

## A good suggestion by the PM

### Make upazila hospitals functional

WE agree with what the prime minister has suggested when it comes to doctors being on station at upazila-level hospitals. This has been a major problem for decades. Doctors attached to various hospitals at upazila level keep their positions there but prefer to stay and practise their trade in Dhaka or other major cities. This is a major violation of the rules of business and something needs to be done about it because people in rural areas are deprived of health benefits and must expend precious money to travel to Dhaka to get proper medical treatment.

One can only hope that the suggestion made is turned into concrete action, should such absentee medical personnel continue to behave in such an unprofessional manner. The excuse that good schooling is not available in rural areas falls flat because once a job is accepted and appointment made, the doctor must report to duty wherever that may be. That is how it is done in other professions. Why should there be an exception for the medical profession?

As the government is expending considerable monies to upgrade upazila hospitals, it is only right that appointed doctors do their duty there. The prime minister's statement resonates with most people in the country. If, for some reason, doctors attached to these hospitals cannot be on station, then they should leave their jobs. Let other doctors from the respective upazilas or elsewhere take up these positions. There is no point in equipping hospitals in rural areas if they are bereft of doctors because that is simply a total waste of public expenditure.

## A laudable step in inmate rehab

### Country's first clothing factory in prison opened

A SPART of an initiative to rehabilitate prison inmates, the government has recently opened a mini-garment factory inside Narayanganj District Jail. According to a report by *The Daily Star*, some 300 inmates will be able to work in two shifts at the factory, making fabrics and handicrafts, while their earnings will be deposited to their bank accounts. They can either send the money to their families or withdraw the entire amount while leaving the jail. This is the first initiative of its kind in Bangladesh's prison system, a small but important step in remoulding convicted criminals and giving them a chance to earn, learn skills and make a meaningful life.

The move also marks a welcome shift in how prisons and prisoners are viewed at the policymaking level. Until recently, the general idea in Bangladesh about prisons and jails was that they are just for punishment. It is important to note that punishment is but one of the several goals of a prison. Exclusive attention to punishment risks violating the rights of the offenders as human beings, and limits their chance to change. More importantly, it doesn't reduce recidivism, which has emerged as a major threat of late, with many former convicts ending up back in prison—which is why it's important that our prison system pays more attention to rehabilitating the prisoners. That said, rehabilitation programmes for inmates should also include education, life skills trainings and psychosocial sessions on a regular basis so that they can be safely reintegrated into society once they are released.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.com

### Dhaka's water crisis

The *Daily Star* on December 26 published a report titled "Safe water in jar mostly unsafe" on its front page. This was an astonishing report. We are astounded to learn that what we drink believing "safe water" is not safe at all.

Air and water are two essential elements for humans to survive. Unfortunately, both the elements are unsafe and polluted for Dhaka-dwellers.

In my opinion, the lack of monitoring by the government, particularly the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution, is to blame for this crisis. Their neglect towards public health is why we now have no choice but drink this unsafe water. The government must do something about this immediately.

MD Zillur Rahman, Dhaka

### A glorious triumph

Congratulations to the young members of the Bangladesh women's national under-15 football team on clinching the title of the recently concluded SAFF U-15 Women's Championship in Dhaka. Bangladesh beat its formidable Indian counterpart by a solitary goal in the final match after reaching the final as the group champion by crushing Nepal, Bhutan and India in the group encounters.

Gulam Rabbani, the coach, also deserves credit for guiding our girls towards winning their maiden title in the prestigious tournament.

Aziz Amirul, By email

## ROHINGYA CRISIS

# Can UN make a difference?



SHAIKHAWAT LITON

THE resolution passed by UN General Assembly on Sunday asking Myanmar to end a military campaign against Rohingyas and ensure the return of all refugees and grant

full citizenship rights to them offered a fresh some flowery words for the world's most persecuted community. But it holds little hope for them as the resolution does not have any legal effect. Therefore Myanmar has no obligation to abide by it and may remain unchanged in its strategy as in the past.

