cleansing", and human rights groups say crimes against humanity may have been committed.

Vatican watchers say that the crisis will both dominate the trip and make it the trickiest of his papacy, even for a pontiff with a track record of championing refugee rights.

Officials in Myanmar and abroad have warned the Pope to choose his

words carefully. Ahead of the visit, Myanmar's sole Cardinal, Charles Maung Bo, and Kofi Annan, the former UN secretary-general who headed a commission probing the crisis in Rakhine, are among those telling the Pope to avoid using the term "Rohingya" to avoid upsetting the hosts and possibly triggering a backlash against minority Christians or Muslims.

Francis is due to meet both Aung San Suu Kyi and Htin Kyaw, Myanmar's president, in Naypyidaw tomorrow. On Wednesday he will meet Buddhist leaders and hold a mass at a stadium in Yangon, the largest city.

On Thursday morning, he will meet Min Aung Hlaing, Myanmar's commander-in-chief and the man human rights groups are holding accountable for alleged mass rapes and shootings of Rohingya civilians during the military operation. He will then depart for two days in Bangladesh, where he is expected to meet Rohingya families who escaped the violence.

Myanmar emerged from more than four decades of diplomatic isolation and domestic repression in 2011 into a partial democratic transition that left its powerful military in control of key functions, and with a deadlock on constitutional reform. The country's

new-found freedom has given voice to Buddhist extremists and others who human rights groups accuse of inflaming ethnic and sectarian tensions.

Even as international outrage has built over the refugee crisis, the public mood in Myanmar is brittle, defensive, and angry at the outside world. Many Burmese believe that foreign media and humanitarian officials have twisted the facts of the security operation in Rakhine and slandered their country's reputation, meaning any intervention by the Pope is likely to create anger.

"This country is a Buddhist majority country, and the Christian population is quite small," says Maung Twe Chun, a religious nationalist. "He is visiting Myanmar as a political representative on behalf of the EU for the purpose of Bengali issues."

In one sign of Myanmar officials' nervousness about security around the trip, Yangon's regional government has banned protests around the city during the Pope's visit.

While Rex Tillerson, US secretary of state, recently raised the prospect of reintroducing targeted sanctions on Myanmar, the international community are divided over how to react, as many fear jeopardising the country's transition toward quasi-civilian democratic rule.

## To be resolved

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never earned such a huge diplomatic success before."

Bangladesh envoys posted in 58 countries joined the programme titled "Diplomacy for Peace and People". Hosted by the foreign ministry, such a conference has been organised for the first time since the country's independence.

Hasina urged the diplomats to enhance the country's position, image and dignity through their merit, talent and hard work.

She suggested that the diplomats should hold frequent meetings and views-exchange programmes with local people, businessmen, intellectuals and journalists at their places of postings.

The PM also advised the diplomats to extend all-out cooperation to the expatriate Bangladeshis, work for their welfare, and hold meetings with them to make sure that they are not harassed.

Hasina said special emphasis should be given on sub-regional cooperation and connectivity alongside maintaining cooperative and harmonious relations with neighbouring countries.

The envoys should work to explore

new markets for Bangladeshi products and manpower, uphold its interest on climate change issue, achieve sustainable development goals, and contain terrorism and religious extremism, she added.

She also urged the diplomats to take measures against anti-government campaigns of the killers of Bangabandhu, war criminals and vested groups abroad.

She said it was very unfortunate that the killers were awarded diplomatic jobs at different foreign missions. The government tried the killers, but some absconding ones along with war criminals were still hatching conspiracies abroad. "You've to remain careful against their orchestrated propaganda."

High commissioners, ambassadors and permanent representatives of Bangladesh to different organisations attended the meeting.

The conference will have exclusive sessions on foreign policy issues. It will also have panel discussions on different contemporary national and international issues.

Ministers, advisers, lawmakers and senior officials will address the ses-

sions, and are expected to provide guidance on securing national interest.

The conference aims to discuss issues ranging from foreign policy challenges to implementation of development goals, expansion of trade, and welfare of expatriate Bangladeshis.

The envoys are also expected to share their experiences and discuss the challenges in promoting the country's interests.

DINNER AT GONO BHABAN

The PM listened to the diplomats after the inaugural session of the Conference and also during a dinner at the Gono Bhaban.

The envoys highlighted the success of Bangladesh's diplomacy in some areas.

Issues related to logistics and manpower support to the missions, better services to the expatriates and better exploring trade opportunities across the world came up during the interactions, an ambassador told UNB.

"This is very encouraging for us," Bangladesh Ambassador to Vietnam Samina Naz told UNB thanking the PM for giving them time.

## Flies more germ-laden

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further proof, as well as insights into the extent of that threat.

"We believe that this may show a mechanism for pathogen transmission that has been overlooked by public health officials, and flies may contribute to the rapid transmission of pathogens in outbreak situations," said researcher Donald Bryant.

