

Root causes of Rohingya crisis lie in Myanmar

UNHCR Representative Stina Ljungdell talks to Ahmad Ibrahim of The Daily Star on the issues surrounding the presence of Rohingyas in Bangladesh and the connotations of refugee status in today's world.

The Daily Star (TDS): While the Rohingya plight came to the spotlight in 2012, UNHCR has been involved in this for a very long time. What is the UNHCR's role in dealing with the Rohingyas residing in Bangladesh?

Stina Ljungdell (SL): For the past decades there has been movement by Rohingyas to Bangladesh; they have come in waves. The UNHCR was asked by the government of Bangladesh to assist them in 1991/2, when almost 250,000 refugees had come to Bangladesh. There was a massive repatriation in 1992 and further movements back to Myanmar till 2005 but no more after that. At present, there are about 31,000 Rohingyas residing in two refugee camps, of which some 25,000 are currently registered with the government of Bangladesh. UNHCR and the government of Bangladesh are in the process of conducting a joint verification with the aim to establish a joint database. UNHCR works in tandem with the government to provide the refugees with food, shelter, primary education and healthcare.

TDS: Under UNHCR's mandate, what is the definition of a refugee and do all the Rohingyas moving into Bangladesh fall under that bracket?

SL: A refugee is a person who flees his/her country as a result of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, affiliation with social groups or political opinion. People have moved across borders for centuries and they continue to do so. I cannot make a statement on what makes all people move. However, given the Human Right Reports being circulated about the current situation of Rohingyas in Myanmar, one can now presume that many of them may have a well-founded fear of persecution should they return to Myanmar.

Bangladesh is not a signatory of the 1951 Convention relating to Status of Refugees (CRSR) and is referring to the unregistered Rohingyas as "undocumented Myanmar nationals." Myanmar does not recognise them as citizen and refers to them as "Bengalis." The misfortune of the Rohingya is therefore that they are stateless. They are desperate for a place to call home.

TDS: What is UNHCR's biggest challenges in Bangladesh?

SL: In the past, the 25,000 registered refugees who received food ration from WFP shared this with unregistered Rohingyas, resulting in malnutrition, comparable to the sub-Saharan malnutrition levels. This challenge is about to be solved through the joint verification exercise and the resulting joint database. Another, and the main, problem in this operation is the fact that the prospects for durable solutions are



Stina Ljungdell in refugee camp

not around the corner. The registered refugees have been living in refugee camps for more than 22 years and they realise that their own lives have been wasted but they are desperate for a future in freedom for their children. It is heartbreaking to listen to their stories and I so wish I could give them hope that a solution to their protracted displacement is being worked out.

TDS: The Bangladeshi media has also raised questions of their repatriation and whether or not delaying it puts undue pressure on Bangladesh. What are your thoughts on that?

SL: The root cause for their plight and the solution to their displacement lie in Myanmar. Because Myanmar was very closed for many years, it has been easier for international bodies to interact with Bangladesh, which is an open democracy. In view of the most recent report by the UN Special Rapporteur to Myanmar, UNHCR cannot support repatriation at this point in time. UNHCR repatriates people in safety and dignity, and it does not look likely that this would be possible until the inter-communal violence in northern Rakhine State has been resolved.

TDS: What support would you like from the government regarding this issue?

SL: Bangladesh is not yet signatory to the 1951

Convention and we would encourage Bangladesh to consider signing this important piece of international law. We are also encouraging Bangladesh to adopt National Asylum legislation which would be suitable given the regional consideration. At present there is only the Foreigner's Act, which stipulates that any illegal entry into Bangladesh is a criminal offence, irrespective of the reason behind the entry, even if a person is fleeing persecution.

TDS: The media has often portrayed Rohingyas as people related to drug trafficking and lawlessness. How do you see this?

SL: The unregistered Rohingyas are a marginalised community who must nevertheless survive. This population is struggling on a daily basis to meet the basic needs of their children. I would not be too surprised if some were involved in activities in which they should not be involved, and although this can never be justified, it can be explained by the fact that they are often left with no other choice. It should however be noted that most of the unregistered Rohingya have none or very limited level of education and they are therefore mostly used as "mules." Before rushing to condemning them, we must ask ourselves, what would we do if our children were living on the verge of starvation?

