

City





UNGA MOTION ON MYANMAR

Dhaka keeps off vote as it skirts reality

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has abstained from voting a UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution that failed to adequately reflect on the Rohingya crisis and their repatriation from Bangladesh.

also expressed disappointment at the resolution on the "Situation in Myanmar" that was adopted by the UNGA on Friday with 119 votes in favour, one against and 36 abstentions, said Bangladesh's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York in a statement yesterday.

At the UNGA, Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN Rabab Fatima said, "We share borders with Myanmar; we host over a million of their people. Therefore, stability in Myanmar is critically important for us in finding a durable solution for the million Rohingya we host, who are victims of atrocity crimes."

The Rohingyas fled the military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine State in 2017 to Bangladesh and despite several attempts, they did not volunteer to return saying the situation in Myanmar was not conducive and they had no guarantee of safety and citizenship.

A core group of member states including the US, EU, UK, and Canada initiated the resolution and finalised it in consultation with ASEAN members. It focused on the current democratic message.

crisis in the country, including the declaration of emergency, and detention of its political leader, calling for a restoration of democracy, and recognising the central role of ASEAN.

Rabab Fatima said as a democratic country, Bangladesh deeply cares about the restoration of constitutional order in Myanmar, but any resolution on Myanmar, whatever may be the context, would remain incomplete if it doesn't recognize the root causes of the Rohingya crisis and make concrete recommendations to address them.

"Failure of the international community to address those root causes, even after the ethnic cleansing in 2017, has led to a culture of impunity in Myanmar, and we can see that playing out now for other minorities as well."

Rabab Fatima said the resolution fails to recognise in its operative part, the urgent need for creating conditions for the safe, voluntary and sustainable return of the displaced minorities of Myanmar, particularly the Rohingyas.

"As such fundamental issues were not included in the resolution; therefore, Bangladesh decided to abstain.

Some key OIC members, including some ASEÁN and SAARC members, also abstained. Rabab Fatima, in her explanation of the vote, said the resolution fell short of expectations and would be sending a wrong

Another refugee influx

security forces in the Ayeyarwady river delta region, after villagers fought back against troops searching for weapons.

"The people of Myanmar have been left with no other choice...," said Dr Sasa, spokesperson for NUG, in a statement, adding that the constant threat of military raids, arrests, torture and killings had pushed communities to take up arms.

"It is just the beginning. The situation will spin out of control. Even if it is one man in a village, they will not just bow in front of these murderers. The whole country is on the road towards a civil war."

Maj Gen ANM Muniruzzaman president of Bangladesh Institute of Peace & Security Studies, said Myanmar is drifting towards a

powers like China and Russia, while they have economic interests, even though they want the restoration of democracy. The ASEAN, Japan, Singapore and India all are still soft

on Myanmar military, he said. On the other hand, it seems the people in Myanmar are quite brave and continuing to resist the military.

Delwar Hossain International Relations at Dhaka University said the situation in Myanmar may remain unstable for a long time, as the powerful military, which has the history of killing civilians notoriously, will do its best

Security analyst and former election commissioner Brig Gen (Retd) M Sakhawat Hussain said the NUG has yet to gain any international support, but western powers may eventually

Brig Gen (Retd) Shahedul Anam Khan said the events in Myanmar suggest that ethnic rebel groups will join forces to fight the military. There is no visible solution to the crisis with the international community taking no concrete actions till even yesterday.

He said conflicts in Myanmar, which have already displaced more than 100,000 people, can lead to an influx (of refugees). Already, several thousand Myanmar nationals have fled to India's Mizoram and Thailand.

Muniruzzaman said a civil war in a country also means trouble for its neighbours.

If we look at the Syrian crisis, all the neighbouring countries were affected. During Afghanistan's crisis, Pakistan has been in trouble with a huge influx of refugees."

There are risks of human trafficking through the sea, as discovered in 2015, he said, adding that major powers at play over Myanmar have serious security implications in the Bay of Bengal that could see suspicious maritime movement.

Bangladesh needs to have its Its military has the support of big strategies ready considering different powers like China and Russia, while the western powers have not cut off relations with Myanmar military as scenarios, Muniruzzaman said, adding, "We cannot afford to be caught off guard like in 2017, when an influx of Rohingya refugees took

> Shahedul fears ethnic minorities, who will be the main target of the Myanmar military, may cross the border into Bangladesh. He suggested strengthening surveillance on the

> Analysts think the progress towards implementation of cooperation mechanisms, like China-led Belt and Road Initiative or sub regional cooperation like Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar and India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, will be hampered due to the longterm instability in Myanmar.

