

Give proper treatment to Toriqul

Everyone is entitled to medical care

WE join our voice with Toriqul's family to request the prime minister to come to the aid of this suffering young man and to help him get the necessary medical treatment for his broken leg and other injuries, inflicted upon him by BCL men who attacked him with hammers, sticks and other weapons. Toriqul is a victim of a crime and the terrible ordeal that he and his family are going through right now in trying to get him the treatment that he needs is an injustice on top of an injustice.

It is the right of every human being in any civilised society to receive proper medical care. That someone would be denied such a right for protesting is simply unheard of and should have never happened. It goes beyond belief that a hospital would refuse to provide treatment to a patient, or kick him out, leading to his injuries aggravating because of him having to move from one hospital to the next.

As this newspaper reported, bearing the cost of Toriqul's treatment has been hard enough for his family and friends as it is, without the added difficulty of hospitals refusing to give him treatment and BCL men visiting his home to interrogate his family. Given all that this young man has already been put through, helping him and his family now is the least that the government can do.

It should be remembered that this incident will greatly affect our image as a nation. As a society, our national ethos is displayed on occasions like this, which is why it is so important for the government to step up and help Toriqul and his family.

Rising criminality in refugee camps

Address the underlying causes

WE are concerned by a spate of murders in Rohingya camps in the last six months that have left the refugees insecure among themselves. The killings—19, in total, including two ghastly murders of two community leaders—have not only sown fear among the already devastated group of people who fled widespread state-sponsored violence in Myanmar, their ancestral land, but have also raised questions about safety and security inside the camps in Bangladesh.

According to a report by this newspaper, as many as 55 Rohingyas have been arrested as part of the murder investigations, which have so far yielded no breakthrough. In addition, other serious crimes including rape, abduction and drug peddling have reportedly been committed inside refugee camps.

The government's announcement that it would deploy an additional 2,000 policemen to guard the camps is a welcome move, but it would be amateurish to hope that less than 3,000 police personnel would be enough to maintain law and order in camps where nearly a million are cramped in.

While the local police suspect the internal rivalry to establish supremacy or "silly matters" as the main reasons for those murders, the policymakers should contemplate the bigger picture. Too many people are living in ghetto-like camps, and there is little scope for them to do any meaningful work other than merely surviving on aid.

Unfortunately, there's no option other than channelling more resources to maintain the camps. While the current situation warrants more law-enforcement efforts, all stakeholders including the government and aid agencies should join hands to address the underlying reasons—such as unemployment and frustration among the youth. At the same time, all parties involved should double down on their efforts to repatriate these refugees to their motherland with their rights fully protected.

JUNE AGREEMENT ON ROHINGYA CRISIS

Misses the central issue of citizenship

TAPAN BOSE

ON June 6, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed an agreement with the government of Myanmar for the repatriation of some 700,000 Rohingya refugees now living in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. This minority ethnic group had been forcibly displaced from their homeland in Myanmar's Rakhine State between August and December last year, when the country's armed forces unleashed a reign of terror killing and raping hundreds of men and women and burning down village after village under the guise of counter-insurgency operations against a small armed group. To be clear, Rohingya insurgency is a much smaller movement

to Myanmar. There is nothing in the agreement about accountability for the horrific crimes committed against them by Myanmar's generals and other members of the armed forces.

This is not the first time that the international community has decided to "betray" the Rohingyas. The "Slow Burning Genocide" of the Rohingyas has been going on for decades. But the West that controls the UN was not really concerned. Yes, there was a steady outflow of refugees. But this was limited within the region of South and South East Asia. Unlike the hundreds of thousands of Syrian, Iraqi and Libyan refugees, the Rohingyas were not swarming across the borders of the European countries. Europe was not threatened by the Rohingya influx.

The West had imposed "sanctions" on Myanmar. It was for the lofty ideals of

including health care, energy, construction, automotive industries and digital innovation. Two military conglomerates and cronies of the generals have total control over Myanmar's business interests even after the so-called "democratic reforms". As we know, these generals are mainly responsible for spreading anti-Muslim hatred and whipping up mass hysteria among the Buddhist majority in the country.