Noor Inayat Khan, Britain's super Muslim woman spy



FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

FOR seventy years, the story of Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan, a Muslim woman who was a World War II British spy, was consigned to the scrap heap of history. This year, a 60-minute documentary, "Enemy of the Reich: The Noor Inayat Khan Story" premiered in the US. Narrated by Oscar-winning actress Helen Mirren, the documentary recounts the heroine's ordeal through dramatised reenactments and interviews with experts, including Noor's two nephews. Indian-American actress Grace Srinivasan, a 2013 graduate of George Washington University, played Noor perfectly. The documentary was shot in 11 days in Baltimore.

Noor Inayat Khan had royal pedigree. Her father, Hazrat Inayat Khan was a descendant of Tipu Sultan, the famous ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore in the 18th century. Born in 1882 in Gujarat, Khan left India in 1910 and travelled the world teaching Sufi Islam. While in New York, he fell in love with Ora Baker, the half sister of American scholar Pierre Bernard, her guardian at that time. As Bernard refused consent to their marriage, they went to Europe and married. Noor Inayat Khan was born in Moscow on January 2, 1914.

After World War I broke out, they left for London. Noor attended nursery in Notting Hill. Khan and Ora Baker (Ameena Begum) had three more children: Vilayat (1916), Hidayat (1917) and Khair-un-Nisa (1919). In 1920, they relocated to a suburban Paris house, a gift from Khan's Sufi patron.

Hazrat Inayat Khan died on a visit to India in 1927, sending Ameena Begum into deep depression. Barely 13, quiet and shy Noor grew up fast and cared for her grief-stricken mother and siblings. She studied child psychology at the Sorbonne, and music at the Paris Conservatory, composing for harp and piano. She wrote poetry, and contributed regularly to children's magazines and French radio. She published "Twenty Jataka Tales" in 1939.

After Germany overran France, the Khans fled to Bordeaux, crossed the English Channel and landed in Falmouth on June 22, 1940. Although Noor's upbringing was pacifist, she decided to fight the Nazis, saying: "I wish some Indians would win high military distinction in this war. If one or two could do something in the Allied service which was very brave and which everybody admired, it would help to make a bridge between the English people and the Indians."

She joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) on November 19, 1940, and was sent for training as a wireless operator. Noor had "difficulty" learning the codes, which the prejudiced espionage establishment attributed to her not being "overburdened with brain!" The truth was different. As a Muslim woman, Noor was taught never to lie. She was unwilling to send false messages. A young man, who had a crush on her, was assigned the task of working with Noor. He convinced her that unless she sent the codes exactly as written, innocent people were going to die. That did the trick!

Because of her French upbringing, Noor was assigned to the French Section of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), and underwent rigorous training. Cryptonymed "Madeleine," Noor was flown to northern France at night to a French Resistance landing strip on June 16, 1943. She and two other women were met by Henri Dericourt and escorted to Paris. They joined the underground Physician's network, codenamed Prosper.

Within six weeks, all Physician network radio operators except Noor were arrested by Gestapo along with hundreds of Resistance Prosper members. For her safety, the head of French Section asked Noor to return to England. She refused. As the only remaining wireless operator in Paris, at enormous personal risk, Noor continued to transmit messages to London from the dwindling Prosper agents. Noor was now the most wanted British agent in Paris. Gestapo distributed her sketches and was looking for her everywhere.

With wireless detection vans in hot pursuit, Noor could only transmit 20 minutes at a time. She moved constantly, evading capture while maintaining vital communication with London: "She refused to abandon what had become the most important and dangerous post in France and did excellent work." She was on her own for three months.

Noor was betrayed to Gestapo by suspected double agents Henri Dericourt or Renee Garry. Reportedly, Renee Garry, who was paid 100,000 francs, was furious at Noor because SOE agent France Antelme had dumped her for Noor. Noor was arrested on October 13, 1943 and interrogated for months at Gestapo headquarters in Paris.

