

## Another wave of Rohingya persecution

Key to solution is to end their statelessness

SET against the backdrop of June and August riots between majority Rakhine Buddhist and minority ethnic Muslim Rohingyas that had caused exodus of the latter out in to the sea, there has been a fresh spate of violence on the Rohingyas triggering their displacement out of their own country.

Going by the United Nation's statistics, 22,587 people have been displaced with 67 lives lost as Muslim survivors flee bullets and burning homes to escape on fishing boats floating on the sea. According to one estimate, at least 80 boats packed with escapees were witnessed off the Myanmar's west coast. Constant trickles of new arrivals from Kyaupkyu's Muslim quarters have been highlighted in Human Rights Watch's analysis of the satellite imageries.

They have nowhere to go to, no food or medicine can reach them, they are camped and decamped as UN agencies try to reach succour to them with little avail. Even the OIC's effort to open an office to extend a hand to the hapless fell through resistance by the Myanmar government.

This is really taking on a dreadful proportion of ethnic cleansing in the neighbourhood with disturbing implications for a peace-loving country like Bangladesh. It is a humanitarian concern that allows for no solution through political, sectarian or military means. Its solution lies in an unambiguous humanitarian approach underpinned by an adherence to international citizenship laws. Neither any suppression of ethnic minority by a majority in a country with the security forces looking the other way can be treated as an issue entirely internal to that country. For its spillage effects across the border tends to force another country to be at the receiving end of the ordeal, one way or other.

The heart of the problem lies in Myanmar denying citizenship right to the Rohingya Muslims whose ancestors have been domiciled in the Rakhine state since a few centuries back. We recall President Thein Sein's outright call for deportation of the Rohingyas asking other countries to accept them. In fact, such a rejectionist approach is out of steps with the reformist agenda Myanmar has taken under its quasi civilian government that replaced its oppressive ruling junta last year. The West has ways to leverage Myanmar to restore citizenship rights to the Rohingya Muslims. All that is awaited is its exercise of a will to make it happen.

## The remains of the day

Eid waste disposal efforts commendable

THE Dhaka City Corporation has made a laudable effort towards animal waste disposal following Eid-ul-Azha this year, a time when the streets are usually covered in blood and animal waste for days, the stench of which draws more birds and animals which hover around the debris.

A week before Eid, both Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) distributed environment-friendly sacks for waste collection and disposal along with bleaching powder at the city's cattle markets, for free or at a nominal price. Alongside the city's 8,500 regular garbage collectors, an additional 2,000 were deployed, along with extra vehicles and equipment for cleaning up the city within a promised 48 hours starting on the afternoon of Eid day. While the capital for the most part seems to be clean enough, complaints have been received from certain areas, especially narrow streets and lanes, which are yet to be cleaned. In an interactive effort, however, the authorities have given a phone number for people to call with their complaints, after which cleaners will be sent to the area.

Here we also applaud the people for their cooperation in the drive and their personal efforts to keep the city clean, without which the authorities by themselves would have been left in a tight spot. Whereas some 6,000 tonnes of waste are generated daily in the capital, the first day of Eid-ul-Azha results in an additional 24,000 tonnes of waste being generated, not a small feat for the city authorities to counter in terms of disposal. Thus we congratulate them on their efforts which have been successful for the most part and hope that the rest of the cleaning work will be completed soon and that the city will be even

# China surfs the aluminum wave



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

BY far one of the most versatile metals in the world, the diversity of aluminum usage is phenomenal. Yet it is a metal that

never caught the fancy of the world commodity markets. Its price has remained relatively stagnant at around \$2,100 per tonne since the '80s. Where copper prices have tripled over the same timeline, aluminum that is found in everything from soda cans to aircraft is an industry in decline. Industry leaders in the West have seen their collective fortunes fade from \$200bn a year some five years ago to an estimated \$65bn currently. The industry is in the midst of retrenchment and consolidation. Whereas Western aluminum powerhouses are in a state of decline, China is forging ahead with ever-increasing production capacities that defy predictions.

There has been no dearth in demand for this unsung hero of a metal. According to International Aluminum Industry (IAI), production increased from 1.5million tons to 44million tons over six decades from 1950 to 2011. By virtue of its composition, aluminum can be shaped into any form. It is lighter than steel and cheaper than copper. Then why is it that the global aluminum industry, with the exception of China in decline

today? One of the reasons can be traced to the fact that supply has kept pace with rise in global demand.

