

POST-COUP MYANMAR Don't forget the sufferings of millions of people

UN calls on int'l community

AFP, United Nations

Millions of people in Myanmar "cannot afford for us to forget" their suffering, a UN official said Thursday, describing mounting hunger, mass displacement and safety concerns as the conflict between the junta and ethnic minority groups drags on.

The military's ouster of Aung San Suu Kyi's government in 2021 sparked renewed fighting with ethnic minority armed groups, as well as with pro-democracy "People's Defense Forces" (PDFs) in areas previously untouched by decades of conflict in Myanmar.

"As the conflict continues to escalate, as humanitarian needs intensify, and with the monsoon season just around the corner, time is of essence for the people of Myanmar," UN official Lisa Doughten told the Security Council, on behalf of humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths.

"They cannot afford for us to forget. They cannot afford to wait. They need the support of the international community now to help them survive in this time of fear and turmoil."

According to the United Nations, 2.8 million people are displaced in Myanmar, 90 percent of them since the junta took power in 2021. That number has only risen as fighting has intensified in the Southeast Asian nation since last autumn.

In October, an alliance of ethnic minority fighters launched a surprise offensive in northern Shan state, capturing territory and taking control of lucrative trade routes to China.

Across the country, residents "are living in daily fear for their lives," Doughten said — especially since the junta said in February it would enforce a military service law, allowing it to call up all men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27 for two years.

"Across Myanmar, hunger is mounting. In 2024, food insecurity is now affecting some 12.9 million people — nearly 25 percent of the population," the UN official added.

Khaled Khari, the UN assistant secretary general for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, said an end to the "military's campaign of violence and political repression" would be "a vital step."



Remembering St Joseph on its 70th anniversary

SALEH UZ ZAMAN

On a sunny afternoon in October 1993, my mother took me to visit the campus of St Joseph Higher Secondary School, nestled among large trees on a relatively quiet (at least back then) road of Asad Avenue in Mohammadpur.

The ploy was to get me interested in moving here, which, thank the stars, worked almost instantaneously.

It was impossible for an 8-year-old child not to be awed by the magnificent school building, huge



fields, a basketball court, a table tennis court with tables lined up, and a separate practice pitch for cricket.

A few months later, I would become a part of a wonderful legacy. For the next eight years, I would call this place my second home. In later years, it would become a part of an everlasting nostalgia.

St Joseph was founded with only four boys back in 1954, March 19 to be exact, in Narinda. In 1965, the school moved to its present campus, 97 Asad Avenue. The main building was designed by architect Robert Boughiey, renowned for his works — Kamalapur Railway Station, the National Museum, some of the residential halls in BUET (similarities between these halls and St Joseph are quite visible), and others.

Over the years, this educational institution became the stepping stone for numerous academics, corporate leaders, sportspersons, politicians, scientists, engineers and



PHOTOS COLLECTED

architects, medical professionals, musicians, artists, debaters, quizzers, filmmakers, journalists, and policymakers of local and global repute.

The Josephites, as the students had been monickered, have spread worldwide, forming one the most respected alumni base in the country. Their sense of achievement started from the school; the trophy cabinet is a staunch testament to that.

The institution has gradually branched out with its curriculum and established its co-ed branch in recent years. Throughout its history, it has promoted a superb extra-curricular and sports programme, hosted arguably the best school-level laboratories and library, and was guided by some of the best educators in the country.

The last time I returned to the campus was in March 2021, as I had to pick up my SSC certificate to submit to my new workplace (I still have no idea why I did not collect it in 20 years).

After picking the piece of paper, I wandered around revisiting the old classrooms, fields, the Brother's House (This is where the 'Brothers of the Congregation of Holy Cross' live) and lastly spending some time sitting in the "Chess Room" (Yes,

there is a Chess Room. The first two Bangladeshi chess grandmasters are Josephites). This was one of the places where some of us would hang out the most, carrying out mischiefs. After decades, I felt like a child again.

That kid in me still pines to go back one more time to stroll on the basketball court. He pines to hear Mr Raihan Ahmed call him "Lallu Bachchu" one more time. It would be amazing to see Ms Rehana smiling vivaciously after a nice poem read-out. Or, to witness old man Brother Donald Becker, donning his trademark green polo shirt re-enacting scenes from *Oliver Twist*. To be in one of the meetings that Mr Moinuddin Ahmed (affectionately known as Monti among the students) used to hold with the librarians.