> Also, the prospect of Rohingya repatriation, which has been hanging for about four years since some 750,000 Rohingyas fled a military crackdown, becomes slimmer as the internal security situation in Myanmai

> "However, we need to keep pushing for it. We need to work for the Rohingya genocide case at the International Court of Justice. We cannot lose sight of it," Delwar said.

Govt to allow antigen test

Antigen tests are immunoassays that detect the presence of a specific viral antigen, which implies current viral infection. They are relatively inexpensive and can be used at the point-of-care.

According to the DGHS letter, antigen testing is being conducted at government hospitals for Tk 100 each and it is now necessary to open the service in the private sector.

The cost of importing the testing kits will at mostbe Tk 500 each. Private hospitals and clinics can charge each patient a maximum of Tk 700, including service charges, the letter added.

On September 17 last year, the government permitted antigen-based rapid testing at public healthcare centres to scale up the testing facilities.

In the rapid antigen testing, a suspected patient will get the result within 30 minutes after the collection

of samples. Farid said permission for rapid antigen testing will not be given to all private hospitals and clinics, rather those who have RT-PCR testing facilities and belong to A and B categories will

get the permission. As of yesterday, a total of 334 government healthcare establishments had the rapid antigen testing facility, according to the DGHS.

For the detection of Covid-19, the RT-PCR test is considered the golden standard and it is widely used in Bangladesh. But it takes at least 24 hours to get results.

If the antigen test results of individuals showing Covid symptoms are negative, their samples will be tested again using RT-PCR machine for confirmation.

Rapid antigen tests are commonly used in the diagnosis of respiratory including viruses and respiratory syncytial virus, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Antigen tests for Sars-CoV-2 are generally less sensitive than viral tests that detect nucleic acid using reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR).

Rapid antigen tests work best when a person is tested in the early stages of infection with Sars-CoV-2, when viral load is generally highest, CDC says.

Health Contacted, Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said, "We have already permitted government hospitals to carry out antigen-based testing. To expand the facilities, we will give permission to private hospitals and clinics. We are now reviewing the costs and are hopeful of granting the permission soon.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina attending a virtual programme from the Gono Bhaban to hand over houses to landless, homeless people yesterday. Under the second phase of the Ashrayan-2 project, she handed over 53,340 homes to landless and homeless families.

Distant dream becomes reality

Beneficiaries overjoyed after PM hands over new houses to landless, homeless people under Ashrayan-2 project

ASHUTOSH SARKAR from Chattogram

Having gotten used to a hand-tomouth existence, and at times even worse, Birangona Shila Guha could never imagine that she would have her own a house with running water and electricity.

That farfetched dream became a reality yesterday for Shila and thousands of others like her as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina handed over 53,340 semi-pucca homes along with land ownership documents to homeless and landless families across the country under the second phase of the Ashrayan-2 project.

The PM attended the programme virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

"With our limited resources, we're trying to reach people at grassroots level for improving their lives and livelihoods. That's our aim," she said, reports UNB.

The highest 12,436 houses were given in Rangpur division, while 10,547 in Chattogram, 7,630 in Dhaka, 7,172 in Rajshahi, 7,153 in Barishal, 911 in Khulna, 2,512 in Mymensingh and 1,979 in Sylhet divisions.

Hasina said since assuming office, the government has been trying to help the ultra-poor in every way and the result is now visible. "The ultrapoor are gradually learning to stand on their feet."

Speaking at the programme, Shila Guha from Moulvibazar's beggar -- I can now switch the light prime minister.

on in my house every day. You [prime minister] have given me the house. I am very happy now. I pray for your long life and success from the bottom of my heart."

She requested the PM to visit her house and see her present happy state first hand. "We will cook rice and shatkora

curry if you visit," she told the premier through the video conference.

With a smile, the premier replied, "I will go to see you when I have the opportunity."

Taslima Khatun, a beneficiary of the project at Jhenaigati in Sherpur, said, "I am a divorced woman of 30. I was in a very miserable state with my son and daughter. You [prime minister] have given me a pucca house with water and electricity. I have planted trees in the yard. I send my children to school now.

"It is my humble request -- come to our area and see us all. I never imagined that I will be able to live in such a beautiful house. It is due to your sincere efforts," she said.

In reply, Hasina said, "It is my pleasure and success that all of you are now doing well."

