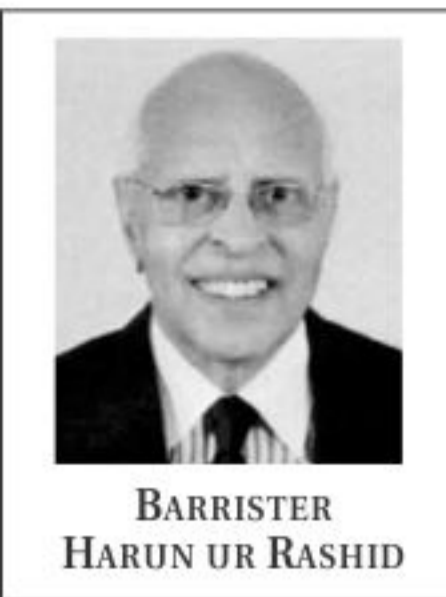


BOTTOM LINE

# International community press solution for Rohingyas



**D**URING the past two decades, Bangladesh accepted and sheltered more than 300,000 Rohingya refugees, who not only stayed back but also put heavy economic and social burden on the world's most

densely-populated nation. After violence erupted in the Rakhine state in early June, Bangladesh refused giving shelter to any Rohingya. Although the refusal drew criticism from human rights activists, it has attracted the attention of the international community to the Rohingya issue.

It is worthwhile to note that the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has launched a major international campaign to put an end to the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslim minority in the Rakhine state of Myanmar and protect their legitimate rights. OIC offices in Geneva, New York, and Brussels are making intense efforts to foster international intervention in the issue.

The OIC is believed to be in touch with the United Nations, UN Human Rights Council, European Union and other international organisations to halt the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar.

OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu strongly condemned the situation which has resulted in deaths of innocent civilians, burning of their homes and forced eviction from their homeland. Ihsanoglu further hoped that the Myanmar government would respond to the concerns of the international community in a positive and constructive manner, so that all its Rohingya Muslims are able to return to their homeland with honour, safety and dignity.

Furthermore, the issue was raised at the recent Asean Foreign Ministers' meeting in Cambodia. The Asean is seeking an explanation from member state Myanmar about recent ethnic violence targeting minority Rohingya group. "There will be a full explanation from Myanmar because this is an important and critical issue for Asean as a community," Asean Secretary General Dr. Surin Pitsuwan reportedly said.

On July 28, it was reported that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Judge Navi Pillay, called for an independent investigation following claims of abuses

toward Rohingyas by security forces in Myanmar.

On July 25, Aung San Suu Kyi called for new laws to protect Myanmar's ethnic minority groups, highlighting one of the country's most challenging issues as it opens up to the outside world.

She urged the government to pass "necessary laws or amend laws to protect the rights of ethnic nationalities," and said protecting minority rights required more than just maintaining ethnic languages and cultures. "The high poverty rates in ethnic states clearly indicate that development in ethnic regions is not satisfactory and ethnic conflicts in these regions have not ceased," she said. She didn't, however, mention the

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recent violence in the Rohingya area.

Ms. Suu Kyi called for an end to discrimination against ethnic minorities as part of the "emergence of a genuine democratic country," the Associated Press reported. By focusing on the country's ethnic divisions in her first parliamentary address, Ms. Suu Kyi rightly drew attention to an issue that needs to be resolved speedily and peacefully.

While, in May, Suu Kyi met thousands of Myanmar refugees at a Thai border camp and promised to try as much as she could to help them return home, she was conspicuously silent on the Rohingya issue. During the recent trip to Europe, she talked about need for "the rule of the law" in the country and avoided the Rohingya issue, which disappointed many human rights organisations overseas.

Human-rights groups, meanwhile, have criticised Ms. Suu Kyi for failing to speak out more in favour of the Rohingyas, whom most people in Myanmar consider "illegal settlers" in Myanmar.

In mid-July, Myanmar's president told the

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres: "We will take responsibility for our ethnic people but it is impossible to accept the illegally entered Rohingyas, who are not our ethnicity," according to the president's official website. However, the UN high commissioner reportedly did not agree with the views of the president on the Rohingya issue.

Since its independence, Myanmar has suffered from intense ethnic divides. More than a half-dozen ethnic groups claim autonomy from the centralised government system dominated by the Burman ethnic group.

At least one group, the Kachin, is waging a low-level war against the government, while violence in western Myanmar in early June between Buddhists and Muslim Rohingyas in Rakhine state (Arakan) left at least 78 people dead and led to the declaration of emergency in the state by the government.

The administration of President Thein Sein is to be credited as it has reached cease-fire deals with some restive minority groups, but peace with the Kachin has yet to take place. Many analysts say more radical changes are needed, including enactment of new laws to recognise the ethnicity of minorities in Myanmar.

