

## World leaders failed to act

Amnesty Int'l on crimes against humanity in Myanmar

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

World leaders' failure to act has allowed the Myanmar security forces' perpetrators of crimes against humanity to remain at large for a year after their murderous campaign against the Rohingyas prompted an exodus of epic proportions, the Amnesty International said yesterday.

More than 700,000 Rohingya women, men and children fled from northern Rakhine State to Bangladesh after August 25, 2017 when the Myanmar security forces launched a widespread as well as systematic assault on hundreds of villages.

The Amnesty International has also called on the Australian government to cease its support and assistance to the Myanmar military, impose targeted sanctions on 13 military personnel implicated in the atrocities, and push for accountability and justice for their crimes against humanity committed to date.

"This anniversary marks a shameful milestone. The explosion of violence over the past year perpetrated by Myanmar's military in villages across northern Rakhine State was not the action of rogue soldiers or units. There is a mountain of evidence that the murder, rape, torture, burning and forced starvation was part of a highly orchestrated, systematic attack on the Rohingya population. That Australian taxpayers' money is going to support the perpetrators is unthinkable," said Diana Sayed, Amnesty International Australia's crisis campaigner.

"Cutting Australia's training support to the Myanmar military is the least the Australian government can do to stand up for the Rohingya people's rights.

"Next, the Australian government must impose sanctions on Myanmar's Commander-in-Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, and 12 other individuals implicated and named in Amnesty International's 27 June report 'We Will Destroy Everything: Military Responsibility for Crimes against Humanity in Rakhine State,

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## EID-UL-AZHA

### Relatives meet Khaleda in jail

Homemade food not allowed in

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia spent around an hour with her relatives inside jail on the Eid day.

Though her party leaders were not allowed to meet her, six of her relatives entered the Old Dhaka Central Jail around 3:35pm on Wednesday.

Khaleda's sister Selina Islam, her husband Rofiqul Islam, sister-in-law Nasrin Iskandar, daughter-in-law Sharmila Rahman, granddaughter Jahiya Rahman and Tarique Rahman's sister-in-law Sahina Zaman Bindu met her.

They came out of the jail around 4:40pm.

However, the jail authorities did not allow them to take food inside.

Selina alleged although they had prior permission, they were not allowed to take the food inside the prison. "We brought with us homemade food, but we weren't allowed to take those in."

She also said Khaleda was

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Veteran Indian journalist Kuldeep Nayar, centre, during his first visit to The Daily Star office in Motijheel in mid-1992. Late SM Ali, the newspaper's founding editor-publisher, and Mahfuz Anam, the then executive editor, are also seen in the picture.

FILE PHOTO

## Tribute to A Unique Mentor

FROM PAGE 1

He was a personal friend of our founder editor-publisher SM Ali (Ali Bhai to us all). So it was only natural that Ali Bhai sought the collaboration of his old friend and veteran journalist and editor while launching his own new venture, of which we all had the honour to be a part. Thus, Kuldeep Ji's association with The Daily Star was practically from the very beginning.

I recall his first visit in mid-1992 when we were still in our Motijheel office. We bonded right from the word go. He seemed to thrive in the midst of this group of young, enthusiastic and committed journalists led by unquestionably the most internationally famed Bangladeshi journalist that Ali Bhai was. And we, for our part, were thrilled at the proximity of this famous journalist whose fame we had heard about but may not have been familiar with his writings, and who now stood with us, shoulder to shoulder, in our endeavour to give Bangladesh a quality newspaper as the country embarked on its new democratic journey.

As if it was his job to push us forward, he moved from one section to another starting with the newsroom, then to the editorial section, and then he met with the feature writers and came back to the newsroom where he stationed himself for days. His one key message to us was "accuracy" in news reporting. He repeated ad nauseam the need for it and said everything depended on it. A newspaper would never have any credibility, which is its lifeblood, without accuracy.

He devoted a lot of his time for us while spending the lunch and dinner hours with his friends, and I was privileged to be a part of the circle as the executive editor at the time. I was astounded by his energy and interest and later understood the reason for it. He had left the newsroom years ago when he retired from the editorship of Statesman and now, finding himself again in the hustle and bustle of what is the heart of any newspaper, he appeared to recall his old days and once again re-lived his newsroom days. And needless to say, we all benefited from it greatly.

Then disaster struck The Daily Star. We lost Ali Bhai in late 1993, within two and a half years of the paper's launching. Like many people, Kuldeep Ji thought that this promising new daily faced an uncertain future. Like most people he also didn't know what this writer, and SM Ali's successor, would be able to deliver. And he decided to extend his experienced hand to a totally untried one, stunned by the loss of his editor and mentor and not know-

ing how to proceed.