The researchers were able to investigate the microbial content of individual fly body parts, including legs and wings. The legs appear to transfer most of the microbial organisms from one surface to another, he added.

Blowflies and houseflies, both carrion fly species, are often exposed to unhygienic matter because they use feces and decaying organic matter to nurture their young, where they could pick up bacteria that could act as pathogens to humans, plants and animals.

The study also indicated that blowflies and houseflies share over

50 percent of their microbiome, a mixture of host-related microorganisms and those acquired from the environments they inhabit. Surprisingly, flies collected from stables carried fewer pathogens than those collected from urban environments.

The researchers found 15 instances of the human pathogen *Helicobacter pylori*, a pathogen often causing ulcers in the human gut, largely in the blowfly samples collected in Brazil. The known route of transmission of *Helicobacter* has never considered flies as a possible vector for the disease, said Schuster.

The potential, then, for flies to carry diseases may increase when more people are present.

"It will really make you think twice about eating that potato salad that's been sitting out at your next picnic," Bryant said. "It might be better to have that picnic in the woods, far away from urban environments, not a central park."

## Lift duty on gold import

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National Board of Revenue, a traveller can bring each bhori of gold by paying Tk 3,000 as duty.

"We have a large market of gold. The metal is popular here. But we do not want the sector to be dependent on smuggled gold and unethical means," said Executive Director of TIB Iftekharuzzaman at a press conference at their Dhaka headquarters.

The TIB recommends gradual cut in import duty to eventually make it zero in light of experience of the countries like the UAE and Singapore. But, high-priority should be given to the fact that Bangladesh must not be used as a corridor for smuggling gold, it said.

The organisation came up with the suggestion after its study on transparency and accountability in the gold sector in Bangladesh had found that gold market is controlled by gold and

jewellery traders.

"The government virtually does not have any control over gold trade, which suffers from lack of accountability. Huge irregularities and corruption also exist in various stages of the sector," said TIB Director (Research and Policy) Mohammad Rafiqul Hassan, presenting the findings of the study.

The TIB said gold smuggling continues in the country with the help of a section of unscrupulous officials of law-enforcement agencies, land port, Biman and private airlines. It added the smuggling ring has roles to create barriers in framing a comprehensive policy on gold import and trade.

"We are following a destructive dual policy. On one hand, we are allowing trade of illegally imported gold in the domestic market. On the other, we have yet to frame a policy to ensure proper import and trade of the metal,"

said Hassan, who co-authored the study.

He said making as well as sale of gold jewellery is legal in the country, but policy and regulations for import of raw materials are restrictive and time consuming. As a result, the sector mainly depends on smuggled gold.

"It has been an open secret for a long time," he said.

Citing various estimates, the TIB said the number of jewellery shops would be between 20,000 and 100,000 or more with at least 500,000 people engaged in the trade. Annual demand for gold is 18-36 tonnes domestically, it added.

Still import through formal channels does not take place, according to TIB.

A businessperson has to get permission from three ministries -- finance, commerce and industries -- to import

gold and has to wait up to 1.5 years for the approval. By this time, the risk of price fluctuation remains in the global market, the study says.

Freighters also do not show interest to transport gold in absence of insurance.

The TIB study came at a time when smuggled gold is caught in the nets of customs detectives frequently at Shahjalal International Airport, the country's premier airport.

In 2016-17 fiscal, customs intelligence seized 623.7 kilograms of gold, up from 121.68 kg the previous year, said the TIB, adding that 1,674 kg of gold was seized in last four years that would otherwise deprive the state of Tk 974 crore in revenue.

According to TIB, this is just the tip of the iceberg as the amount of detection is insignificant to that of smuggled gold.

It blames sluggish progress in trial of cases filed against smugglers, poor investigation and weak framing of charges for corruption and irregularities and absence of witnesses. Influential people connected with smuggling also remain out of the net.

There are also instances that people got involved in smuggling by securing bail two months after arrest, it said.

"Example of punishment is rare," said Iftekharuzzaman.

To establish transparency and accountability, TIB suggests formulation of a comprehensive law.

It also recommends giving amnesty to gold traders and jewellers by registering their stocks of gold in hand on payment of tax for a certain period of time and bringing all gold traders under compulsory licensing to ensure governance in the sector.

## Govt looking

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the largest private bank in the country, by purchasing significant portion of its shares.

It has allegedly bought shares of the bank in the name of seven companies. Some of those companies exist only on papers.

In addition, the Group has direct investments in five other banks -- First Security Islami Bank, Bangladesh Commerce Bank, Union Bank, NRB Global and Al-Arafah Islami Bank.

Saiful Alam Masud, chairman of S Alam Group, himself is the chairman of First Security Islami Bank, and Abdus Samad, one of his brothers, is the chairman of Al-Arafah Islami Bank.

Masud's daughter and a son-in-law are also on the board of directors of the two banks.

S Alam Group, which also has exposure in non-bank financial institutions, solely owns Reliance Finance. There are talks that the Group has bought stakes in four other NBFI in recent years.