It is important to note that many of the groups occupy areas crucial for the country's economic plans because they are home to large portions of Myanmar's rich natural resources, including natural gas and mined commodities.

Although Myanmar authorities have focused recently on trying to steer more economic development into ethnic areas, many investors remain wary of sinking money into regions where conflicts could flare up. The Rohingya conflict, in particular, has reportedly unnerved investors and upset rights advocates who fear the violence could escalate and destabilise Myanmar.

Myanmar will chair Asean in 2014 and, given that perspective, analysts say the Myanmar government needs to sit down for a dialogue with all ethnic groups including Rohingyas to grant equal rights and autonomy in Myanmar's political system. The deal with the ethnic groups in the late '40s (so-called Panglong Agreement) collapsed after late General Ne Win took power in a 1962 coup.

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EDITORIAL DESK: The Nation

**T**HE Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad has taken a serious beating in recent days on just about all fronts, from the defections of military top brass and diplomats, to the assassination of at least three of the president's inner circle.

While hardly a day has gone by without reports of killings as the 16-month-old civil war rages on, Wednesday saw the deaths of several key figures in an incident that could become the game-changer as fighting reached the heart of Damascus.

Part of the capital has turned into a war zone and the victims include al-Assad's brother-in-law and architect of his bloody crackdown, deputy defence minister Assef Shawkat.

Also killed on Wednesday were the interior minister and the defence minister, and the fact that they were targeted at national security headquarters suggests the rebels not only have the capacity to maintain their campaign in the capital but the ability to strike at the heart of the regime's most secure strongholds.

Calling this a setback for the al-Assad regime would be an understatement. US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said the situation was "rapidly spinning out of control."

But the guerrilla war could turn into a conventional one now that the rebels control certain parts of the capital along with pockets of the country elsewhere. Conventional military assaults could escalate as heavier artillery is deployed and the regime unleashes the full power of the air force in a desperate bid to defeat the rebels.

If the past 16 months tells us anything, it is that al-Assad has no qualms about employing "dirty tactics," and is likely to inflict more deadly violence on innocent people as he fights to maintain his grip on Syria.

Regrettably, the international community has not been able to respond to the devastating developments on the ground. But that does not mean it doesn't have real concerns. After all, Syria has one of the largest stockpiles of chemical weapons in the Middle East.

Needless to say, the greater the chaos in the country, the greater the chance that these weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists. There is also the chance that the Syrian regime will use them. The chemicals in the regime's possession include blister agents and nerve gas that have been inserted in bombs and missile warheads.

Details of their location are sketchy, but if al-Assad decides to give the green light for their use, one can be certain that some will be launched before they can be destroyed.

East Asia has been witness to the devastation that chemical weapons can wreak on human life. In 1995 Japan's Aum Shinrikyo cult released nerve agents in Tokyo subway cars, killing 13 people and injuring several hundred. Along with "doomsday cults," terrorist organisations would be keen to get their hands on such chemical weapons. Syria is not a signatory of the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention and it is very unlikely that the regime will permit international inspectors to check these stockpiles.

If the United Nations and the international community are unable to agree on joint action towards a resolution of the war in Syria, perhaps they could at least find common ground on the issue of its chemical weapons. Russia, with its friendly policy towards the al-Assad regime, is in the best position to help develop a plan to address this issue. Turning a blind eye to the problem of chemical weapons in the country is out of the question now that the situation is descending into all-out war. Ignore this issue and there could be serious implications even after the killing in Syria stops.

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# As Syria explodes, all eyes are on its chemical weapons

# Living within resource limitations

ZULFIQUER AHMED AMIN

**O**N October 31, 2011, with the birth of Oishee at 12:01 am in Bangladesh, UNFPA and government of Bangladesh celebrated the arrival of the 7 billionth global citizen on the planet earth. As of June 26, 2012 the world human population is estimated to be 7.022 billion by the United States Census Bureau, and over 7 billion by the United Nations. The population is expected to reach between 8 and 10.5 billion between the year 2040 and 2050. In fact, the world's population grows at a near-record pace, with a population equal to New York City's added every month, and equal to Germany's added every year.

Anton van Leeuwenhoek (1673-1723) estimated that the Earth could support a maximum of 13.4 billion people. Gregory King predicted the Earth could support 6 to 12 billion humans. "Liebig's Law of the Minimum" approach estimates human carrying capacity ranges from 1 or 2 billion people living in prosperity, to 33 billion people fed on minimum rations and using all suitable land for high-intensity food production. Scientists now believe that the human carrying capacity of Earth may be approximately 12 billion. Hypothetically, if the human population continues to grow at the present rate, the mass of people would be equal to the mass of the earth within 1,600 years.