This correspondent visited Boholpur village in Chattogram's Raujan upazila yesterday. Each of the 30 landless and homeless families were given pucca houses under the project.

beneficiaries expressed The Srimongol upazila, said, "I was a happiness and gratitude to the

Speaking at the programme, the PM said, "When one gets a home, the person is thrilled with joy and happiness, and that becomes visible on their smiling faces. I want nothing more than that." She also said the departed soul of

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will be in peace when every person of the country gets a home.

Hasina said the government has a goal of making Bangladesh free from poverty and it is doing everything to achieve that.

Local public representatives and public servants, on behalf of the prime minister, handed over the joint ownership documents of the two-decimal houses.

On January 23, 70,000 such houses along with documents were given to homeless and landless people under the first phase of the project in line with the PM's announcement that there would be no homeless and landless people in Bangladesh.

According to the lists prepared under the Ashrayan project, the number of homeless and landless families (under class-Ka) is 293,361 in the country, while that of just homeless families (under class-Kha)

principal Ahmad Kaikaus, secretary to the PM, conducted the programme and made a powerpoint presentation.

RELATED STORY ON PAGE 5

COVID VACCINE

Problem over its export to Bangladesh to be solved soon

Hopes Indian envoy

UNB, Dhaka

India is boosting its production of Covid-19 vaccine, but there is no word yet when it can resume its export of the jabs to Bangladesh, the country's high commissioner to Bangladesh said yesterday.

"We hope the problem will be resolved soon," High Commissioner Vikram Doraiswami told reporters after a meeting with Jubo League Chairman Sheikh Fazle Shams Parash at the central office of Awami League.

The Indian envoy said, "We are increasing corona vaccine production. The corona situation in India is still at a dangerous stage. So, we are not yet able to say the exact time of giving corona vaccine to Bangladesh."

Parash recalled India's crucial help during the 1971 Liberation War and said India has always been by SEE PAGE 12 COL 6

Teesta likely to swell later this month

Southeastern region braces for flashflood

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Water Development Board yesterday forecast a possible flood due to the swelling of the Teesta caused by heavy rainfall in upstream

Meanwhile, flash floods in Cox's Bazar and the Bandarbans have also been forecast, as monsoon has begun full-fledged across the country.

Teknaf, Ukhiya, Ramu, Maheshkhali, Kutubdia and some places in Bandarban could be affected due to this flash flood, warns the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) in a bulletin published on its official website.

"There is no chance of heavy flood this month. But in the first week of July, there will be a flood in the Brahmaputra basin," Arifuzzaman Bhuiyan, executive engineer of the FFWC, told The Daily Star.

The bulletin issued yesterday said there was 114mm of rainfall in Bandarban's Lama upazila in 24 hours

SEE PAGE 12 COL 6

Rights custodian not doing it right

its own accord. Similarly, ASK found that in 2019, seven out of eight cases of custodial death remained unresolved. Not one of the eight complaints of custodial torture were disposed of, and only one of the 11 extrajudicial killing complaints was resolved.

None of the seven complaints of death in custody filed in 2018 were disposed of.

Resolving a case" is also loosely defined by the NHRC, the ASK report

"In most cases, the Commission classified a case as resolved when the Government replied that no evidence was found of any involvement of the law enforcement agencies into human rights violations or that the matter is still under investigation. Only in a handful of cases, the authorities state that steps had been taken against those responsible," notes the report.

"In most cases, the Commission

only takes nominal measures." NHRC measures can include issuing a public statement, sending notices to a relevant ministry and reminding them to address human rights violations.

"I think they [ASK] brought out the truth. The National Human Rights Commission has an inherent weakness. In its statute, it says that they are not legally mandated to investigate anything related to the disciplined forces," said Prof Dr Mizanur Rahman, who was its chairperson from 2010 to

"In India, the human rights commission can at least investigate the police forces. But here, other than writing letters to the home ministry, we cannot even do anything about the police, or even investigate.

According to the NHRC's own 2020 annual report, the commission approached the home ministry regarding 401 cases between 2012 and 2020, and received "satisfactory" responses in about of the cases.

32 cases

Current NHRC Chairperson Nasima Begum, however, said that the government is very responsive to the commission now.

