

Stop spread of hatred against Rohingyas

Activists urge host countries to treat the refugees humanely amid pandemic

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Rohingya activists have urged the host countries to stop hatred against them and treat them as human beings, saying the refugees, who have fled genocidal acts in Myanmar, are now facing higher level of xenophobia amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Stating that the countries like Malaysia and Thailand denied accepting the Rohingyas who tried to reach their shores in the smugglers' boats, they said it was not their choice to take such risky journeys but grave rights violations back in Myanmar forced them to do so.

Rohingya activist Sujauddin Karimuddin from Australia said just two days back he got a call from a woman that one of her two kids in Rakhine had tuberculosis but she had no access to medical service. To go to the town, she needed \$150 for a travel permit.

When she managed that, the transport provider demanded double and triple the normal fare, saying radical Buddhists could attack the car if he carried her, he said.

"You see, in the West if I have a passport, I can travel anywhere in the world. And in Rakhine, it is so difficult. That's why people take whatever means they can to escape the situation where they are denied of basic human rights," he said.

The observations came at an eSymposium on "Hunger, Exploitation, Hate Crime and Xenophobia: Rohingyas in Land and at Sea" jointly organised by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) and Free Rohingya Coalition (FRC).

Sharifah Shakirah, director of Rohingya Women Development Network in Malaysia, said Rohingyas take perilous sea journey for a better life though they face tortures on the way and after the arrival. That only proves how dire situation they face at home.

Rohingyas, who were denied citizenship in Myanmar since 1982, faced violations of basic rights and fled atrocities to Bangladesh and other countries. They faced the most brutal crackdown in 2017 when some 750,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh.

Speakers said with a plethora of discriminatory rules, famine like

51 more public

FROM PAGE 1
treating novel coronavirus patients, still do not have a nonstop supply of oxygen which is essential for treatment of critical Covid-19 patients.

These hospitals, constructed by the Public Works Department, have medical gas pipeline system, but most of them lack centralised oxygen supply supported by liquid tanks.

So, they rely on inter-connected oxygen cylinders. As a result, it is not possible for them to ensure uninterrupted oxygen supply to critical Covid-19 patients who suffer from severe respiratory problems, health officials said.

The ministry asked NEMEMW and TC to ensure liquid oxygen tanks in those of the 39 major public hospitals which do not have it on an urgent basis to activate a centralised oxygen supply system.

WORKS ON AT 23 HOSPITALS

Following the health ministry's directives, NEMEMW and TC, through its contractors, has already set up liquid oxygen tanks in three hospitals and patients of those are getting benefit of it, said Aminur Rahman, chief technical manager of NEMEMW and TC.

The three hospitals are Kuwait-Bangladesh Maitree Government Hospital, Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital and Kurmitola General Hospital.

Besides, works for installing liquid oxygen tanks in 23 more public hospitals started last month and those are likely to be completed within this month, he said.

The hospitals are Faridpur Medical College Hospital, Syed Nazrul Islam Medical College Hospital in Kishoreganj, Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Medical College Hospital in Gazipur, MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital in Sylhet, Sheikh Abu Nasir Specialised Hospital in Khulna, 250-bed general hospitals in Chattogram, Tangail, Gopalganj, Manikganj, Jamalpur, Munshiganj, Habiganj,



Maintaining physical distance, people receive rice and other relief materials, distributed by BGB 53 Battalion, in an area close to the border with India in Chapainawabganj's Shibganj upazila. The battalion said it has so far helped 3,107 poor families since the pandemic hit the country. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: COLLECTED

A fraudster in myriad guises

FROM PAGE 1

Perhaps, his biggest "identity" is that he is the chairman of Regent Hospital, which has recently been sealed off on charges of issuing fake Covid-19 test certificates and illegally collecting money from coronavirus patients.

According to police sources, Shahed is involved in various crimes and the illegal practice at the private hospital was just the tip of the iceberg.

He is facing around 32 cases, including for murder, money laundering and embezzlement of public money. He has already served in jail for embezzlement of money. Most of the cases were filed under Section 420 of the Penal Code.

The Daily Star repeatedly tried to contact Shahed for comments, but his mobile phone was found switched off.

According to Rab sources, initial investigation revealed that he has siphoned off a large amount of money abroad.