On March 19, 2024, St Joseph celebrated its 70th anniversary.

Brother Nicholas Thielman, the last non-Bangladeshi headmaster of the school used to say, "St Joseph is not only a seat of learning; it's a way of life. It is a school that makes a difference."

Seventy years later, I'm sure every Josephite embodies that statement.

The writer is a former student of St Joseph Higher Secondary School, Class of 2002

Missing child's body found in ditch in Narayanganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

The body of a child, who went missing on Thursday in Araihaazar upazila of Narayanganj, was recovered from a ditch yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Sakib Sikder, 10, son of Dipu Sikder of Rupganj upazila.

On information, police recovered his body from a ditch next to his grandparents home Panchrukhi area of Araihaazar.

Araihaazar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Ahsan Ullah said the child was on a visit to his grandparents with his mother for the last two weeks.

On Thursday morning, the child went missing and his family members failed to find him. The next morning, locals saw a body floating in a ditch and informed police.

"Several injury marks were found on the child's body. Initially, it is suspected that he was murdered. However, the cause of death can be identified after getting the autopsy report."

The filing of a case is underway in this connection, OC added.

College teacher attacked with sharp weapon in Sirajganj

UNB, Sirajganj

A college teacher was critically injured after being attacked with a sharp weapon near his house in Jamtoil College Para area of Sirajganj's Kamarkhand upazila last morning.

Shafiqul Islam, 58, of the upazila, is an assistant professor in the history department at Chowbari Dr Salam Jahanara College.

According to the locals, Shafiqul Islam went to the pond behind his house to dump garbage in the morning.

At that time, some unidentified criminals cut his throat and left him injured.

Family members took him to Sirajganj Shaheed M Mansur Ali Medical College Hospital in critical condition.

Later, he was transferred to Dhaka for better treatment at noon.

On information, police visited the spot and recovered a blood-stained knife from the scene of the crime, said Md. Rezaul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kamarkhand Police Station.

A complaint was yet to be lodged in this connection, said the OC.

"We will learn more about the incident after an investigation."

Six killed

FROM PAGE 1

police reached the scene," said Zakir Hasan, superintendent of police in Feni.

He said they will take the next legal steps as per law.

Meanwhile, the railway authorities formed a five-member probe body headed by Chattogram Division Transport Officer Anisur Rahman to investigate the accident.

Station Master Mohammad Harun said the Chattogram-bound mail train left Feni Railway Station around 8:05am.

Ten minutes later, it crossed Fazilpur station and was heading towards Muhuriganj station.

When the truck got onto the level crossing, the train slammed into the truck, throwing it off the tracks.

The train had to be taken back to Fazilpur station for repairs. It later left the station for Chattogram around 11:45am.

Shab-e-Qadr tonight

FROM PAGE 1

Minister Sheikh Hasina greeted the country's people and the Muslim Ummah across the world on the occasion.

In separate messages, they prayed for continuous peace, progress, and prosperity of the country, the whole world, and the Muslim Ummah.

The president, in his message, said Lailatul Qadr is a holy night for all mankind, which is better than thousands of nights.

"The importance and significance of Lailatul Qadr are huge, as Almighty Allah revealed the holy Quran on this night. This night brings us the opportunity to gain the 'Neki' of more than thousands of months of worship in our temporary life," he said.

In her message, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that on this night of the month of fasting, Almighty Allah sent down the holy Quran to the world as a guide for mankind.

She said Almighty Allah has given a unique status to the night, while infusing mercy and blessings of Allah pour in on mankind on the night.

"Through worship on this holy night, we can gain nearness to Almighty Allah. We can achieve his infinite mercy, salvation, blessing and forgiveness," the premier added.

"On the occasion of the holy Lailatul Qadr, we pray to Almighty Allah to give us the grace to devote ourselves to the work of human welfare and nation-building by avoiding all kinds of injustice, conflict, violence, and superstition," she said.

