

Government strategy paper on Rohingyas

Let humanitarianism prevail

C.R. ABRAR

JUNE 20 marked the World Refugee Day. The day beckoned the fortunate ones who have a place to call home to reflect and ponder on those who cannot go back to their homes for fear of persecution. This day, therefore, provides an opportunity to engage in soul searching about how as a nation we should treat those who come to our land fleeing persecution.

Bangladeshis can take pride in the way we have dealt with the refugees. Despite resource constraints the people and the governments have tried their best to host these unfortunate people. The international community has also responded favourably to the country's call for assistance when need arose. However, over the past several years, there appears to have been a departure from this humanitarian approach as national security considerations began to take priority in policy-making.

The shift in policy was manifested in the speeches and statements of senior functionaries of the State; in beefing up border security; in denying admission to incoming Rohingyas and pushing them back to extreme insecurity (albeit in some cases after providing potable water, dried rice and fuel for motor engine); in augmenting surveillance in Bandarban, Khagrachari and Cox's Bazar districts; and in discouraging, if not barring, humanitarian agencies from rendering services to the unregistered refugees.

This national security driven approach contributed to the shaping of public perception and the agenda of the mainstream media, which became more intolerant and hostile to the Rohingyas. In 2012 and 2013, when the Rohingya community was subjected to ever increasing oppression and persecution of the Myanmarese government forces, chauvinist Rakhines and the militant Buddhist monks and needed shelter the most, Bangladesh decided to close its border. Those at the helm of the State did not find it necessary to explain this policy shift to the lay people as the act was justified on the sacrosanct ground of national security.

Despite the presence of the Rohingyas for decades in Bangladesh there has not been any official policy document. It is refreshing to note that the government has framed a 'Strategy Paper on Addressing the Issue of Myanmar Refugees and Undocumented Myanmar Nationals in Bangladesh'. The cabinet has already approved the document and the concerned ministries and agencies have been instructed to ensure its implementation. To the best of knowledge of this writer no consultation with civil society or stakeholders other than various ministries and departments of the government had been held in framing this

document of public importance.

Very few would contest that a democratic polity accords space to civil society to contribute in public policy framing. In a sharp departure from the good practice of holding of public consultations that was followed by the government of the day in framing the overseas employment policy, the anti-trafficking act and the overseas employment and emigrants' act, this time it decided to go alone in developing the Rohingya Strategy Paper. Be that as it may, let us now see what the Strategy Paper contains.

The document clarifies the government's position on some important issues pertaining to the Rohingyas. It unequivocally identifies them as "Myanmar nationals." This statement on the citizenship claims of the Rohingyas is very important vis a vis the dubious policy of the Myanmarese state in denying them citizenship. The second is the acknowledgement of the presence of

order to facilitate the repatriation and reintegration of their nationals now living in Bangladesh."

Despite this recognition that root causes of the flight of the Rohingyas are "systematic persecution and deprivation," the overall strategy framed stems from a national security perspective with disproportionate emphasis on "enhanced capacity building of the border security agencies with a view to arresting the continued inflow of Myanmar nationals through irregular channels." In order to materialise the objective of sealing the border "with barbed wire fencing" and erection of "sufficient numbers of border outposts and observation towers" has been mooted. In addition, strengthening of intelligence and surveillance efforts "to monitor the involvement of undocumented Myanmar nationals with subversive and criminal activities" has been proposed. Thus, while on one hand the

this vulnerable community would deem any registration or survey with skepticism and fear (of deportation).

The Strategy Paper proposes that "following the listing/identification," the "undocumented Myanmar nationals are to be provided with basic medical care, potable water, sanitation facilities and other essential humanitarian services." The Strategy Paper admits that all the above are "essential humanitarian services," and if they are so, why is the government insisting that those should be extended "following the listing/identification"? There has to be due recognition that they are human beings in dire conditions and they need immediate protection and basic assistance, and those should not be subjected to any administrative stipulation.