THE UNGA, in around the last three decades, has passed more than two dozen resolutions asking Myanmar to stop human rights abuses and take steps against the perpetrators of rights violations. The records show that every year since 1991 the UNGA in its resolutions has expressed concern at the grave human rights situation in Myanmar and urged the authorities to take measures to improve the conditions. In addition, according to a Reuters report on November 16, the General Assembly's Third Committee, which focuses on human rights, has annually adopted a resolution condemning Myanmar's human rights record for the last 15 years. But all efforts by the UN have gone nowhere. The Myanmar government has continued to persecute its ethnic minorities.

Atrocities by Myanmar military against Rohingyas since last August, which forced nearly 670,000 Rohingyas fleeing violence to enter Bangladesh, are the latest example of how Myanmar authorities have been ignoring UN calls for decency.

The UN itself labelled the atrocities against Rohingyas a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" and international rights bodies and rights leaders have termed it "genocide". The UN Commission on Human Rights prepared numerous reports over the years detailing the grave situation of human rights in Myanmar. The UN on several occasions called to the Myanmar military to end violence against Rohingyas. But nothing worked due to Myanmar's disregard to UN efforts.

Take the examples of some resolutions passed by the UNGA over the years since 1991 calling upon Myanmar to improve the human rights situation and bring the perpetrators to justice. The UNGA on December 17, 1991 in a resolution stressed the need for early improvement of the state of human rights in the



The Myanmar government has, over the years, shown a complete disregard to UN efforts to improve the situation of Rohingyas.

country. In March 1995, the UNGA urged the government of Myanmar to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and assembly, and the protection of the rights of persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities.

It also urged to put an end to violations of the right to life and integrity of the human being, to the practice of torture, abuse of women, forced labour and forced relocations, and to enforced disappearances and summary executions. The UNGA in March 2007 called upon the government for taking actions to end impunity by bringing to justice any perpetrators of human rights violations, including members of the military and other government agents.

The UN also asked the Myanmar government to facilitate a genuinely independent investigation into continuing reports of sexual violence, in particular against women belonging to ethnic nationalities, and abuse of civilians carried out by members of the armed forces in Shan, Karen, Mon and other states.

In April 2013, the global body expressed its serious concern at the outbreak of violence between communities in Rakhine State in 2012 and called upon the Myanmar government to take all necessary actions

to protect civilians without delay and to ensure a full, transparent and independent investigation to bring to justice those responsible.

The Myanmar government has never proceeded in line with the calls made by the UNGA over the decades. Rather it has continued to deny all allegations of atrocities against ethnic communities including Rohingyas, allowing perpetrators of alleged genocide against Rohingyas to enjoy impunity. It also denied a UN fact-finding commission entry into Myanmar this year. And recently, it banned UN special rapporteur for human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, for raising her voice against Rohingyas abuses.

The Myanmar military has merily been disregarding UN efforts as the global body is unable to take any punitive action against them without consent of the UN Security Council. And it is almost impossible for the Security Council to pass a resolution against Myanmar due to strong opposition of China, a close aide of Myanmar for decades thanks to its strong economic and geo-political interests in Myanmar.

Backed by Russia, China has foiled several efforts by the Security Council to censure the Myanmar government by using its veto power. China, Russia and some countries strongly opposed Sunday's UNGA resolution moved by the OIC. China has been vehemently opposing any

international efforts to resolve the Rohingya crisis.

Amid such a situation, the process for repatriation of Rohingyas who have crossed the border into Bangladesh since late August may start next month following a deal signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar. International rights bodies have observed that the atmosphere is not conducive to repatriation in the absence of any move to bring the perpetrators of genocide of Rohingyas to book.

Therefore, the crucial question is: Will Rohingyas be able to live in safety even if they are allowed to return to their homes by fulfilling a set of stringent criteria stipulated in the deal?