Safety audit ignored

FROM PAGE 1

No proper safety audit was done on Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga Road, the first expressway of the country, he said.

On wider roads, motorists tend to drive faster and this increases crashes, he said.

Since the environment surrounding roads changes over time, safety audits on the existing roads should be done at reasonable intervals, he added.

EXPANSION WITHOUT SAFETY AUDIT

Currently, RHD is implementing at least 12 projects to turn almost 800 roads into four-lane highways.

The roads being widened are 210km Dhaka-Sylhet, 190km Tangail (Elega) Rangpur, 48km Jashore-Jhenaidah, 56km Sylhet-Tamabil, 51km Akhaura-Ashuganj, 50km Cumilla (Mainamati) Brahmanbaria (Dharkhar), 43km Sylhet-Sheola, 20km Panchdona-Ghorashal, 50km Feni-Noakhali, 59km Cumilla-Noakhali, 10km Jatrabari-Demra road, and 48km Dhaka Bypass.

RHD sources said safety audits were carried out at the design stage only for Dhaka-Sylhet Highway; Sylhet-Sheola Highway; and Dhaka Bypass Road.

RHD carried out the audit for Dhaka-Sylhet Highway. The auditors' recommendations included adding overpasses at busy intersections which would require around Tk 3,000 crore. As the authority does not have the money, it is uncertain whether the recommendation would be implemented.

The World Bank as the financier did the audit for Sylhet-Sheola project. The private partners of Dhaka Bypass Road Project, which is being implemented under a public private partnership model, carried out an audit for this project.

Seven of the 12 projects are being implemented with foreign loans, one under PPP and four with government funds. This correspondent talked to officials of all the 12 projects.

Some of them said feasibility study and detailed design of most of the projects that are now being implemented were done under a separate project funded by Asian Development Bank.

But the provision for safety audit was not in the ADB-funded project, they said.

Consultants hired under the ongoing projects made some reviews of the design, and in some cases,

recommended measures for road safety. But these are not enough to make the roads safe.

ONLY 5 PERCENT AUDITED SO FAR

There are 22,476km road in the RHD network. Of this, 3,991km are national highways, 4,897km regional highways and 13, 558km district roads, according RHD's 2022-23 annual report.

The RHD carried out a large-scale road safety audit for the first time in 2017-18 fiscal year when it audited 500km of five national highways.

Apart from giving recommendations for fixing safety issues, the audit report also called for completing safety audits on the remaining national highways.

In the 2018-19 fiscal year, the RHD carried out an audit on 300km of three highways, and in the 2021-22 fiscal year, it audited 255km of two highways.

Tanvir Siddique, superintendent engineer (road design and safety circle) of RHD, said safety audits were being done gradually with priority on national highways.

Lack of human resources and funds are the main reasons why more audits are not done, he said.

RHD Chief Engineer Syed Moinal Hasan said post-construction safety audit is more important than audit at the design stage.

"We are giving more emphasis on post-construction audit," he told The Daily Star last week.

There is a serious scarcity of people with proper expertise on safety audits, he said.

"However, we are planning to pursue a large-scale [safety audit] activity soon," he added.

WHAT IS THE PLAN?

Under the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway improvement project, RHD is now preparing a manual with checklists for carrying out safety audits.

"We want to make road safety audits mandatory for projects," said Dhaka-Sylhet Project Director AK Mohammad Fazlul Karim.

He said they were also preparing a roadmap for carrying out a safety audit.

For example, which road will be audited first and what would be the procedure to certify to a person as eligible for safety audit will be mentioned in the road map, he said.

Drafts of the manual and roadmap have already been sent to the stakeholders concerned, he added.

Aedes control efforts not up to the mark

FROM PAGE 1

He added that in many areas outside Dhaka, dengue cases are being recorded for the first time. This is another reason for the high number of cases this year.

Chattogram City Corporation is yet to start a crash programme to kill the larvae of Aedes mosquitoes, the carrier of dengue virus, though the disease hit the port city hard last year, said city dwellers.

Hamidullah Mehedi, junior consultant of medicine department at Chittagong General Hospital and one of the researchers of a joint study on dengue in Chattogram, said, "Around 20 percent patients in Chattogram still did not know that the mosquitoes are the main cause of dengue."