The Myanmar Times on June 28 reported that the "EU is exercising more caution when making investment decisions involving Myanmar. This is due to recent instability at the country's borders, including the ongoing refugee problems in Rakhine." Nevertheless, Myanmar remains an important trade partner to the EU, and the latter's interest to expand into the country remains robust.

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which have since been proven to be a charade.

There is also a host of American companies—about 130—doing business in Myanmar. The list includes Caterpillar, Coca-Cola, Ford, Pepsi, KFC and others engaged in diverse areas like oil and gas, insurance and information technology. About two weeks before the Myanmar army began its massacre of Rohingyas in Rakhine, Aung Naing Oo, director general at the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration and secretary of Myanmar Investment Commission, said, "We are in active discussions with Amcham Myanmar [American Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar] to facilitate trade and investment with the United States. We do hope the entry of US insurance companies in the near future, which will lead to millions of dollars surge in our list of FDI [foreign direct investment]." (The Nation, Bangkok, August 08, 2017)

Under the neo-liberal system, where promoting the private interests of the business community has become the primary responsibility of the governments, the lure of the "thirteen pieces of silver" will guide the policies of states. As long as the West continues to control the United Nations, with Russia and China aiding and abetting them, there is little chance that the United Nations will be able to live up to its charter.

In recent months, the human rights situation in Kachin and northern Shan States has worsened. Mass atrocity crimes continue to be reported. Over 120,000 Kachin and Shan civilians have been displaced since 2011. Thousands of people in Kachin State are trapped in conflict zones while access to humanitarian aid remains blocked in many conflict-affected areas. There is no mention in the UNHCR/UNDP/Myanmar agreement of the approximate 120,000 Rohingyas who are still languishing in concentration-camp-like situations inside Myanmar. Whatever may be said about the status of Rohingya refugees in refugee camps in Bangladesh, there is no doubt that they feel safe there. The question is how safe they will be once they are forced to go back under this agreement.

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PHOTO: DIBYANGSHU SARKAR/AFP

Rohingya refugees walk towards the Balukhali refugee camp after crossing the border in Ukhia.

compared to the other ethnic rebellions going on in Myanmar's other regions. Yet the government had undertaken this massive terror campaign primarily to drive almost the entire ethnic group from the land of their birth and across the border into Bangladesh.

The UN has not made the terms of the agreement public. It didn't reportedly hold any consultation with the representative organisations before signing the agreement. On June 27, during a presentation at the 38th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Yanghee Lee, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, said, "I note the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) recently signed between the Myanmar Government, UNHCR and UNDP in early June to assist the process of repatriation from Bangladesh. It is disconcerting that the MoU remains not publicly available and there has not been transparency about its terms." There is no provision in the agreement that would oblige Myanmar government to ensure security and dignity of the Rohingyas after they return

"democracy". It did not demand an end to the systematic ill-treatment of the Rohingyas and other minority communities of Myanmar. There can be no democracy without all citizens being able to participate equally in the governance of the country. This is the foundation of liberal democracy which the West boasts of having established. Yet, no Western leader had thought of including the restoration of equal rights to citizenship for all people of Myanmar in the agenda for negotiations for lifting the sanctions.

President Macron of France accused Myanmar government of committing genocide against the Rohingyas. Yet, France's business community, including its oil and gas giant TOTAL, continues to do business in Myanmar. The EU talked about imposing sanctions, but the truth is that even today, there are about 300 EU investors with the combined portfolio of more than USD 6 billion in Myanmar, some in collaboration with private partners and others with various government departments. These companies are working in diverse areas

The EuroCham-Myanmar, which is funded by the European Union, was formally launched in Yangon in December 2014, when Myanmar army was busy killing Rohingya men, raping their women and putting them in concentration camps. EuroCham-Myanmar promotes the business interests of European companies in Myanmar. Switzerland, Sweden and Norway are equally involved. While the Swiss are selling passenger aircrafts, Sweden's Volvo is selling cars and commercial vehicles and Germany's Mercedes Benz and BMW are providing luxury vehicles to Myanmar's generals and the rich. Norway's Telenor owns the biggest telecom network in Myanmar. Thanks to the efforts of Norway's ambassador, Telenor was able to beat the Chinese, Japanese and South Korean companies in securing the contract from Myanmar army. Statoil, a Norwegian oil exploration giant, has a stake in the natural gas exploration off the coast of Rakhine. In fact, Norway's gigantic Pension Fund had led the opening of the floodgate of investments in Myanmar after the so-called "democratic reforms",

RAIN HARVESTING

Our only means of survival

BRIGADIER GENERAL QM SHAHJAHAN HAFIZ

OUR rivers are drying up because all the upper riparian countries are diverting water away from our rivers causing acute shortage of water and desertification. The day is not far off when we will have no water in the rivers. All the bilateral and international efforts to solve the problem are bearing no fruit.