What Dag Hammarskjöld, the second UN secretary-general, said about the purpose of creating the UN in the first place should be recalled for UN's current chief Antonio Guterres to decide the next course of action. Dag Hammarskjöld said: "The United Nations was created not to lead mankind to heaven but to save humanity from hell."

All evidence testifies to a hell-like situation in Myanmar for Rohingyas and some other ethnic communities. What the UN has been doing for decades has not changed their fate. And sadly, its current role in resolving the Rohingya crisis does not give us much reassurance.

Shaikhawat Liton is Special Correspondent at The Daily Star.

## PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

# Misery loves inflation targeters' company

THE United States, Europe, and Japan are all making positive economic strides. In the US, the unemployment rate is falling, and now stands at just over four percent. Unemployment remains high in the eurozone, at close to nine percent, but that still represents significant progress from the past decade or so. And Japan has achieved virtually full employment, with labour demand so high that new graduates are able not just to find jobs, but to choose them.

Yet there is one key area where progress seems to be lagging: inflation. While the US consumer price index reached 2.2 percent in October, the European Central Bank and the Bank of Japan have so far been unable to meet their targets of roughly two percent inflation, with the eurozone's average annual price growth hovering around 1.5 percent and Japan's firmly lodged in the one percent range.

There are good reasons to strive to meet the

inflation target. Money markets would be rid of near-zero interest rates. Concerns about currency appreciation damaging export competitiveness would be assuaged, as globalisation and artificial intelligence continue to create competition for workers. And the expansionary monetary policy pursued by the world's major central banks in recent years would be vindicated.

Yet when it comes to ordinary people's wellbeing, meeting the inflation target is not always the best option. Of course, reining in high inflation is beneficial, as it preserves the value of existing money. But raising below-target inflation to two percent leaves people worse off, as it causes their savings to lose value continuously, thereby

index—the sum of the inflation and unemployment rates—is based on the assumption that an increase in inflation, like an increase in unemployment, creates economic and social costs for a country.

The reality is that the inflation target is a means to an end—to facilitate full employment and faster GDP growth—not an end in itself. And, at least in Japan, substantial progress toward that end has been made, despite the failure to meet the Bank of Japan's inflation target. Signs of full employment in the market for permanent workers could set the stage for a moderate wage-price increase. That was not the case before 2013, when the implementation of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's economic reform programme, so-called Abenomics, ended a period of austere monetary policy.

But this has not deterred critics of Abenomics from harping on the non-fulfillment of the inflation target. The question is why.

Not long ago, I posed that question to a monetary-policy authority (whose name I am not at liberty to divulge). Rather than provide a straightforward answer, he replied that it was "tricky," finally landing on the statement that, no matter how low the unemployment rate, the inflation target should be pursued.

This kind of thinking is common among economists, particularly the generation swept up by the "rational expectations" revolution in macroeconomics. This cohort views economics as the study of models, in which agents' expectations can be assumed to be rational and consistent with the model. From this perspective, inflation expectations can be assumed to be either ideal predictions of the future, or at the very least rational ones, with their accuracy and precision undermined only by limitations in information received by economic actors.

Older economists thought differently, assuming that most economic outcomes in the real world are the result of behaviour that is at least partly irrational, meaning that expectations should be viewed more as reasonable possibilities than near-certainties. Because I belong to the generation taught by old sages—Lawrence Klein, Franco Modigliani, and James Tobin—I think Shinzo Abe's economic assessment—one that should be applied to today's discussions about monetary policy and inflation.

While it is important to recognise the merits of inflation targeting, the misery index, too, has a role to play in helping us to assess the state of our economies—and the success of our policies.

Koichi Hamada is Professor Emeritus at Yale University and a special adviser to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

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Despite failing to meet the inflation target, Japan has achieved virtually full employment.

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undermining their prosperity. The late Arthur Okun, who was one of my professors at Yale before serving as Chair of US President Lyndon Johnson's Council of Economic Advisers, created the so-called misery index, which goes beyond headline GDP growth or the unemployment rate to provide insight into how the average citizen is faring economically. Okun's