

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 Roingya fled to Bangladesh.

Speakers said with a plethora of discriminatory rules, famine like

conditions prevail in northern Rakhine where Myanmar government continues to pursue its genocidal policies against the Rohingya in violation of the explicit order of the International Court of Justice to protect the Rohingya.

There are more than 1 million Rohingyas in Bangladesh, 300,000 in Saudi Arabia, 150,000 in Malaysia, 30,000 in India and tens of thousands more scattered across the world.

However, the refugee camps have very rudimentary facilities and under the Covid-19 situation available services have been drastically curtailed. Most Rohingyas in informal camps and shanties in urban settings live in crowded conditions with poor water and sanitation facilities. All these make them particularly vulnerable to Covid-19, they said.

Shakirah said hatred and xenophobia can never result in anything good, but love and solidarity can.

"We are the same human being like you and need basic rights as you enjoy. Please don't hate us. We don't want to be burden. Allow us to work, study and stand by us. We will surely return home," she said.

Free Rohingya Coalition Coordinator Nay San Lwin from Germany said the UN is failing to ensure Rohingya rights in Bangladesh. The refugees are somehow surviving, but they have limited scope for education and work.

The foreign investors in Myanmar should create pressure if Myanmar does not stop genocidal policies and practices against Rohingyas in Rakhine state, he said. "Once the citizenship is guaranteed, we are repatriated to our original villages, Rohingya identity is recognized, we will definitely return to Rakhine."

RMMRU Executive Director Prof CR Abrar said any hatred and xenophobia must end, including by media, and that none should be left behind as the UN works for Sustainable Development Goals.

He also called for reparation from Myanmar to the host countries that are bearing the cost for sheltering Rohingyas and a strong global stance to make sure Myanmar enforces ICJ order to stop Rohingya genocide.

Chapainawabganj, Kushtia, Sherpur, Bagerhat, Barguna, Chuadanga, Bhola, Magura, and Nilphamari, 100-bed Children Hospital in Rangpur, and Government Employee Hospital in Dhaka.

MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital has currently a liquid oxygen tank with a capacity of 10 kilolitres, which will be increased to 20 kilolitres.

WORKS FOR 21 MORE TO START SOON

The health ministry on July 1 directed the Health Engineering Department (HED) to install central oxygen line and liquid oxygen tank in 23 public hospitals by following the Direct Procurement Method.

However, the HED will install the system in 21 hospitals as works for two others have already been started by other government agencies, Abdul Hamid, superintendent engineer (electrical) of HED, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We have already started works in two hospitals in Narayanganj and Cumilla. We hope we will be able to complete installation of centralised oxygen supply system in seven hospitals before the Eid-ul-Azha," Hamid said.

Works in other hospitals will also start before the Eid, likely to be celebrated on July 1, but it would take some more time, he added.

Hamid said setting up a centralised oxygen supply system costs around Tk 3.25 crore for each 100-bed hospital. The cost is Tk 4.25 crore for each 250-bed hospital.

WB TO FINANCE 30 MORE HOSPITALS

Meanwhile, centralised oxygen supply system would be installed in 30 more public hospitals under the Covid-19 Emergency Preparedness and Response Project funded by World Bank, health ministry officials said.

"Unicef will implement the project and the procurement process in this regard is underway," a health ministry official said wishing not to be named.

action.

"The health department was inactive when they should have played an active role," he said, adding that a lack of coordination in health ministry's activities has been evident since the beginning of the outbreak.

Pointing to the Regent Hospital scam, GM Quader questioned how a hospital that didn't have any facilities to test Covid-19 and treat Covid-19 patients got approval from the respective authorities of the health department.

Lambasting Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), GM Quader asked what they did to monitor the activities of Regent and other hospitals after giving them permission to test Covid-19 and treat Covid-19 patients.

"So far, we know, they [the DGHS] didn't take any timely actions against the misdeeds and corruption [of Regent Hospital] in the name of providing health services," he also said.



Maintaining physical distance, people receive rice and other relief materials, distributed by B&B 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

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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 embezzling 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 Sarwardy, Bir Bikrom, gave some interesting information about Shahed in a Facebook post.

According to the post, Shahed introduces himself as Major Iftekar Ahmed Chowdhury, Colonel Iftekar 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. Sarwardy mentioned the number of the card as 269261714575.

Contacted, Sarwardy, 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 Sarwardy'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

examinees 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. But 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 a 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

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 Sarwoer 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

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 talk-shows, 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 Jamir. 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 Badiuzzaman 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, Badiuzzaman said, "The presence of a third party during a government's MoU signing ceremony naturally raises some questions."

Our Satkhira 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 Satkhira up to class nine before moving to Dhaka where he passed SSC from Rifles Public School and College.

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

branches immediately.

MORE ARREST

Rab yesterday arrested Shahed's associate Tariqul Islam Shibli from Nakhla para 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]."