"Around 50 percent patients did not know that stagnant water increases the spread of Aedes mosquitoes while around 40 percent patients did not use mosquito nets."

Contacted, Sushanta Barua, member secretary of Public Health Rights Protection Committee Chattogram chapter, said, "As there is no entomologist in Chattogram

City Corporation, effective action cannot be taken to destroy Aedes mosquitoes."

He added that the administration is yet to take any steps to raise public awareness on the reduction of mosquito breeding.

He said, "If the mayor and councillors of Chattogram City Corporation can go door-to-door to seek votes during elections, why are they not doing so to prevent dengue now?"

CCC officials claimed that the drives to destroy mosquito larvae are going on in 41 wards of the city, but residents in many areas said they did not see any proactive role of the CCC authorities to kill the larvae.

"Our workers spray larvicide to kill the larvae of Aedes mosquitoes," said Commander Latiful Haque Kazmi, chief conservancy officer of CCC, adding, "We have 41 teams in 41 wards who are spraying insecticide regularly."

"Besides, we have a central team of 80 people who spray larvicide in different areas," he said, adding, "As Aedes mosquitoes lay eggs in transparent water, we will go for

a campaign to create awareness among people so that they keep their surroundings clean and not let water accumulate for over three days."

Anisur Rahman, chief conservancy officer of Khulna City Corporation, told this newspaper that they have increased their activities to prevent dengue.

"We buy larvicide, adulticide and various oils to spray them round the year. We would have got better results if the health department and the district administration helped us," he added.

Meanwhile, Barishal Divisional Health Director Shyamal Krishna Mandal said that as usual, health workers visit houses and tell the residents to use mosquito repellents and keep their houses clean.

Swapan Kumar Das, in-charge of Barishal City Corporation's Sanitation Department, said 100 workers are spraying insecticide to kill the larvae.

[Our correspondents Arun Bikash Dey of Chattogram, Sushanta Ghosh of Barishal, and Dipankar Roy of Khulna contributed to this report.]

Bus operators charging extra ahead of Eid

FROM PAGE 1

Md Ashik, a passenger of Golden Line Paribahan, said, "Over the year, many transport workers are seen literally dragging passengers into buses. But when the Eid approaches, their behaviour with passengers changes. They force the vacationers to pay extra fares."

"The regular fare for a journey on Dhaka-Barishal route by a non-air-conditioned bus is Tk 500. But today [yesterday] I had to pay an additional Tk 200 for a ticket."

Md Jamal, manager at the ticket counter of Golden Line Paribahan, told The Daily Star, "Our buses return to Dhaka almost empty during the Eid season. That's why we cannot but charge the passengers extra."

BRTC Director (Technical) Colonel Mohammad Mubarak Hossain Majumdar said they have received some complaints about bus operators charging passengers additional fares.

"Those who are operating our buses on lease are doing this. We will discuss this issue in a meeting tomorrow [today]. We will give specific instructions to the bus operators in this regard," he told this correspondent.

The situation was almost similar at Gabtoli Bus Terminal. Passengers bound for Khulna, Satkhira, Jashore, and Magura had to pay an additional Tk 100 to Tk 300 for each ticket of Shyamoli Travels, Shyamoli NR Travels, Satkhira Line, SP Paribahan, and K Line Transport.

Visiting the ticket counter of Sohagh Paribahan, The Daily Star found that the bus operator was selling advance tickets to Jashore for Tk 750 each instead of the regular fare of Tk 650.

Md Asif, a booking assistant at the counter, claimed that they did not charge passengers additional fares.

"If the passengers buy tickets from us, they don't need to pay extra money. But if anyone buys tickets from the black market, we have nothing to do," he said.

A passenger named Iqbal Anik bought four tickets to Kushtia on an air-conditioned bus of SB Super Deluxe. He said the operator has now hiked the fare to Tk 1,200 from Tk 900.

A staffer at the ticket counter of SB Super Deluxe said they increased the fare at the instruction of their employer.

Meanwhile, a police control room has been set up in front of the Gabtoli bus terminal to ensure safety of the Eid holidaymakers and deal with any untoward situation.

An on-duty police official said they will take action if any passenger lodges any specific complaint with them.