The sources said Rab personnel raided the hospital on Monday based on intelligence report that the facility was providing fake Covid-19 certificates in exchange for money.

Law enforcers had received similar allegations against him, but no action was taken apparently due to his close links with some politicians in power and top government officials, said the sources.

Recently, Lt Gen (retd) Chowdhury Hasan Sarwary, Bir Bikrom, gave some interesting information about Shahed in a Facebook post.

According to the post, Shahed introduces himself as Major Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Colonel Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury and sometimes as Major Shahed Karim, but his national identity card mentions his name as Shahed Karim.

But now he is using another NID card with the name of Md Shahed. Sarwary mentioned the number of the card as 269261714575.

Contacted, Sarwary, who served as GOC of 9th Infantry Division, director general of SSF and Ansar and VDP and director of Army Intelligence, told The Daily Star that he provided the information knowingly and confirmed its veracity.

He, however, advised this newspaper to conduct its own investigation.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the temporary accreditation card of Shahed issued by the Press Information Department. His card number is 6845 and according to it, Shahed is the Publisher and Editor of The Daily Natun Kagoj and his national identity card number is 8650406187.

One of Sarwary's posts also referred to a report published in The Daily Janakantha on December 11, 2014.

Going through the issue, this correspondent found a report titled "Uncertainty looms over 100 SSC

high-ups asked me to allow Regent

According to Rab, the hospital

examines for unapproved Regent School & College."

At a briefing on Wednesday, Rab's Intelligence Chief Lt Col Sarwar-Bin-Quasem also said Shahed was a fraud and master of bluffs.

"We came to know that he had a multi-level marketing business where he embezzled a lot of money from people. Later, he landed in jail. After serving two years in jail, he came out in 2011. He didn't stop. He continued with his fraudulence," he added.

Following Rab's drive, other information started surfacing.

At Regent's head office in Uttara, a room was allocated for Shahed with many modern facilities, including an automated door-lock that could only be opened with a password.

His personal SUV featured a flag stand, VIP horn and he had multiple gunmen at all times for his security. They used walkie-talkies.

According to Rab sources, he had no permission to use those.

HOW SHAHED 'MANAGED' HEALTH MINISTRY

The directorate of health signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Regent Hospital to turn it into a dedicated Covid-19 hospital on March 21, although the licence of the facility has not been renewed since 2014.

According to the MoU, the government would bear all the treatment costs of Covid-19 patients.

But Regent Hospital charged patients different fees and also submitted a Tk 1.98 crore bill to the government.

Sources said the health minister and government high-ups were present during the MoU signing ceremony.

Now the ministry is asking the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) to explain as to why the contract was signed despite the hospital's licence had expired in 2014.

According to ministry sources, papers of Regent Hospitals were not examined before signing of the MoU, following recommendations from government high-ups.

Besides, Shahed had very good relations with the director general of the DGHS and top leaders of Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad (Swachip), a pro-AL organisation for doctors, said the sources.

Shahed's party position as a member of the AL's international affairs sub-committee helped him "manage" the health ministry to pick his hospital as a dedicated Covid-19 treatment facility, according to multiple sources.

Asked why the health directorate signed an MoU with hospital that has no proper documents, Aminul Hasan, director of hospitals and clinics at the DGHS, said: "We did it after ministry high-ups asked me to allow Regent

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Hospital. We just executed the order."

Prof Abul Kalam Azad, director general of the DGHS, declined to comment. "I have stopped talking to journalists directly. We have assigned two of our officials to talk to journalists," he told this newspaper on Wednesday evening.

Although Shahed boast of being a member of the AL's international affairs sub-committee during television talkshows, party leaders are now denying his links with it.

At a press briefing at his office yesterday, Information Minister Hasan Mahmud, also the joint general secretary of the ruling AL, said, "I use to visit our party office regularly. I don't know about his membership at any sub-committee of the Awami League."

Talking to The Daily Star, AL Joint General Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim said Shahed has no involvement with the party. "Shahed doesn't hold any executive posts of any committees -- from central to grassroots level."

This newspaper has, however, obtained a copy of the list of the committee members. The committee is headed by ex-ambassador Muhammad Jamil. Shahed's name is mentioned there.

Contacted, AL leader and Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) President Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin termed the MoU with Regent Hospital "shameful".