"We have also approached the law

minister recommending that the law

They received absolute silence in

be amended to allow us to investigate the hospital the next day with serious the disciplined forces," said Nasima

On May 28, 2018, the NHRC even submitted a demi-official letter to the Home Minister, where it recommended, among other things, "that arrested persons should not be taken along during drug raids, and that if absolutely necessary, then an executive magistrate is also asked to accompany them; that if an unwanted death does take place, an investigation must be ensured through the executive magistrate and responsible persons

must be brought to book." However, it did not follow up on whether their directives are being

followed, noted the report. Former NHRC chairperson Kazi Reazul Hoque, who served from August 2016 to July 2019, was the one

who sent that recommendation. "We used to send 30 to 40 reminders for a response but to no end. We repeatedly sent letters because that is all we could do legally. We can approach the President regarding any complaint, and twice we took

advantage of that. "Following that, the response rate of the ministries periodically improved," said Reazul.

Dr Mizanur said that sometimes they were even able to identify the exact perpetrator but found the ministry unresponsive.

"When we asked the home ministry to clarify how a member of a law enforcement agency is involved in human rights violations, they hardly ever responded. Often they were just sent back to their mother forces, the disciplined unit they came from," he

The death of the visually impaired general secretary of the Rangamati Naniyarchar branch of the Pahari Chhatra Parishad Rumel Chakma is an exemplary case where the NHRC's involvement was absolutely nominal, the report claimed.

According to submitted to the NHRC by Rumel Chakma's father, Rumel was allegedly tortured to death by security forces in Rangamati.

The family claimed that Rumel was picked up on April 5, 2017, and handed over to the police in the evening. He was later admitted to injuries and died on April 19, 2017 while undergoing treatment.

"The Commission did not take any immediate action on the matter. After Rumel's death on April 24, the Commission issued a statement expressing that the death of an innocent person through inhumane torture was the ultimate violation of human rights.

"The Commission formed an investigation committee. In the investigation committee's report, the Commission concluded: 'If a person dies while under the supervision of the law enforcement agency, then his responsibility cannot be avoided by those involved.

"On this matter, the Commission did not take any further steps," stated

Dr Mizanur said that during his tenure when he could not legally investigate, he used to send factfinding missions. "Sometimes we

were successful, mostly we were not." The NHRC, however, is empowered

to do more -- it just chose not to. For example, even though the commission is legally allowed to direct the government to compensate victims, and even sue the government if it does not comply, it did not implement this power until September 14, 2020, and that too for a case that happened long back.

Khadija Akhter, a teenage domestic worker, was brutally tortured by her employers at Mirpur in Dhaka in

"In March 2019, the High Court Division of the Supreme Court noted that the Commission had failed to exercise its power in the case of the Khadija Akter," stated the report. The verdict noted that the NHRC did little else except sending letters to the home

Seven years after the incident, and for the first time in the NHRC's history, it recommended that the government compensate the victim, said the report.

Such initiative was a rare sight, the report observed. "The Commission should have extended a helping hand in recovering the compensation of all such victims.'

The ASK report also opined that the NHRC is leaning towards the ruling

party, and as evidence, they pointed out its investigation into the gang rape of a housewife in Noakhali's Subarnachar during the last general

elections

The NHRC said that there was no link between the election and the rape, while human rights bodies and journalists found that the rapist was directly present at a polling centre as

"The Subarnachar report by NHRC was nonsense. We expect better from the NHRC," said Dr Mizanur.

LACK OF MANPOWER The report found that the NHRC historically been woefully has

understaffed. Although an organogram of 93 staff was approved during the formation of the commission, the body initially had only 28 staff, out of which 16 were associate staff. Of the remaining 12, four were working on deputation from the government according to the

NHRC, Annual Report 2010. At that point, there were only eight members to conduct the fact-finding

of the human rights violations. It was only in 2018, that the Ministry of Public Administration agreed to appoint 40 people, including 19 officers -- however, employees at the Commission said that the pandemic

put that process on hold. According to its 2020 annual report, the NHRC is staffed by 48 people. "In reality, the Commission cannot accept and resolve all the complaints it gets because of an acute lack of manpower," the annual report

While the Dhaka office tottered under its heavy caseload, district offices are even worse off.

"The existing regional offices have only a staff member or two. The Cox's Bazar office has only one staff member who is the head of both the offices in Cox's Bazar and Rangamati.

"None of the regional offices have their own vehicle, although the office in Cox's Bazar works with the Rohingya community, and it takes about two hours to drive from the city to Cox's Bazar," states the ASK report.

In May 2017, nearly 10 years after the formation of the NHRC, it got its first panel lawyers. Currently, the commission has 153 panel lawyers in 63 districts of the country.