

Will Rohingya repatriation ever happen?



BULBUL SIDDIQI

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"I can see my homeland when I gaze upon the distant hills from the top of a hill where I live in the refugee camp. I want to return to my home. Home is where I can breathe, and I can feel the smell of my country. You cannot call this a life; it's just surviving."

THIS is what a middle-aged Rohingya man, living at a makeshift camp in Cox's Bazar, who crossed over to Bangladesh during the 2017 exodus of Rohingyas fleeing military persecution in Rakhine, Myanmar, said when I asked him how he was. It is easy enough to see the desperation of these displaced people to return to their homeland, as well as the frustration because they are not able to. Every time I visit the Rohingya refugee camp for my research, I come across people who have not yet given up hope of returning to their home in the Rakhine state. I even met a man who, having lived in a registered camp for 35 years, has not yet lost his hope to return to his homeland. He spent most of the golden time of his life struggling to survive in Bangladesh. He would be waiting till his death to return to Rakhine.

However, the harsh reality is that there remains a significant challenge for a dignified repatriation of the Rohingyas. Restrictions related to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the post-military coup situation in Myanmar have made their repatriation even more uncertain. One positive development is that the two parties have agreed to initiate a dialogue, and to this end a meeting was held virtually between Bangladesh and Myanmar on January 27, 2022. Verification of the Rohingyas sheltered in Bangladesh has started, which is a positive sign. A report published by *The Independent* on January 28, 2022 said that, so far, the Myanmar authorities have verified only 42,000 out of the 830,000 sets of biometric data of the Rohingyas



that Bangladesh has provided.

According to a report by Somoy TV on March 15, 2022, Myanmar has expressed interest to begin the repatriation process by taking in only 700 people. This shows the unwillingness and reluctance on Myanmar's part to accept the Rohingyas as their citizens. The denial of citizenship of the Rohingyas has been at the centre of the prolonged Rohingya crisis. The Myanmar authorities enacted the 1982 citizenship law that excluded the Rohingyas and denied them citizenship in Myanmar. The question now is: if the situation in the Rakhine state does not improve, and if they do not grant the citizenship rights of the Rohingyas and ensure their safety, would repatriating this tiny group of a huge displaced population bring any positive impact?

Another interesting recent development was the US formally determining that Myanmar's military had committed genocide. This long-awaited acknowledgement is another milestone in fighting for the rights of the Rohingyas. If Bangladesh can effectively use this opportunity to put pressure on Myanmar, the process of repatriation can be facilitated.

Repatriation in the context of the refugee crisis is a lengthy process—the situation with the Rohingyas is no

different. And previous attempts have not been successful in ensuring effective and voluntary repatriation. Several studies show that only a few initiatives of repatriation were successful. Besides, there is a claim of involuntary Rohingya repatriation between 1992 and 1997.

Given the complexities, the Rohingya refugees may end up in a situation of "Repatriation delayed, repatriation denied." Neither Bangladesh nor the Rohingya community would want this. However, if the world does not prioritise the Rohingya repatriation, the fate of this huge marginalised, displaced population would remain shrouded in uncertainty. Besides, the current global refugee situations, including the Afghan and the Ukraine crises, may shift the global attention away from the Rohingya crisis. If that happens, there would be a fear of a shortage of funding that may create significant challenges for managing and ensuring essential services to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. A report in *The Daily Star* titled "Funding

on decline, challenges up" on August 25, 2021 said that the decline in funding for the Rohingyas in Bangladesh was leading to difficulties in providing education services, shrinking of income-generating activities for the refugees, rise in domestic violence, drug trades, and so on.

If the repatriation is delayed further, it would also bring challenges for Bangladesh to take any interim and mid-term measures to manage the Rohingya crisis. The delay in repatriation would also increase the sufferings of the Rohingyas living in the camps. The living conditions in the congested camp environment are not the same as their lives in their home. Home is where they can breathe. The lack of social cohesion between the host and the Rohingya communities is also evident, as my research suggests a growing dissatisfaction and declining sympathy among the host community towards the Rohingya refugees. Many locals in Cox's Bazar have raised the issue of price hikes in their neighbourhoods. Lower wage is another problem for the host community as many Rohingyas work outside the camp to earn extra cash at a lower rate. This is why many people from the host community prefer to hire a Rohingya instead of a local individual.

We may need to think about a few things as ways forward. A holistic approach has to be taken to continue the efforts in pursuing global and regional powers to keep pressure on Myanmar to repatriate its displaced citizens. The second one is to keep mobilising the funds and grants to ensure a dignified life for the Rohingyas in Bangladesh. The third is to hold regular dialogues with Myanmar to keep on the pressure. Besides, as for an interim measure, income-generating opportunities could be increased along with life skill training for the Rohingyas to improve their living standards, ensuring a dignified life in camps.

