

Decline in Rohingya funds most worrying

World leaders must step up financial contributions to help them

It is disheartening to see that even after six years since they fled a brutal campaign by the Myanmar military, the future of the Rohingya refugees remains as uncertain as the day they arrived on these shores. The crisis has only grown since, with none of the options considered so far – their repatriation to Myanmar, legal integration into Bangladesh, or resettlement in a third country – seeming any closer to fruition. Bangladesh stands firm on repatriation – the most just option – as do the refugees. But until that happens, the priority is to ensure steady provision of assistance and support for the refugees and host communities.

Unfortunately, that is proving to be increasingly challenging. As per an estimate by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), this year, humanitarian organisations have appealed for \$876 million in aid for both Rohingya refugees and local communities. However, only 29 percent of the target had been achieved as of mid-year. The steep decline in funds is forcing humanitarian actors to “focus on the most critical and life-saving needs”, according to the UNHCR. It has, for the first time, resulted in the reduction of refugees’ food assistance, raising concerns about cascading dramatic consequences: malnutrition, school dropout, child marriage, child labour, gender-based violence, etc.

The timing of this couldn’t have been worse. It comes at a time when the refugees are facing a greater test of their resilience than ever before, with fires raging their shelters in March, a cyclone ripping through the camps in May, and monsoon rains and associated risks now endangering their lives. While some of the challenges are natural, they do add to the overall crisis. Unfortunately, the larger issues surrounding repatriation and prosecution of the Rohingya genocide have been politicised so much that it has also affected funding prospects, with regional powers like China, India and even Russia showing little interest in providing funds, let alone matching the contributions of their Western counterparts, which could ease some of the immediate pressures.

This is deeply troubling. While the larger issues are being resolved – which, we hope, will be sooner than later – the importance of consistent financial support cannot be overemphasised. This is not just a matter of humanitarian assistance; it’s a matter of upholding human rights. We urge world leaders to step up their financial contributions as well as diplomatic efforts to find a sustainable resolution to this crisis.

Why are there so few nurses?

Shortage of nurses is affecting the care of dengue patients

At a time when the dengue outbreak is taking lives every day and hospitals are getting overwhelmed with patients, we are again reminded of the acute shortage of doctors, nurses and other health workers in public hospitals. A report in this newspaper gives a grim picture of the dengue wards of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), the largest public hospital in the city. It is unthinkable that there are only four nurses per shift looking after 100 patients daily, with the numbers reaching 200 at times. It goes without saying that nurses are the ones who carry out follow-up instructions for doctors and have to be on constant alert for any changes in patients’ condition. A shortage as severe as this obviously affects the care and recovery of patients.

Even during regular times, our public hospitals do not have enough nurses or doctors, anaesthesiologists, surgeons, gynaecologists and other healthcare staff. This paper has reported innumerable times the manpower crisis in district public hospitals, where patients cannot get proper care and are often forced to go to private facilities where costs are often beyond their means.

In 2020, there were approximately 73,043 registered nurses while the estimated demand was for 3 lakh. We have nursing institutes but many nurses opt for the private health sector or overseas jobs where the pay is better. In recent years, the government has tried to attract more nurses by offering better pay and benefits, but clearly, it is not enough to ensure an adequate inflow of nurses in public hospitals.

The government, therefore, must strengthen nursing and midwifery education and increase the capacity of nursing institutes. Policymakers must review the curriculum, faculty and teaching methods, and where necessary, reform them so that the skills of nursing graduates match the needs of the health sector. Moreover, they must focus on recruiting more nurses, establishing more nursing colleges, and providing adequate incentives, financial and non-financial, to persuade them to join public hospitals so that patients are better served at times of health emergencies.

New Message

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Of river erosion and the people it displaces



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Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are ones forced to flee their homes due to war, armed conflict, ethnic/religious persecution, and various forms of natural disasters. Lately, the impacts of climate change have joined the list of displacers. IDPs live in their own countries as displaced and homeless, without crossing an international boundary. They are found to migrate internally for employment and livelihood.

Although often used interchangeably, IDPs are different from refugees in many respects. Refugees are those who fled their homes for another country and are unwilling to return due to the violation of their human rights and/or fear of torture and intimidation. There are also “economic” refugees, who leave their countries in desperation due to economic hardships and for a better life. While IDP is an internal and descriptive category, refugees receive protection under international law and can’t be forced to return home.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, by the end of 2022, there were around 108.4 million people worldwide who were forced to flee their homes. Of these, 62.5 million were IDPs. Bangladesh is currently placed 17th among countries with the largest numbers of IDPs. Many of the displacements in Bangladesh are

Close to 70 upazilas in the country are affected and/or liable to annual riverbank erosion, displacing hundreds of thousands every year. Many are continually displaced by bank erosion; Despite this, there is no specific Standard Operating Procedure for riverbank erosion and displacement responses.

owing to natural disasters such as flooding, river erosion, cyclones, and impacts of sea-level rise in coastal areas.

Between 2008 and 2014, as per estimates by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), close to five million people were displaced due to disasters in Bangladesh. Another study estimates that as many as 16 to 26 million people would likely be forced from their homes in the years between 2011 and



PHOTO: MARUF AREFIN NIM

Despite the bulk of IDPs being victims of erosion, there is very little support for these impoverished populations.

2050 due to climatic hazards, possibly leading to internal displacement and other forms of labour migration predominantly within the country.