Secondly, booming global production resulted in a glut of inventories -- an estimated 10million tonnes of excess aluminum are stocked globally.

Third, aluminum production is hugely energy-intensive. Rising energy costs have led to an increase in cost of production whereas price per tonne has remained relatively constant over the past few decades. Then the unforeseen global financial meltdown arrived to knock the bottom off

the undisputed leader in aluminum. And while Western aluminum-industry pundits downplayed China as a minor irritant in 2005, the country has managed to increase energy efficiency in this energy-inefficient production process to the point that Chinese smelters outperform their European, American and Russian counterparts by a wide margin.

China's roadmap puts it squarely on the path of self-sufficiency in the foreseeable future. According to IAI data, the Chinese industry's aluminum output grew by a significant 10%

of aluminum in China continues to defy projections.

As the country's policymakers install new production capacity in Xinjiang, forecasts point to an additional 10 million tonnes coming into the market every year over the next four years or so. 10 million tonnes of additional output is equivalent to the present annual output of Western Europe and North America combined. This is hardly good news for big names in the aluminum industry for it clearly points to China striving to become self-sufficient in the metal.

With the Chinese market out of the count as an export destination, the future of the industry does not look particularly bright. One way out of the present glut of aluminum is to cut back on production, but this has been hampered by a whole set of other problems. While companies like BP Billington may be pulling the plug on new production while others diversify into different aluminum-based products such as automotive and aerospace parts, China remains on target.

This is an industry in transition. The pains associated with rolling back and diversification a ground reality. It is only a matter of time before China emerges as No. 1. There will be economic repercussions that will be felt far and wide as we had witnessed with the case of rare earth elements, where China has a 97% stake. One thing though is clear as crystal. The boot is now firmly on the Chinese foot.

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commodity prices and brought about a halt in demand.

While Western producers scramble to curtail production like BP Billington, 6th largest aluminum producer that has decided not to make fresh investments to companies like Rio Tinto that is diversifying from aluminum production to mining bauxite; a basic element in aluminum production -- China strides ahead with production.

Indeed, China saw its production jump from 2.8million tonnes in 2000 to 17.8million tonnes today, making it

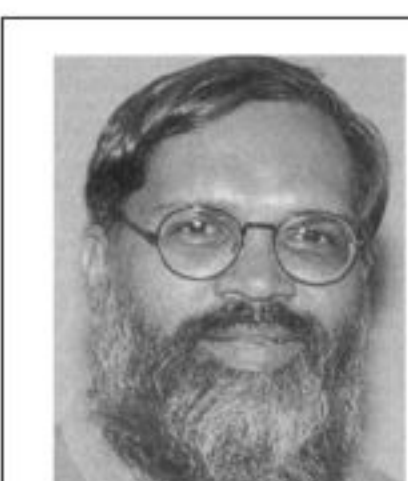
this fiscal compared to last fiscal. When one puts this in perspective with the performance of the rest of the global industry that grew at a measly 2.1%, those figures take on a whole different meaning.

The facts speak for themselves. With China effectively cornering the aluminum industry by virtue of a mixture of faulty decision-making by existing global leaders and spearheading R&D efforts, it will in the near future call the shots on this metal.

While the Chinese economy may have slowed somewhat, the rate of produc-

## PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

# Is Sonia abdicating leadership?



PRAFUL BIDWAI

THE fanfare with which Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and United Progressive Alliance chair-

person Sonia Gandhi launched a public service-delivery scheme in Rajasthan based on the Aadhaar (literally, foundation) unique identity (UID) number should cause serious worry in the Congress party -- assuming it has a good survival instinct.

To put it starkly, the Congress-UPA is sleepwalking into a minefield as it rolls out Aadhaar-enabled service-delivery schemes in 51 Indian districts, and later in the entire country.

The Aadhaar-UID system has serious flaws, which will affect poor people the most through the Public Distribution System (for food), payment of wages under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), and delivery of old-age pensions and scholarships.

What's wrong with Aadhaar? First of all, the 12-digit number generated by the UID Authority of India for each citizen isn't really unique. Aadhaar's biometric techniques, involving a photograph, fingerprints and an iris scan, are untested. Experts point to many possible technical errors, including indistinct fingerprints due to calluses, and poor iris scans due to cataracts.

The UIDAI mission director himself admits that fingerprints aren't likely to work for authentication. These errors could exclude up to 15% of the population.