Unlike fellow arrestees, Noor did not divulge any secrets to Gestapo. She fought so fiercely that they labeled her an extremely dangerous prisoner. When Noor was forced to send a message to London by Gestapo, she slipped in a 18-character word that should have alerted London that she was compromised. That message never reached her supervisor. Double agents were not exclusive to France! For a long time Gestapo continued to send bogus messages under the name "Madeleine," which cost some lives.

Noor and two fellow prisoners escaped through the roof on November 25, 1943. But, there was an air raid siren just as they got out and they were captured in the vicinity. After Noor refused to renounce future escape attempts, she was placed in solitary confinement, shackled to the floor for ten months, and almost certainly sexually abused. Then the death sentence arrived from Berlin: Noor was to be treated as "Nacht und Nebel" (Night and Fog) prisoner condemned for "Disappearance without Trace." Noor, 30, was taken to Dachau concentration camp near Munich, and in the early hours of September 13, 1944 executed by a bullet through her head. Noor's last word was: "liberte!"

Noor Inayat Khan was posthumously awarded the French Croix de Guerre avec étoile de vermeil, and Britain's highest award for gallantry George Cross in 1949. In 2012 Princess Anne unveiled Noor's bronze bust in Gordon Square Gardens - the first memorial to any Muslim or Asian woman in Britain. Prime Minister David Cameron praised Noor for her "bravery," "indomitable courage" and "inspirational self-sacrifice." On March 25, 2014, the Royal Mail issued a stamp commemorating Noor Inayat Khan.

The Germans have done nothing. Is it too much to ask the German government: Wie Ware Es Mit Einem Denkmal Noor? (How about a monument for Noor?)

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

Indian election: ECI's role

MD. ABDUL ALIM

INDIA has just completed its 16th Lok Sabha elections to elect 543 members of parliament. It was the longest election in the country's history, and was held in nine phases from April 7 to May 12. The result of these elections was declared on May 16. Indian election has always been a much-talked issue among election commissioners and election experts and other stakeholders as it is the biggest democratic election of the world. Since its independence, genuine democratic elections have been held in India, and the Election Commission of India (ECI) has been successfully administering, managing and conducting them. India does not have any caretaker government; moreover, it has a very complex socio-political and geo-political situation. How does India arrange free, fair and credible elections? How does the ECI ensure level playing field during elections for all political parties including the party in power? How does it establish authority over the administration during elections and successfully conduct the elections?

Firstly, as per Constitution of India, ECI enjoys extensive power. It is responsible for 'superintendence, direction and control' of elections. To discharge these duties, the president and the governor of the state ensure such staff as may be necessary and is requested by the Election Commission. In recruiting these officials the Commission has a guideline, which says that officials having any criminal case pending in any court of law must not be associated in election duty. Moreover, the officials against whom the Commission has recommended disciplinary action or who have been charged for any lapse in any election or election-related work in the past, shall not be assigned any election related duty.

Secondly, during the time of elections, although returning officers are recruited from the government or from the local authority, they are deemed to be on deputation to the ECI. Even during the election period such officers are brought/subject to control,

superintendence and discipline of the ECI. This helps ECI to establish authority over the returning officers.

Thirdly, ECI recruits observers of its own, who are officers of the government, to watch the conduct of elections. They have the power to direct the returning officer of a constituency to stop the counting of votes at any time before the declaration of election results. He takes such a decision when he believes that there are irregularities in the electoral process which might influence the election results.

Fourthly, in order to ensure credible elections, ECI always tries to acquire high degree of confidence of all stakeholders, including political parties. It arranges regular consultation with the political parties. For example, before the 16th Lok Sabha election, ECI framed a set of draft guidelines on election manifestos, discussed with political parties and finalised the guidelines incorporating their feedbacks. Similarly, a set of guidelines was promulgated to ensure transparency in funding and expenditure by parties.

Fifthly, during the time of elections, the government in power does not interfere in the activities of the Commission. Even, the role of president is highly esteemed by all quarters due to his neutral position. In the 16th Lok Sabha election, President Pranab Mukherjee did not cast his vote to express his "neutrality in the political fray." In February 2012, Salman Khurshid, the then union law minister, violated the code of conduct in a rally in the Uttar Pradesh state elections by promising 9% sub-quota to the minorities. ECI then wrote a strongly worded letter to President Pratibha Patil, seeking her intervention. Finally, Khurshid apologised to the ECI.