Thus began a "Guru-Shishya" relationship between Kuldeep Ji and me. On hearing the news of Ali Bhai's passing, he immediately called me, first of many to follow, and said, in a heavy and reassuring tone that was to be forever etched in my mind, "Do not lose heart; I will be at your side for whatever help you need."

Other than my Board's unanimous and vigorous support for my editorship and my wife's unstinting faith in my ability to lead the newspaper, this phone call meant the world to me.

"Maahfooze [that is how he would pronounce my name], make sure to send me daily copies of your paper by post [internet wasn't available then] and I will send you my feedback. You may find them useful."

And this he did, without fail, and needless to mention, I found them most educative. The copies would reach him seven to ten days later and he would read each edition and then call me. "Your lead story was not properly edited", "The lead point was not developed enough", "Why there was not any follow up of the earlier story", "This story does not have enough facts" and so on.

Ever the editor, he never failed to praise whenever the occasion came about, knowing that my young team needed positive feedback as much as it needed guidance.

Thus we moved on, knowing that an experienced "gaze", though from distance, was always upon us, ready to come to our aid whenever needed. More than anything else it gave us a sense of confidence and me a great sense of relief, knowing that we had the best possible guidance to move forward.

Over the years, he came to The Daily Star many times. He would never miss our anniversaries and took personal pride at the rising strength of the paper he felt was his own. Many of my colleagues he became familiar with and commented to me about the relative strength and weakness of their writing and guided me to help them. My senior colleagues did not know that many of the insightful things I told them actually came from him.

In the last few years, he appeared pained at the non-journalistic challenges that The Daily Star faced. Knowing, through his personal experience, the crucial role that independent media plays in a country's economic and democratic journey, especially the latter, he was disturbed at the impediments that were being laid to the progress of the former. As a most sincere friend of Bangladesh, he would rejoice

at its every success and feel sad when reality indicated the opposite. He would often recount the damage that Indira Gandhi's emergency did to his country and how counterproductive media restrictions were for Mrs Gandhi's own future and would repeatedly plead through his columns that Bangladesh must never take that path.

On a personal level, I enjoyed an extraordinary level of affection from him. He took a personal pride in the success of The Daily Star and rejoiced at our ethical moorings and celebrated our refusal to deviate from them. He treated me like his son and called Shaheen, my wife, his "Bahu". It would be impossible for both Shaheen and me not to see him and his wife, Bharati Ji, if we went to Delhi. And if for some reason we failed to, and if they came to know about it, we would never hear the end of it. Once I went for an angiogram and could not let them know. But somehow, they learned about it and called up the doctor to inquire how I was doing, and later gave me an earful for such negligence. It drove Shaheen and me to tears, realising how much they cared for us.

Once noticing that I was irregular in writing my column, Kuldeep Ji, in a reprimanding tone, said to me, "Do you know that I have never missed my weekly column in the last 35 years? Once when I had my heart surgery I wrote four submissions in advance."

True to his habit, he never ceased writing till the very end. His last column appeared on 14 August 2018, just a few days before he was taken to a hospital where he breathed his last on August 23 at the age of 95.

Journalism, South Asian relations, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, in that order, were the topics of our discussion on every occasion we met, either in Delhi or in Dhaka. Courtesy Kuldeep Ji I had the honour to meet many Indian politicians and media personalities. To every one of them he would ceaselessly talk about The Daily Star. He was immensely impressed by this paper's Board of Directors and would proudly say Indian owners should learn from them as to how to give editorial freedom and protect the institution of the editor.

He became very close to some of the directors, especially Latifur Rahman whose personal tragedies affected him deeply, but whose capacity to overcome them and continue to support independent journalism he admired from his heart.

We mourn the passing away of this giant in our field and take solace in the fact that he led a full life. May he rest in peace.

## Return still elusive

FROM PAGE 1

any action of the world body at the UN Security Council. Signing the agreement made China's efforts successful, as it pursued bilateral means to resolve the crisis. The deal also made it easy for Myanmar to buy more time and ease international pressure on it.

Myanmar's trick worked well. Everything appears calm right now.

Now, the outcries for the Rohingyas or condemnation for Myanmar from global leaders are not that loud. The world has sort of forgotten the Rohingyas, leaving them to pass days in muddy refugee camps.

Some international media now just run reports reminding the world leaders that this August marks a full year of the Rohingya influx, one of the 21st century's worst refugee crises.

But this would neither reduce the stateless people's agony nor lessen the burden on Bangladesh. The flow of humanitarian aid from international communities has also decreased. Fund shortage may put the host country in a difficult situation in the coming months.

In its latest trick, Myanmar, during Bangladesh foreign minister's visit to Naypyidaw on August 10, asked the words "forcibly displaced myanmar nationals" be replaced with "displaced persons from Rakhine State" on identity cards issued to the Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar.

If this happens, Rohingyas would have to return to their homeland without any identity and they would continue to be considered stateless.