Second, Aadhaar is susceptible to the same faults -- e.g. bureaucratic lethargy, callousness towards the poor, and influence-peddling -- that result in inaccurate BPL lists, which in many cases exclude 40% of poor people.

Third, last year Parliament's Standing Committee on Finance rejected the National Identification Authority of India Bill 2010, and termed Aadhaar "directionless" and

"conceptualised with no clarity of purpose." It also called the technology "untested, unproven, unreliable and unsafe."

It rightly raised grave concerns about privacy, identity theft, misuse, data security and duplication, and also noted the Planning Commission's objections. No computer is foolproof against hacking; and data loss has serious consequences.

The Committee said the hasty manner in which the scheme was approved and implemented was "unethical and violative of Parliament's prerogatives."

Faced with these objections, UIDAI chairman Nandan Nilekani promised

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that Aadhaar wouldn't be used as proof of identity for public service provision. The opposite is happening. It's even proposed to make Aadhaar compulsory even for opening a bank account.

India is moving towards converting public-service provision into Aadhaar-based cash transfers so the state can wash its hands of its obligations. Dr. Singh has just up a high-level committee on cash transfers. But cash is no substitute for creating services/facilities, which don't exist.

Even more politically disastrous is the UPA's deception on the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Bill. Land is probably the most important site of people's struggles in defence of livelihoods and survival rights.

The Bill was to be a generous improvement over the colonial Land Acquisition Act 1894 and was touted as a great UPA-2 legacy, comparable

to NREGA.

Originally, it was to limit acquisition of irrigated multi-cropped land to 5% of the total, to require the consent of 80% of both land losers and livelihood losers (e.g. agricultural workers, rural artisans, etc.), to cover ongoing land acquisition, and to provide compensation at four to six times the market value of land.

All this was diluted under pressure from the industries and urban development ministries to make the Bill "investor-friendly." In the Group of Ministers headed by agriculture minister Sharad Pawar, said to be one of India's biggest landowners, the 80% consent norm was downgraded to two-thirds of land losers -- never

mind the livelihood losers.

The proposed National Manufacturing and Investment Zones have been exempted from the Bill. It will only apply to future, not ongoing, land acquisitions. There will be a "sliding scale" of compensation, of between two and four times the market value. Besides, "linear projects" like railways, highways and power lines are exempted altogether.

Relief and rehabilitation obligations on private buyers, earlier mandatory for acquisitions above 100 acres, have been left to the states' discretion. Promoters will only make a one-off payment and won't build infrastructure for the affected people.

Ms. Gandhi has since intervened to restore the 80% consent norm for land losers, but that only partially undoes the harm. Even in its modified form, the LARR Bill would at best be a cosmetic improvement over the 1894 Act. The National Alliance of People's Movements says it will "fuel corrup-

tion and land conflict."

The Bill's main positive feature is that it mandates a Social Impact Assessment, with public hearings, of whether a project serves a public purpose, and evaluates its costs for the project-affected families. The SIA report would be examined by an Expert Group, with some non-governmental representatives, including two social scientists.

However, as past experience with the Environmental Impact Assessment process shows, the SIA cannot guarantee a project's proper evaluation. Besides, the Bill has accepted the industry lobby's demand that the SIA be completed within six months -- an almost impossible task if an in-depth assessment is to be made.

India has displaced 60 million people from land since Independence -- equalling the entire British population. Land has become the hottest subject of contestation between the people and corporate interests backed by the state. Land is also tied up with control over natural resources, including water, forests and minerals.

Under the present neoliberal model of capitalism, corporations invade nature in ways they have never done before. They take over land -- and why, water and air -- and forcibly turn them into commodities.

All Third World countries, and especially fast-growing ones, are witnessing a repetition of what England saw in the 18th century -- Enclosures of common property resources, including farmland and pastures -- only at a faster pace, and with greater ruthlessness.

The UPA is facilitating this. Clearly, Ms. Gandhi has decided to abdicate her responsibility to exercise a moderating influence on the UPA through pro-people measures. She has probably convinced herself, perhaps against her own instincts, that GDP growth is all-important; India needs investment, whatever the cost.

The UPA will pay heavily for this Himalayan misjudgment.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

October 30

**1918** The Ottoman Empire signs an armistice with the Allies, ending the First World War in the Middle East.

**1922** Benito Mussolini is made Prime Minister of Italy.

**1947** The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which is the foundation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), is founded.

**1973** The Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul, Turkey is completed.

**1991** The Madrid Conference for Middle East peace talks opens.