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REFUGEE RELOCATION

Don't undermine or misinterpret genuine efforts

Govt tells UN, int'l community, hopes they will join the process

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The government has urged all not to undermine or misinterpret its genuine efforts to improve the lives of Rohingya refugees through their ongoing relocation to Bhasan Char.

It relocated 1,642 Rohingyas to the island in the Bay of Bengal under Noakhali's Hatiya upazila yesterday.

The UN said that it has limited information and has not been involved in the relocation exercise, while some rights groups questioned the transparency of the relocation process and the extent to which the refugees' relocation is voluntary.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a statement yesterday said the government's position on the relocation has always been transparent and it is being done entirely on a voluntary basis. Accordingly, Rohingya representatives undertook a "go and see" visit to Bhasan Char to assess the facilities and make an independent, informed choice.

"We hope that the international community and the United Nations, as per their mandate, will be involved in the process very soon," said the statement.

"The relocation is on a fully voluntary basis," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told The Daily Star on Thursday, questioning the motives of those who he said enjoy various privileges, including high per diems while they work in Cox's Bazar's Rohingya camps.

The relocation is part of the government's plan to eventually relocate 100,000 of nearly a million Rohingyas from Cox's Bazar, where they have been living in crowded camps after fleeing persecution in Myanmar's Rakhine state over the years.

The foreign ministry statement also said a number of NGOs and journalists visited the island, adding that all expressed satisfaction about it. More importantly, the relocation was preceded by several rounds of discussions, based on the queries of the UN.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



A group of Rohingyas enters a field in front of a warehouse in Noakhali's Bhasan Char yesterday to attend a special prayer to mark their arrival on the island. **Bottom left**, Rohingyas arrive at Patenga ghat-15 in Chattogram city. **Bottom right**, forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals onboard a Navy ship leave the port city for Bhasan Char. A total of 1,642 Rohingyas reached the island yesterday in the first phase of relocation of refugees from Cox's Bazar.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA, RAJIB RAIHAN



New homes, new hope for Rohingyas

First batch of 1,642 refugees sheltered at govt-built housing facilities in Bhasan Char

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA from Bhasan Char

Mahmuda Khatun's desire for peace and comfort is what made her leave the congested Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar for Bhasan Char on Thursday.

And as she reached the island yesterday noon, she was elated to see the facilities there.

"It seems there will be no more struggle and sufferings here," Mahmuda, 60, said while talking to The Daily Star.

The mother of four along with 10 others of her family are among the several lakh Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh and took refuge in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar following a brutal crackdown in their homeland Myanmar in 2017.

"At the camp, all of our family members used to live in a small hut with a tarpaulin over our head. We would get drenched on rainy days and had to endure unbearable heat in summer," she said.

"We couldn't bathe properly... But here [in Bhasan Char], we have a building to live in with other facilities that I believe will give us comfort and peace... That's why I decided to come here," she added.

Like her, many other Rohingyas, after arriving on the island, said they chose to move there for safety and comfort. They made the decision after seeing pictures and videos of the facilities being built under

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

13 killed in two road accidents

Deceased in Manikganj crash include six of a family

STAR REPORT

At least 13 people, including six members of a family, were killed and 10 others injured in road accidents in two districts yesterday.

In Manikganj, seven people died when a CNG-run auto-rickshaw collided with a bus in Mulkandi area of Daulatpur upazila.

Of them, six belong to the same family. They were passengers of the auto-rickshaw, said police.

The family is from Chashabhadra village in Tangail's Nagarpur. The village is situated in the bordering area of Manikganj and Tangail.

The family members were taking baby Radhe to a Manikganj hospital for treatment, said Rezaul Karim, officer-in-charge of Daulatpur Police Station.

The accident took place around 2:30pm when the Daulatpur-bound bus hit the auto-rickshaw coming from the opposite direction, said Tania Sultana, assistant superintendent of police (Shibalay circle) of Manikganj.

One died on the spot and the others passed away on the way to a hospital, said the police officer.