So why did Myanmar resort to such means? It is clear: because Myanmar does not want to take back the Rohingyas. It would be clearer if we see its arrangements for the returning Rohingyas.

Myanmar is building camps to house repatriated Rohingyas as their homes have been burnt during the military crackdown on them last year.

The camps are like prisons. In the camps of Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine, one lakh Rohingyas have been languishing for almost six years. They suffer from chronic malnutrition and receive minimal medical care. They are not allowed to return home. They were forced to leave their homes following sectarian violence in June, 2012.

The returning Rohingyas would be put into such camps and be guarded by the security forces that brutally murdered, raped and tortured many of them. Can

anyone imagine it as a safe place for the repatriated Rohingyas? If this is where the Rohingyas are supposed to go, then why would the refugees want to leave the camps in Cox's Bazar?

Would these people, if the repatriation begins at all, be able to return to their homes?

In February, Human Rights Watch report showed that the burnt Rohingya villages have been flattened with bulldozers. There was no sign that any human habitation ever existed there.

Richard Weir, a Myanmar expert with the HRW, said, "There's no more landmark, there's no tree, there's no vegetation. Everything is wiped away."

In March, Amnesty International exposed other developments. Rakhine State was being militarised at an alarming pace. The authorities were building security force bases and bulldozing land where Rohingya villages were burnt just months ago, said an AI report.

The AI said it was difficult to see how the refugees would be able to return to their original places, let alone do so voluntarily, safely and with dignity.

All these lead to the conclusion: Myanmar military needs the land of the Rohingyas, not the Rohingyas.

The commander-in-chief of the Myanmar army Senior General Min Aung Hlaing had also made his intention clear only a couple of days after his troops launched the crackdown on the minority people on August 25 last year.

He described the crackdown as "unfinished business" dating back to the World War II.

Since the mass exodus of the Rohingyas began last year, everyone -- UN and international rights bodies -- has been advocating safe, dignified and voluntary repatriation. But nothing is working for the Rohingyas.

This is not the first time the junta launched a crackdown on the Rohingyas. Bangladesh had to bear the brunt of major influx of the Rohingyas in 1970s and 1990s due to their atrocities against Rohingyas. Following hectic negotiations, Rohingyas were repatriated. But they were not provided safety, security and dignity, resulting in the returns of many of them to Bangladesh.

This time, the negotiations are not working.

Every day the situation is getting worse, diminishing Rohingyas' hopes of going back. And the longer they stay in Cox's Bazar, the heavier becomes the burden on Bangladesh.

## Caring for the little souls

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one-roomed thatch and tarpaulin structure, and unroll their plastic sleeping mats.

"We had rice, daal and bit of dried fish for lunch," said Akhter Hujur, when asked what food he shared with the orphan, "and that's what we gave him."

"The rice and lentils were given to as relief by World Food Programme. As for the dried fish, I bought that -- 250 grams of it -- and am hoping it will last a few days," he said.

The relief given out is meant for Akhter's family of three. What they share with an orphan from the madrasa every day is a cut out of those rations they receive.

"We do not get any extra relief for taking care of the orphans," claimed Akhter.

In the camps, food given by the relief agencies is the most common form of currency. Relief goods are exchanged for money, which is used to buy other essentials. Or fuel, for example. Hence, it is not as if spare rice and lentils -- however little there may be to spare -- are not needed. In fact, it is just as valuable.

The fact that Akhter, and many other families foster these children just for the mealtimes, means that they are paying out of their pockets for children who are not theirs.

Why do they do it? "I am a Muslim. And in my religion, it is said that we must take care of orphans," he said.

"When the community came to pray at the mosque we asked them to volunteer to take in an orphan each, just during mealtimes. All of our 25 orphans found willing families," said Akhter.

But Akhter's madrasa is not the only one taking up responsibility of the orphans -- every other mosque rolls out bed-mats at night for these children to sleep in.

This system grew up in the absence of a proper fostering system for the greater part of last year. There are no orphanages taking complete responsibility of the 10,526 orphans living across the camps. Around half of this population are between 5 and 10 years old, according to the Department of Social Services. There are 68 children living completely alone without any adult present, scattered across the camps.

Most live with extended family who sometimes find it easier to send the boy children off to the madrasas.

Nabi Ouson lost all his family in the Tula Toli massacre last year, except for three grandsons. Withered with age, the grandfather found it easier to send two of his grandsons to the local madrasa in Balukhali.

His third grandson lives with his paternal uncle. His uncle had also tried to pass him over to the madrasa with his cousins, but the child is too traumatised to live alone. He came back to his uncle's house after a week of staying in the madrasa.

"He stays inside the house all day. Even if he steps outside, it is only for half an hour," says the uncle Junaid Mohammed. The child, Jafor Alam, in spite of being a 12-year-old, barely makes eye-contact. For most part of the interview he looked at the floor, his mouth hanging slightly open.