FAKE COVID REPORT

Private clinic owner held in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Less than a day after the Regent Hospital's scam of came to surface, law enforcers on Wednesday arrested the owner of a private clinic in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila on charge of issuing fake Covid-19 certificates.

A Pabna court yesterday sent Abdul Wahab Rana, owner of Rooppur Medicare Clinic, to jail.

Earlier, acting on a tip-off, police arrested him from the clinic and recovered several fake test reports.

The clinic started collecting samples from suspected Covid patients after Eid-ul-Fitr holiday as the demand for coronavirus testing suddenly surged in the area, said Sheikh Nasir Uddin, officer-in-charge of Ishwardi Police Station.

It is because the authorities of nearby Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant made Covid-19 test mandatory for their workers and staffers before joining work, he said.

"They used to provide reports with a signature of one Abu Sayeed, chairman of Brammanbaria Medical College and Hospital," OC Nasir said.

The Daily Star could not independently verify if the signature was faked too.

MP Shahid

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The Ministry of Interior said it was circulated in some social media that the Bangladeshi accused obtained Kuwaiti citizenship, knowing that he resides in the country according to the Aliens Residence Law.

"What was circulated about obtaining Kuwaiti citizenship [by Shahid Islam Papul] is incorrect," it said.

The administration called on all media outlets to be accurate in running news, saying that its doors are open round-the-clock to respond to any enquiries related to security affairs.

Shahid, lawmaker from Laxmipur-2, is the managing director and chief executive officer of Marafe Kuwaitia Group. He was arrested by Kuwaiti CID on June 6 on charges of human trafficking, money laundering, and bribery.

During quizzing by Kuwait's Public Prosecution, he confessed to bribing Kuwaiti officials millions of dollars for getting job contracts for foreign workers, mostly Bangladeshis.

Workers alleged they had to pay Tk 7-9 lakh each for jobs in Kuwait, but were paid lower than that was contracted for and even left jobless. Some Kuwaiti officials have also been detained in connection with the case.

Coronavirus

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Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

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.

Bangladesh has to pay

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Earlier On Wednesday, Italian authorities did not allow 125 Bangladeshi passengers to enter the country.

Several passengers were tested positive for Covid-19 after they landed in different countries, although they had documents certifying they had tested negative for the virus, he said.

"Several countries have banned landing of flights carrying Bangladeshi passengers in their countries. It can be said that we are on the verge of becoming alone in this world," said the deputy opposition leader.

He said the health ministry got more than three and a half months after the first Covid-19 case was detected in China, but they didn't do anything remarkable during this time to increase health care facilities and tackle the virus.

He said reducing the death from coronavirus would have been possible had the health department taken timely

Govt is blamed despite catching the corrupt: PM

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organisations. Who is doing how much work now?" Hasina asked, adding that it was easy to criticise the government and find flaws in the budget staying at home.

In her around one-hour speech, the PM said the military dictators polluted the society by destroying people's character for a long to stay their power after 1975.

"They taught the people how to resort to corruption, earning black money and defaulting loans, and overall, they made the society polluted to be in power after grasping it illegally."

Hasina said in the past, people used to lead their lives maintaining ideology, but the military dictators destroyed people's character for a long time to make their power unchallenged.

"After coming to power," Hasina said, "The Awami League government has been taking actions against those involved in corruption and irregularities irrespective of their political affiliations. It is not a big matter [for us] who

belongs to what party."

The PM said, "We caught the corrupt people and thieves."

The government is being blamed despite catching the corrupt, Hasina said.

"In the past, corruption turned into policy and irregularities turned into rules. But after assuming power, the Awami League government has been making an effort to make these irregularities corrected and this effort will continue," Hasina said amid thumping of desks by the treasury bench lawmakers.

BUDGET

About the national budget for fiscal 2020-21, the PM said, "We know there is a question whether we can implement the budget fully because of this coronavirus If the situation turns good soon, we'll be able to implement it. If this situation continues throughout the world, we may not reach our target, but we placed the budget so that our economic activities continue."

She added that the government could

place the budget when many developed countries failed amid the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic.

JUTE MILLS

Pointing to the shutdown of state-run jute mills, Hasina said those mills would be reopened after modernising them to catch the international market of jute as the existing machinery of the mills was old.

"It was not possible to make profits running these old mills set up in 1960s and 1970s. An industry cannot run where the government have to pay salaries of 25,000 permanent workers and other temporary workers for years," she added.

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.

The PM said the interested workers

would be given training on the latest technology so that the skilled workers could get jobs when the jute mills would be reopened.

Jute products are an alternative to getting relief from synthetic products to prevent environment pollution, she said.

"We've taken this step [modernising the mills] so that we can catch the international market of jute," added Hasina.

SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Mentioning that many people lost their jobs due to the pandemic, Hasina said her government would increase the humanitarian assistance and expand the coverage of the social safety net programmes.

She added that the government announced 19 stimulus packages so that every people could continue running their economic activities.

The PM urged all to follow the health guidelines properly and do not get panicked.