Unesco projects that total global water use will rise by 32% between 2000 and 2025, and will continue to rise. Rapid population growth and increased total water consumption are rapidly depleting the availability of water. Between 1960 and 1997, the per capita availability of freshwater worldwide declined by about 60%. Another 50% decrease in per capita water supply is projected by the year 2025. Water availability in Bangladesh is around 90 billion cubic meters (BCM) against the demand of about 147 BCM, a shortage of nearly 40%. Kofi Annan's Millennium Report says that if present trends continue two out of three people on the planet will live in countries considered to be "water stressed."

Approximately 95% of the water in developing countries is polluted. Developing countries discharge approximately 95% of their untreated urban sewage and industrial pollutants directly into surface water. New York disposes of 200 million gallons raw sewage into the Hudson River each day. The noisome pollution from chemical waste of mills and factories, home waste, medical waste, sewage, dead animals, plastics, and oil has made Buriganga a dead river. As a result of over exploitation by the population of Dhaka city, the extent of pollution is so extreme that there is no fish or aquatic life in this river. Everyday almost 4,500 tons of solid waste and 20,000 tons of tannery wastes are released in to Buriganga. There is no available technology to avert its dying state. Until we plan our city for human habitation to the limit of its natural capacity, our cry from the heart to salvage Buriganga will always be a cry for the moon to save the day.

In addition to limitations due to population increases, high per capita consumption levels in the United States and other developed nations also put pressure on natural resources. Each American consumes about 50-times more goods and services than the average Chinese citizen. Achieving an average European standard of living (\$12,310 per capita/yr) or an average US standard of living (\$26,000 per capita/yr) appears unrealistic for most countries because of serious shortages of the basic natural resources.

Oil is the heart of humanity's enormous energy economy as well as at the heart of its food supply. Oil and its companion natural gas together make up about 60% of humanity's primary energy. Fossil fuel contributes more than 90% of global commercial energy production. Approximately 70% of the fossil

fuel is burnt by the industrialised nations, who have less than a quarter of world's population. 22% of the world's fossil fuel is consumed by 4% of US population. Currently, only 1.25% of China's population possesses a car. The forecasts are that in 2031 China will have a per capita income close to that of the US in 2004, and would have a billion vehicles. If they all needed to run on gasoline there is simply not enough oil and, of course, the greenhouse gases produced would heat up the whole world distressingly.

In 1798 the Reverend Thomas Malthus hypothesised that population growth would exceed the growth of resources, leading to natural checks by disease, famine, and war. There is a growing trend in strategic circles to view environmental and resource effects -- rather than political orientation and ideology -- as the most potent source of armed conflict in the decades to come. With the world population

rising, global consumption rates soaring, energy supplies rapidly dwindling and climate change eradicating valuable farmland, the stage is being set for persistent and worldwide struggles over vital resources.

Lack of water and agricultural land is a significant contributory factor to the tragic conflict unfolding in Darfur, Afghanistan, according to *The New York Times*, is "the Saudi Arabia of lithium." Soviet specialists discovered huge gas reserves there in the 1960s and drained away 2.5 billion cubic meters of Afghan gas annually. Two-thirds of the oil in the world is in the Middle East, much of it under Iraq and Iran, the axis of oil, the current targets of the US war on terrorism. Control of oil is integral to Washington's official goal of world domination. With regard specifically to the Middle East we have the Carter Doctrine: "An attempt by any outside force to

gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force." Competition for land was identified as a significant part of the backdrop to the post-election violence in Kenya in early 2008, and to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda; water and land have both been identified as conflict drivers in Ethiopia and Somalia.

Renewable resources like firewood and fresh water have reached the ending phase. Most scientists agree that the overall human pressure on the environment is a product of three factors: population, consumption and technology. In the population-environment debate these factors are often emphasised as the dominant cause of rising environmental deterioration. For some, it is inexorable population growth. For others, it is polluting technology. Still others stress excessive consumption, policy and market failures, or common ownership of key environmental resources. The bottom line is that all of these viewpoints are correct some of the time; none of them is correct all of the time. A comprehensive approach to understanding the population-environment linkage must include all three.

Bringing about a sustainable balance between ourselves and the planet we need, in very short order, to reduce our population, our level of consumption, or both. There are two ways a population can regain a balance with the carrying capacity of its environment. If the population stays constant or continues to rise, per capita consumption must fall. If per capita consumption stays constant, population must decline. Where the balance is struck between these endpoints depends on how close the population is to a subsistence level of consumption. If this situation is not wisely addressed, it seems inevitable that this will wrap-up to its logical conclusion -- mass starvation, war, elimination of the weak and survival of the strongest. Question is who will be the luckiest to be among the short list of the survivors?

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