So what should we do? Can we survive without water in the rivers? The answer is an unqualified "no". With no water in the rivers, Bangladesh will eventually turn into a desert and we as a race will go extinct.

Do we have to wait helplessly for the fait accompli? We do not have to depend on the water that will trickle down the rivers after other countries have sucked out every drop from them.

Bangladesh is a blessed country which gets plenty of rain. With the exception of the relatively dry western region of Rajshahi, where the annual rainfall is about 1,600mm, most parts of the country receive at least 2,000mm of rainfall per year. But what happens to all that water? Most of it drains out to the Bay of Bengal. Can we not do anything to prevent the enormous waste of water?

Bangladesh is full of ponds, *dighies*, *beels* and *haors* which store considerable amount of water. But that is not enough for our needs. Moreover, many of them are not accessible to the farmers. But there are many dried out rivers and canals all over the country. Some of them get flooded by the water flowing from the big rivers and some do not even get that but get filled up by rainwater. There are no efforts to save this water which flows into the sea leaving us with virtually no water for the dry seasons. Can we do anything to save this precious water? Harvesting this rainwater is the only way to meet all our needs.

We have to create storage structures throughout the country. Perhaps the experts are already thinking about it. I suggest we build multiple dams along all the dried out rivers and canals in the country to harvest rainwater and create artificial lakes. It may be necessary to dredge



It's time we think about harvesting rainwater to meet our water needs.

STAR FILE PHOTO

them to ensure depth in order to make them capable of holding water which is sufficient for the dry seasons. The heights of these dams should be calculated to ensure that there is none higher than normal flood in the adjoining lands during the rainy seasons. They should be constructed according to the gradient of the rivers or canals. There should also be provisions to get rid of extra water.

Similarly, we have to create planned water bodies out of the existing ponds, *dighies*, *beels* and *haors*. We may even have to dig ponds within agricultural lands that have no access to water.

To make it sustainable the people of the country have to be involved in rain harvesting. We need to create mass awareness on the benefits of rain harvesting. People have to be trained on how to use the water

from these artificial water bodies without harming the environment. They will also have to know how to maintain them. It goes without saying that these water bodies can be used for fishing also. Moreover, they will create a good environment for different kinds of flora and fauna. These water bodies will even attract migratory birds during the winter seasons.

Finally, let us not depend on the mercy of other countries for our water needs. The skies give us more than sufficient water for drinking, cooking, bathing, washing, farming and running industries. Nature's bounty is there all around us. Do we have eyes to see and will to use them for our survival?

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Take real action to stop road accidents

After Razib Hossain's tragic death in April this year, many opinion pieces have been published by newspapers urging action to stop road accidents. Over the years, the number of road accidents has increased. More than 7,000 people were killed in accidents last year while 16,000 were injured, according to a report by a passenger welfare platform. I wonder if there is any other country in the world where so many people get killed in road accidents. How long will it take for the government to take some real action to halt this killing spree?

Amdadul H Sarker, Comilla University

BB should intervene to reduce rice prices

Last year, the production of rice in haor areas was adversely affected by floods, resulting in increased rice prices. In response, the government withdrew import duty on rice. As the production of rice has been good this year, with adequate supply in the market, it was expected that the prices would be reasonable. However, the prices did not fall partly because of the high import duty that the government has re-imposed. Artificial hoarding of rice by dishonest businessmen is also to blame for this high price.

During the last caretaker government, when something similar happened, Bangladesh Bank instructed all banks to realise loans disbursed to rice millers, and magically, the prices of rice came down within weeks. The BB should take similar steps to protect the interest of the consumers.

Ashraf Hossain, By e-mail