Sixthly, in the conduct of elections, ECI always shows its neutrality at each and every step taken by it for arranging free, fair and credible elections. It strongly implements all the provisions of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) equally to all parties and candidates. The violation of any article of the MCC, even by heavy-weight candidates and ministers, is strongly addressed.

During the campaign of 16th Lok Sabha election, ECI issued a show cause notice to Narendra Modi for violating Section 126(1)(a) and 126(1)(b). The Commission even ordered the local ECI to file FIR if the reply was not satisfactory. Such show cause notices were also issued to Dr. Nazrul Islam, Minister of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs; Mulayam Singh Yadav, President of Samajwadi Party; Beni Prasad Verma, Union Cabinet Minister of Steel; and Rahul Gandhi for violation of MCC. These violations are always investigated by the ECI itself through video recording of the rallies and other campaign events.

Seventhly, the orders of ECI relating to transfer of officials are always implemented. Just before the 5th phase of the elections in West Bengal, ECI ordered the state government to transfer some officials including five superintendents of police, one district magistrate and two additional district magistrates. Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal became furious and challenged the ECI's order. ECI did not respond to Mamata's challenge, but planned to postpone the elections in the concerned constituencies. When this news was published in the media, Mamata agreed to transfer those officials.

ECI is known to be a 'fiercely independent' election management body of the world. Once the election machinery is set in motion, the electoral process is subject to the administrative supervision of the ECI, and no court of law can stop the process. ECI exercises total control over the entire election machinery, even though the members of the electoral machinery are not its employees, for which the key contributing factors are: (i) India has a tradition of a neutral civil service (ii) neutrality of the president (iii) strong implementation and sanctions of the model code of conduct as well as other legal provisions and finally, (iv) respect towards democracy by all stakeholders.

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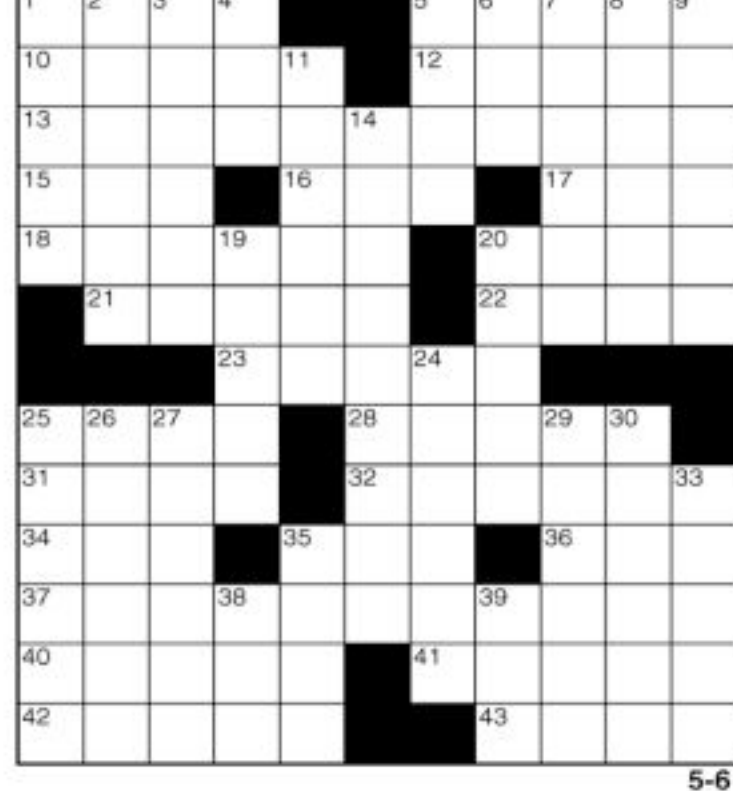
CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 Apple center
- 5 Floor models
- 10 Mimics
- 12 Supreme Court Justice Kagan
- 13 1969 "Hello, Dolly!" star
- 15 Finish
- 16 Long, long time
- 17 "My country -- of thee"
- 18 Had a sword fight
- 20 Make over
- 21 Old outhouse
- 22 Important times
- 23 Suit places
- 25 Flag feature
- 28 Be a rooter
- 31 Despire
- 32 "The Matrix" star
- 34 Heady brew
- 35 Long sandwich
- 36 Make a choice
- 37 Soup grain
- 40 Follow as a result
- 41 Competitor
- 42 Rider's horse