The victims are: three-and-a-half-year-old Radhe, her father Gobinda, 30, mother Babita, 25, uncle Ram Prashad,

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1
PHOTO ON PAGE 12

Weary of waiting in a long queue for about two and a half hours for Covid-19 test, ailing Supreme Court lawyer Tanvir Ahmed Siddique was about to fall to the ground outside the capital's Mugda General Hospital around 9:30am yesterday. His wife came to his aid minutes before he was lifted on a gurney and taken to the emergency department of the hospital. A rising number of people have been showing up at the medical facility for novel coronavirus testing in recent weeks.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

HEFAJAT MAYHEM 2013

Govt moves to resume probe

62 of 83 cases filed against more than 87,000 people pending for 7 years

SHARIFUL ISLAM and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

The government is resuming the long-stalled investigations into 62 cases filed over the mayhem by thousands of Hefajat activists in the capital and elsewhere in May 2013.

The move comes amid threats by Hefajat-e-Islam leaders of pulling down all sculptures in the country.

"The cases remained pending for quite a long time. We have to finish them," Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told The Daily Star on Thursday.

He added that it was a routine process and no special instruction had been issued.

The cases have to be disposed of, he said, adding that either a final report or charge sheet has to be submitted to the court concerned.

Hefajat Amir Junayed Babunagari has recently said a sculpture of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman planned for the capital's Dholaiakhal will be pulled down.

Multiple Hefajat leaders' comments about the sculpture of the Father of the Nation sparked strong protests by the ruling Awami League, its front organisations, several socio-cultural organisations and individuals.

On May 5, 2013, thousands of members of Hefajat, a Qawmi madrasa-based Islamist organisation, clashed with law enforcers and ruling Awami League men, turning Motijheel and Paltan areas into a battlefield.

They set fire to hundreds of shops, vehicles and police outposts and looted stores, including those with Islamic books. Clashes also took place in different other districts in the following couple of days.

A total of 83 cases were filed in seven districts including in Dhaka, accusing 3,416 named and 84,796 unnamed people. Many of the accused were from the Hefajat, the Jamaat-e-Islam and the BNP.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Antigen test begins in 10 dists today

24 more die, 2,252 infected in 24 hrs

MOUJUD AHMED SUJAN

Amid the significant rise in the number of new coronavirus cases, the health directorate is all set to start antigen-based rapid testing in 10 districts from today.

The districts are Brahmanbaria, Gaibandha, Jashore, Joypurhat, Madaripur, Meherpur, Munshiganj, Panchagarh, Patuakhali, and Sylhet.

Habibur Rahman, director of Management Information System (MIS) at the DGHS, said, "Initially, we are starting antigen-based rapid testing at nine district-level hospitals and at one medical college [Shaheed Shamsuddin Medical College Hospital in Sylhet] from Saturday. It will be expanded to other districts from the next week."

The antigen-based rapid testing is an easy-to-use molecular test -- alternative to the sophisticated RT-PCR tests -- which detects the presence of the virus itself, while the antibody

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Let's fight Covid-19 together, save lives

PM seeks urgent global action, collaboration, places proposal on equitable access to vaccines

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has sought "urgent global attention and further collaboration" to defeat the coronavirus pandemic, save lives and accelerate economic recovery.

She said Bangladesh stands ready to work with all in this global efforts.

Delivering her pre-recorded speech at the 31st special session of the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday evening