In Bangladesh, the impact of all disasters such as floods, river erosion, and tropical cyclones are not the same. These differences matter in regard to preparedness, responses, and post-disaster rehabilitation. For instance, there is a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for district and local administrations during high floods, which often affect around one-third of the country, displacing – mostly temporarily – millions of people. The SOP requires the district administration concerned to undertake evacuation, provide temporary shelters, relief, and post-flood rehabilitation assistance, including agricultural recovery. There is also an array of cyclone preparedness methods such as early warnings, rescue, relief, and cyclone shelters for protection of the people and communities in coastal regions. As a result, there have been fewer reported deaths from natural disasters in recent times. Improved readiness and disaster response capacity have made floods less deadly. Both in the cases of floods and cyclones, most of the affected people are able to return home with assistance and

rehabilitation support.

But displacement due to river erosion is an entirely different story. Despite the fact that the bulk of IDPs are victims of erosion, there is very little attention and support for these impoverished populations. Just like flooding, erosion is an endemic and recurrent natural disaster. According to experts, close to 70 upazilas in

measures, including advance warning systems for potential erosion, training for increasing preparedness for loss reduction, recovery, resettlement, new livelihoods, and reformulation of land policies for alluvial and diluvial land to ensure access, and use of newly emerged char lands by former owners.

Needless to say, erosion victims

the country are affected and/or liable to annual riverbank erosion, displacing hundreds of thousands every year. Many are continually displaced by bank erosion; the extent and frequency of displacement at the individual and household levels are phenomenal. Despite this, there is no specific SOP for riverbank erosion and displacement responses. There is hardly any institutional support for erosion victims from national or local government agencies, compared to the response that flood and coastal cyclone victims get. Local government administrations rarely respond to or assist those displaced by erosion. And for the displaced populations, there are no homes to return to once those are devoured by the rivers.

The displaced households primarily rely on assistance from relatives and friends, and typically resettle within the local communities. Those who are unable to find a place resettle on available flood control embankments. Only a limited number of displaced households leave for the cities in search of livelihoods.

The extent of losses and damages caused by erosion displacement can be significantly reduced with an SOP dedicated to erosion displacement, resettlement, and rebuilding. Such an SOP should address socio-economic

and displaced households are on the margins of Bangladeshi society and are deprived of basic protection and assistance. They are dispossessed of their land resources and other property, and are unable to secure livelihoods for themselves. The SOP should help develop and strengthen the localised strategies of resilience and adaptive mechanisms for the socio-economic development of IDPs. The Disaster Management Bureau of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief should look into this urgently and extensively.

IDPs are one of the most vulnerable groups in the country. Bangladesh cannot afford to leave behind the IDPs in its journey to becoming a middle-income country. The government should put it high up on its agenda to prevent and manage internal displacement, protect those already displaced, collect data on the numbers and conditions of IDPs, support training on the rights of IDPs, and develop localised strategies for all kinds of climatic adaptation and development. This would require a comprehensive, IDP-specific legal instrument that affirms the rights of those who are internally displaced, while establishing minimum standards for the well-being of IDP communities.

Rising sea levels and the lessons to learn



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Bangladesh’s geographic location has given it a wealth of natural diversity while also making it vulnerable to many calamities. Floods, droughts, tides, coupled with rising sea levels, are typical throughout the year. The proximity of the Bay of Bengal to the country’s south is particularly concerning, as the negative impacts of rising waters are already apparent. Over the next few decades, millions could be displaced if the at-risk Sundarbans and heavily populated coastal areas become submerged. By 2100, there could be a 0.4- to 1.5-metre rise in sea levels, which presents Bangladesh’s islands with a possibility of going under.

In this situation, we may take lessons from strategies that other countries are using to combat this crisis. For example, due to its low elevation, the Netherlands is particularly susceptible to rising sea levels. So, its

government has put in place measures such as creating greater space for rivers to lessen the risk of flooding, strengthening river dikes, building coastal dikes and seawalls, and investing in environmentally friendly urban development. Bangladesh has formulated the Delta Plan 2100, drawing lessons from the Netherlands’ experiences.

Low-lying deltaic landscapes can be found in both Bangladesh and the Netherlands. However, Bangladesh does not have the financial, scientific, or technological resources to build raised sea fortifications. Furthermore, it is essential to incorporate adaptation measures for climate change into national and sectoral planning if these plans are to be in line with the nation’s overarching objectives for sustainable development. A thorough and strategic approach is required to defend against the recurrent floods and climatic

disasters Bangladesh faces.

Another example is Japan, whose resilient urban planning ideas could inspire Bangladesh’s ability to anticipate and respond to disasters. In addition, Costa Rica’s concentration on sustainable land management and reforestation provides insights into reducing the effects of climate change. These strategies demonstrate the

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viability of targeted measures to increase resilience against floods and climate disasters, even though each solution may need to be modified to fit Bangladesh’s context. The country needs to decide on how to cope with the challenge of sea-level rise, as farming and residential areas may become submerged. For instance, with climate change harming food production, researchers could develop a type of rice that can withstand flooding and salinity while providing a

higher yield. Additionally, houses can also act as shelters, so people do not have to go far from their homes when floods occur. Similar initiatives have already been undertaken by some local NGOs.

The government has made some progress in protecting people and infrastructure from rising sea levels. Bangladesh has submitted multiple national communications to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and has formulated a 100-year delta plan. Its adaptation plans include water, flood, and erosion management, ensuring climate-resilient livelihoods, and various Ashrayan projects. Among all these, constructing a barrage on Brahmaputra and the Gorai River Restoration Project are the most important. Besides, lead authors for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change include scientists from Bangladesh, who continue to conduct outstanding studies.

Many tactics can be used to reduce the risks of rising sea levels. But to use these, governments and communities must join hands and act quickly. At the same time, they must put effort into reducing greenhouse gas emissions to stop further global warming. The only way to save our planet and ensure a secure and sustainable future is by taking action urgently.