Finally, it is time to develop a comprehensive refugee management policy as Bangladesh has witnessed a series of refugee influxes from Myanmar over the years.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send us your letters to letters@thedailystar.net

Be humane, not blind

Most people abhor wars in which innocent lives are lost and people are maimed and injured. And so, all wars should be condemned.

Ever since Russia attacked Ukraine, western countries and commentators have been up in arms about it. My question to these people is, where were your sympathies when the US attacked Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Palestine, etc. where millions of people have been killed?

The death toll in Iraq and Afghanistan were much greater than in Ukraine. So why did these people vigorously support those invasions, if human lives really mattered so much to them? It is sickening to see them shed their crocodile tears when, at

the very least, they supported wars that led to the killings of millions of people—if not actively propagated and allowed for these killings.

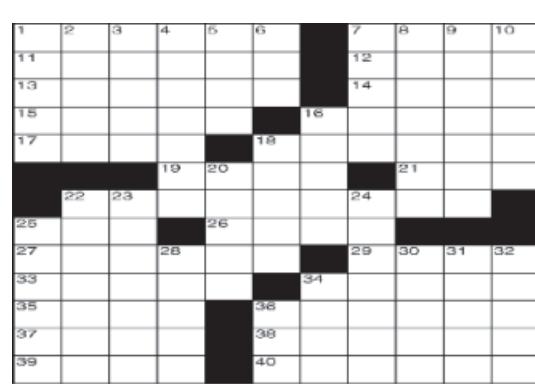
And what is worse is that they twist the truth and spread their propaganda by exploiting the most basic human emotion of other good-hearted people, to be sympathetic towards the sufferings of others. That is why, people should be humane and sympathise with others. But they should find the truth for themselves, instead of blindly following what they are told by known liars. That is what would be most beneficial for all.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Local Government Engineering Department
Office of the Upazila Engineer
Adarsha Sadar, Cumilla

Invitation for Tenders (Works) Limited Tendering Method (LTM)

Tender Notice: 10/2021-2022

Date: 27-03-2022

Memo No. 46.02.1967.000.14.99.073.21-254

1	Procuring entity & code	Upazila Engineer, Upazila: Adarsha Sadar, District: Cumilla.
2	Procuring entity district	Cumilla.
3	Invitation for	NCB
4	Procurement method	LTM
5	Source of funds	GOB
6	Development partners	N/A
7	Program name (code)	N/A
8	Tender publication date	27/03/2022
9	Tender last selling date: 11/04/2022	9. Tender last selling date: 11/04/2022
10	Tender closing date	12/04/2022
11	Tender opening date	12/04/2022
12	Tender opening date	Time: 3.00pm
13	Name & address of receiving tender documents	Office of the Upazila Engineer, LGED Upazila Adarsha Sadar, District: Cumilla.
14	Name & address of opening tender documents	Office of the Upazila Engineer, LGED Upazila Adarsha Sadar, District: Cumilla.
15	Place of pre-tender meeting	Office of the Upazila Engineer, LGED Upazila Adarsha Sadar, District: Cumilla.
16	Date and time	05/04/2022 12.00pm
17	Eligibility of tenderer	As described in Tender Document.
	Description of work	
1	Tender Package No.	Name of work
		Estimated cost (Taka)
		Tender security (Taka)
		Price of tender document (Taka)
		Completion time (month)
		Tender validity period
1	UPCR/Kalirbazar/CUM-S/2021-22/01	Repair of Kalir Bazar Bazar Union Parishad Complex Bhaban under Adarsha Sadar Upazila Dist: Cumilla.
2	UPCR/Durgapur(S)/CUM-S/2021-22/02	Repair & Maintenance of Durgapur South Union Parishad under Adarsha Sadar Upazila Dist: Cumilla.
3	UPCR/Pachthobi/CUM-S/2021-22/03	Repair of Pachthobi Union Parishad Complex Bhaban under Adarsha Sadar Upazila Dist: Cumilla.
4	UPCR/Jagannathpur/CUM-S/2021-22/04	Repair of Jagannathpur Union Parishad Complex Bhaban under Adarsha Sadar Upazila Dist: Cumilla..
18	Name of official inviting tender	Md. Saiful Islam.
19	Designation of official inviting tender	Upazila Engineer, LGED, Upazila: Adarsha Sadar, District: Cumilla.
20	Address of official inviting tender	Office of Upazila Engineer, LGED, Upazila: Adarsha Sadar, District: Cumilla.
21	Contact detail of official inviting tender	081-63449
	Email:	ue.cumilla-s@ged.gov.bd

Tender shall be valid for a period of 60 days after tender opening and must be accompanied by the tender securing specified above. Interested tenderers may obtain further information from the office of the undersigned and purchase the tender documents in cash from the places mentioned above. The tenderer or their authorized representatives are allowed to attend the opening of tenders. The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reasons whatsoever.

Md. Saiful Islam
Upazila Engineer
Local Government Engineering Department
Adarsha Sadar, Cumilla
ue.cumilla-s@ged.gov.bd