DOWN

- 1 Like Superman
- 2 Door-pounder's cry
- 3 Library patron
- 4 Go astray
- 5 College head
- 6 Actor Wallach
- 7 Warm sunshine, to snow
- 8 New York lake
- 9 Assurances
- 11 Shirt part
- 14 Explofating stuff
- 19 Book, in France
- 20 View anew
- 24 Legal profession
- 25 Forms
- 26 Natural gift
- 27 Relaxed
- 29 Change over time
- 30 Do over
- 33 Designer's concern
- 35 Downhill coaster
- 38 Regret
- 39 Tear



Yesterday's answer



CRYPTOQUOTE

ISKP IK RNUK, F KTO, ISKP IK IFF, F KTO. F TRUN KTO ISKP IK'QK QTFPKH NMO. -- ONDDX RTUNQHT

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE MORE YOU LIKE YOURSELF, THE LESS YOU ARE LIKE ANYONE ELSE, WHICH MAKES YOU UNIQUE. -- WALT DISNEY

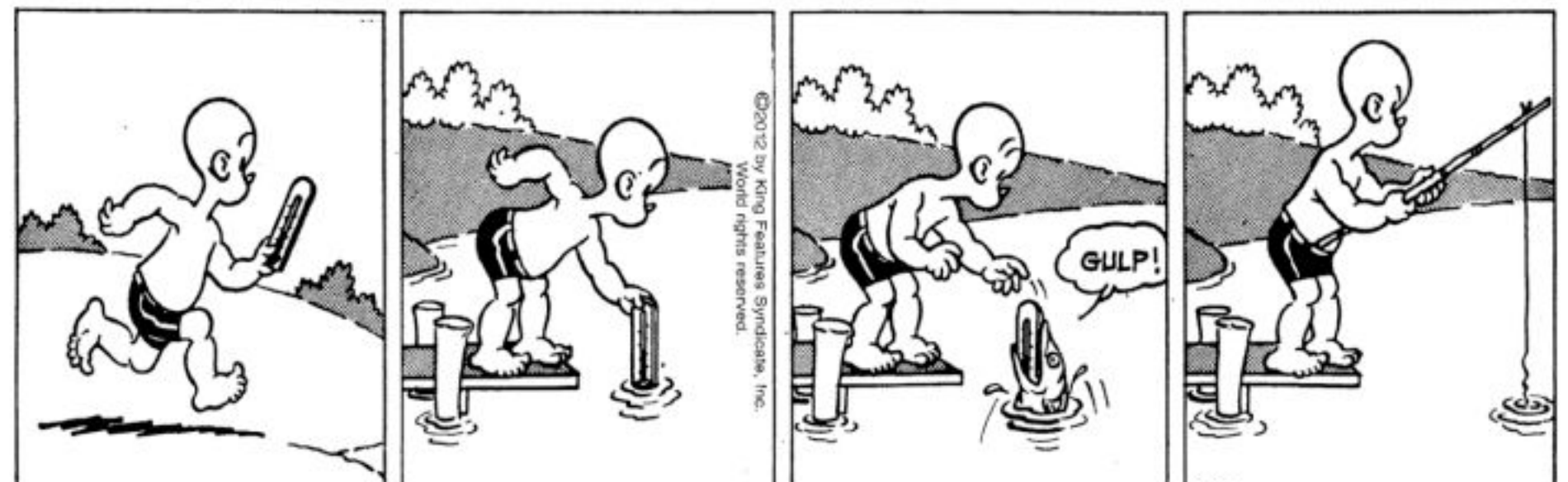
BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte



QUOTABLE Quote

Ah, summer, what power you have to make us suffer and like it.

Russel Baker