This is the child's story, as told by his uncle: Around 9:00am, the military came to their village of Tula Toli and started firing indiscriminately. Their parents, along with the other villagers ran for the beach towards the river, while and Jafor and his 8-year-old brother Shamser ran towards the woods. At the beach, the military rounded up all the men and babies and killed them with brushfire. Only a handful of men were spared. The women they took back to the village were raped.

Even though Jafor's uncle told the story, he was not an eye-witness. Jafor was. All this, including the murder of his father and his mother being taken away, happened in front of Jafor and his brother as they hid out in the woods.

"My brother and I started walking. We found some villagers coming to Bangladesh so we decided to follow them. After 2 days of walking, we came to the Naf river," said Jafor.

In spite of all this, Jafor has not received any mental counselling yet. Nor does he go to the child-friendly-spaces set up all that much since he is too afraid to step out of his house.

"I have 7 children of my own to feed with the relief but I get nothing extra for feeding Jafor and Shamser," complained the uncle.

The government of Bangladesh has recently started to roll out a stipend program for foster parents. In the first stage 2,872 children, about a quarter of all orphans, have been selected as a part of the programme. Their foster parents would be given Tk 2,000 for their care. The Department of Social Services categorised the orphans according to the level of risk they are in, and the children selected for the first round of funding were all classified as "high-risk".

"It took us a year to trace the orphans and enlist them all," said Md Hasan Murad, Team Leader of the project at Unchirang camp in Teknaf, adding that up to 9,000 such children will be covered by the programme in the next six months.

## Unicef warns of a 'lost generation'

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Hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas continue to live in cramped and rudimentary camps in Cox's Bazar after fleeing a military operation in Myanmar that was subsequently likened to "ethnic cleansing" by the UN's top human rights official Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein.

According to a United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) report released in New York/Cox's Bazar on Thursday, the international community needs to do more to prevent some half a million youngsters "falling prey to despair and frustration".

One key need is better education facilities, which some older children say is almost more important than food, according to Simon Ingram, senior communications adviser to Unicef.

"Now they are starting to look forward, they're starting to wonder, 'What next?'" Ingram said, citing a child alert issued Wednesday. "They are starting to think, you know, what sort of future that they really have, and this is where a new level of anxiety and fear starts to come in."

Although huge advances have been made in the living conditions of those forced to flee Myanmar, including in disease outbreak prevention, improved

water provision and stronger shelters, Unicef warns that children in Cox's Bazar face a bleak future.

"If we don't make the investment in education now, we face the very real danger of seeing a lost generation of Rohingya children," Unicef Bangladesh Representative Edouard Beigbeder said in a statement.

Inside Cox's Bazar, some 1,200 education centres were operational by July this year for around 140,000 children -- a significant achievement, given the level of demand.

But there is no agreed curriculum and few learning opportunities for all those above 14 years old, problems that Unicef is intent on resolving, by providing a higher quality education that focuses on literacy, language and numeracy, as well as "essential life-skills".

"It's about an insurance against a loss of a generation of children to hopelessness and despair -- something that we really must avoid at all costs," Simon Ingram said.

"We really want to see everybody accepts that this is not a crisis that is going to go away anytime soon and that we have to plan in a more sustainable way for the future, whether that be in

terms of providing water and sanitation or health care, or in need of education."

According to the UN agency report, girls and teenagers are especially at risk of being excluded when it comes to educational opportunities in Cox's Bazar. It also calls on the Government of Myanmar to ensure that in Rakhine state -- where more than half a million Rohingyas remain -- children from all communities have equal access to quality education.

The report says the international community should invest in supporting quality education and life-skills for all Rohingya children, especially girls and adolescents who it says are at risk of being excluded.

The report points out that a lasting solution to the crisis of the Rohingyas requires addressing the situation inside northern Rakhine.

It calls for the implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, including the recognition of the basic rights of the Muslim population there -- covering freedom of movement, the right to access basic services such as health and education, and meaningful livelihoods.

It also calls on the Myanmar government to provide protection for

Rohingya children and those of all other ethnic groups, and to create appropriate conditions on the ground that would allow the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Rohingya refugees to their former communities.

Under an official deal signed by the UN and the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar in June, it was agreed that efforts would be made to create appropriate conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Rohingya refugees to their former communities. But to date, no such returns have happened.

### Shahidul

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problems with eyesight and pain in his jaw and gum.

He did not have these complications before he was picked up by detectives from his Dhanmondi home, said the duo.

"We appeal to the government and more specifically, to the jail authorities to ensure immediate treatment for Shahidul Alam by transferring him to a hospital," they said in the statement.

A Dhaka court sent 63-year-old photographer to jail on August 12 on completion of his seven-day police remand in the case.