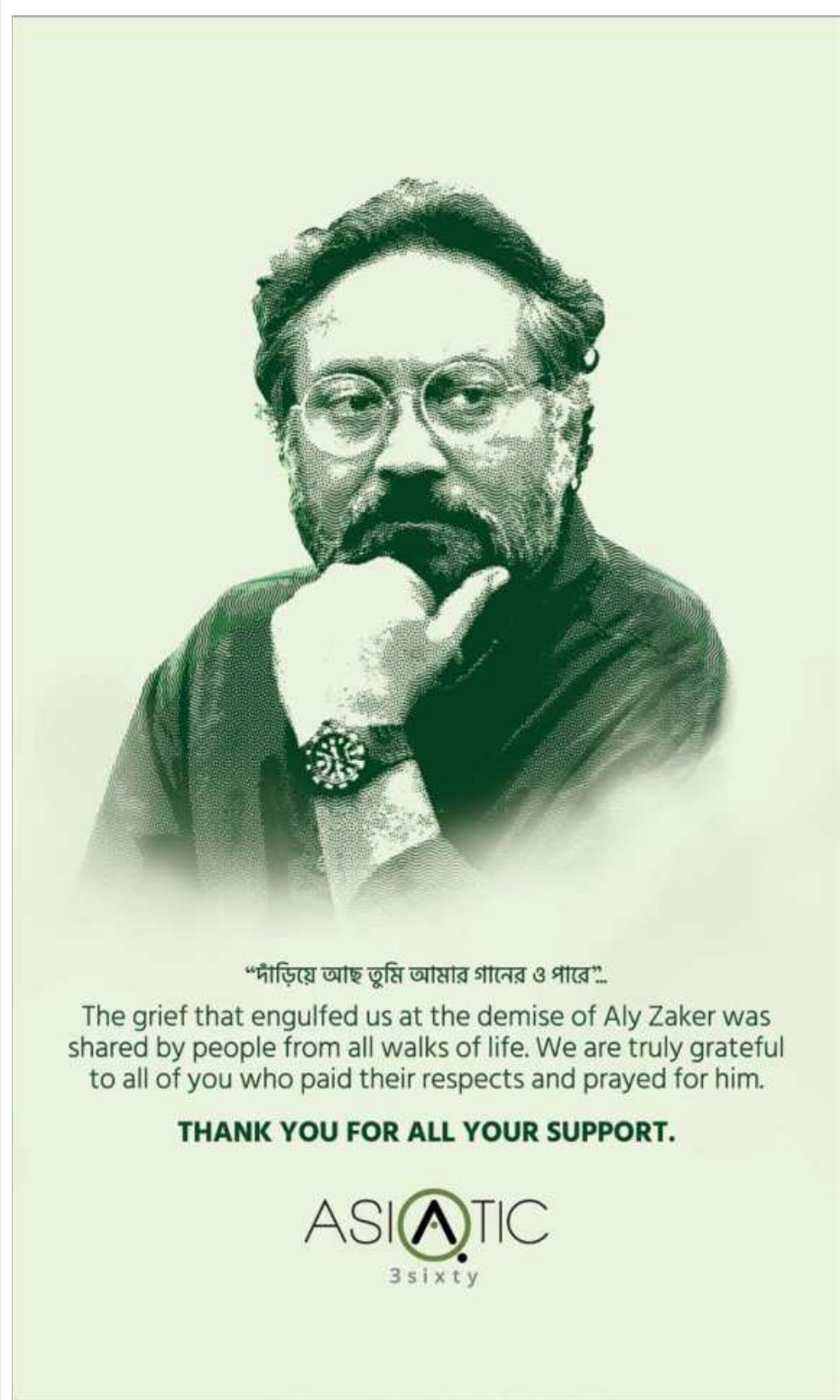


(New York time), the premier placed a three-point proposal.

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Chair Azerbaijan and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres convened the two-day special session in response to the pandemic.

The PM's three-point proposal is: ensuring universal and equitable access to quality Covid-19 vaccine, transferring technology to developing countries to manufacture it

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



"দাঁড়িয়ে আছি তুমি আমার গানের ও পারে.."

The grief that engulfed us at the demise of Aly Zaker was shared by people from all walks of life. We are truly grateful to all of you who paid their respects and prayed for him.

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT.

ASIATIC
3sixty

40th span of Padma bridge installed

One more left

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

The 40th span of the Padma bridge was installed yesterday, making 6km stretch of the main structure visible.

Only one more span is needed to complete the 6.15-kilometre long bridge, said officials concerned.

The span was installed over the pillars 11 and 12 within eight days of installation of the 39th span, said Dewan Abdul Kader, executive engineer and project manager (main bridge).

On Thursday, a specialised floating crane took the span to the designated poles from Mawa Construction Yard. Considering prevailing weather, the bridge officials decided to take the span a day ago. Then, the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5