"It was not ethical and the health ministry can't make such deals with any hospital without checking documents. The health ministry can't do it," he said, adding that the image of the party and the government was being tarnished due to such activities.

Referring to the presence of Swachip leaders at the signing ceremony, Jalal said they could not avoid their responsibility.

Former AL health affairs secretary Badruzzaman Bhuiyan said checking documents thoroughly was mandatory before signing any agreement.

"I don't know why the agreement was made without a proper scanning on such a sensitive issue," he said.

Without naming anyone, Badruzzaman said, "The presence of a third party during a government's MoU signing ceremony naturally raises some questions."

Our Sathkhira correspondent adds: Shahed was born to Sirajul Karim and Safia Karim in Kaman Nagar area of the district headquarters.

Safia was the former general secretary of Mohila Awami League, the women's wing of the AL, in the district. Shahed studied in Sathkhira up to class nine before moving to Dhaka where he passed SSC from Rifles Public School and College.

They had a shop in Sathkhira, but the family permanently moved to Dhaka after Safia died.

branches immediately.

MORE ARREST

Rab yesterday arrested Shahed's associate Tariqul Islam Shibli from Nakhalpara and seized some documents this morning, said Sujoy Sarker, assistant director of Rab's Legal and Media wing.

With Tariqul, Rab so far arrested nine persons in this connection. Seven of the eight others, who are Regent Hospitals staffers arrested during a drive on Monday, have been placed on a five-day remand. One arrestee is underage.

Lt Col Ashique Billah of Rab said they also had picked up Shahed's brother-in-law on Wednesday night for questioning. "As he was not found involved with the Regent hospitals and the Covid-19 certificate scam, we released him [yesterday]."

During this time, some 15,632 samples were tested in the 74 labs across the country.

Since January 21, a total of 9,04,784 samples were tested for the virus. Of them, 19.40 percent were tested positive.

Of all confirmed cases, 48.17 percent have recovered, including yesterday's 3,706 positive cases, while around 1.28 percent died as of yesterday.

Of all deceased, 1,770 (79.09) were males and 468 (20.91 percent) were females.

Of the yesterday's deceased, 29 were males and 12 were females while 38 of them died in hospitals and three died in their homes.

Fourteen of them were from Chattogram, six from Khulna, two from Rajshahi, two from Mymensingh, two from Sylhet and three were from Rangpur division.

Of all deceased, more than 50 percent were from Dhaka division.

One of the yesterday's deceased was aged under 10 years while one was between 11 and 20, two between 31 and 40, three between 41 and 50, 11 between 51 and 60, 12 between 61 and 70, nine within 71 and 80 and two were between 81 and 90 years old.

Of all deceased, 44.19 percent were above 60 years old and 29.04 percent were aged between 51 and 60.

A total of 536 patients were released from these hospitals in the 24 hours before yesterday and 879 people were put under isolation during this period.

Drives on to arrest Shahed

FROM PAGE 1

Issuing the order, Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit of the BB also sought information on the accounts of Shahed and that of the persons or organisations linked to him, if found any.

Rab on Tuesday night filed a case against Shahed and 16 staffers of Regent Group and Regent Hospital after a mobile court found proof that the hospital authorities issued fake Covid-19 certificates and charged patients for test and treatment, violating an agreement with the government.

The mobile court led by Executive Magistrate Sarwoor Alam sealed off Regent Group head office and two branches of Regent Hospital in Uttara and Mirpur.

According to Rab, the hospital

authorities so far issued more than 10,000 Covid-19 test reports.

Around 4,200 of the samples were tested in different government labs. They threw away rest, prepared fake reports and gave those to patients without testing.

The hospital authorities took Tk 3,500 for each test, meaning they embezzled more than Tk 3.5 crore, despite having agreement with the government to conduct tests and provide Covid-19 treatment for free, said Executive Magistrate Sarwoor Alam.

Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Health Services, which reached a deal with Regent for Covid-19 treatment though its licence expired in 2014 and was never renewed, has asked the hospital authorities to shut down its

branches immediately.

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The PM said her government allocated Tk 5,000 crore to pay the dues of the jute mill workers.

"The workers will be given 50 percent of their dues in cash, while the rest will be paid as saving certificate so that they can get a handsome amount of money from the interest [of the certificates] in every three months," she said.

She added that the government could

Govt is blamed