One wonders why the Strategy Paper has decided to exclude humanitarian organisations of global repute such as the Nobel Prize winning Medecins Sans Frontieres-MSF (Doctors without Frontiers), who have specialised skills in providing health care services in emergency situations, and insisting only on Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and local NGOs. Has any assessment been done whether the latter have the capacity to render such expert services to this huge and dispersed population? It is also interesting to note that the only mandated agency of the UN to deal with forced migrants, the UNHCR, has not found a place in the Strategy Paper's list of development-oriented international organisations "to maintain international standards and mobilise necessary financial and technical assistance." Included in the list are UNDP, WFP, UNICEF and IOM.

The Strategy Paper mentions a 'security dialogue' with Myanmar and the regional level cooperation of other countries. It is time to take stock of the humanitarian dimension in addressing the Rohingya issue in its totality. Instead of trying to attend to this within the purview of the Bali Process (that the Strategy Paper indicates), which essentially looks at human mobility through the lens of trafficking and irregular movement, this category of forced migrants should be dealt under a comprehensive regional framework that duly recognises root causes of their flight and addresses them from a humanitarian perspective. While all forms of pressure should be exerted on Myanmar to create enabling conditions for the Rohingyas to return in dignity; other parties, including Bangladesh, should also treat these unfortunate refugees with respect.

The writer teaches International Relations and coordinates the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) at the University of Dhaka. He is the President of Odhikar.

Economic growth and environmental protection go together



At the launch of the World Environment Day in 2014, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon announced: "Planet Earth is our shared island, let us join forces to protect it." Every year World Environment Day serves as the people's day for doing something positive for the environment, galvanising individual action into a collective power that generates an exponential positive impact on the planet.

Air pollution has now become a major killer with three million people dying of it every year, and carbon emission has doubled in three decades. In the water front, according to the United Nations projection, 2.7 billion people will face severe water shortages by 2025 if consumption continues at current rates. Added to this is the problem of contaminated water that kills 2.2 million every year.

In Bangladesh, in spite of the fact that we have 4m hectares of inland water support area, water crisis has been building up because of declining availability during lean period. Water quality degradation, especially of surface water due to poor sanitation, industrial effluents and pesticide run off; arsenic contamination of ground water and poor surface water quality have put the country in a critical situation. Water scarcity is directly linked to human activities that run counter to sustainable development. Arguably, agriculture accounts for two thirds of the fresh water consumed.

The Johannesburg summit endorsed a proposal that envisages "more crop per drop" approach. It calls for more efficient irrigation techniques, planting of drought and salt-tolerant crop varieties and better monitoring of soil humidity levels. Improving water delivery system would also help reducing the amount that is lost en route to the people who use it. The programme it envisages is WASH -- water, sanitation and hygiene -- for all, a global effort that aims to provide water service and hygiene training to everyone who lacks them by 2015. Though worldwide population growth has eased, the growth is still horrific in poor Asian countries.

In Asia and Africa, infectious diseases such as AIDS, malaria, cholera and tuberculosis are feeling the Malthusian effect. Rural land degradation is pushing people into cities, where crowded and polluted living conditions create the perfect grounds for sickness. To make WASH programme a success, women must be provided with basic education and job training. In our country as well as in most other places in Asia, we have hardly made any headway in this sector. Educated mothers not only have a stepladder out of poverty, but they also choose to have fewer babies. Moreover, any development effort aimed at improving the environment worldwide will require healthcare for the young since there are more than 1 billion people aged 15-24.

The West has noticed but blatantly ignored that up to a third of the world is in danger of starving. Two billion people lack reliable access to safe nutritious food and 800 million -- including 300 million children -- are chronically malnourished. Beset with agricultural failure, fragile ecosystem, erratic weather and other factors, Bangladesh now faces serious problem in feeding its people. Because of dismal poverty and population boom, land clearing for agriculture principally through shifting cultivation in the hill forest areas goes apace. Forests are being destroyed by logging, mostly illegal.

The amounts of crops, animals, bio-matter that we extract each year from the earth inhabited by 6.1 billion people exceeds what the planet can replace by an estimated 20%. Experts have opined that it takes 14.4 months to replenish what we use in 12 months, indicating a deficit spending of the worst kind.

Sustainable development means equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities. It is an exceptional opportunity economically to build markets and create jobs; socially, to bring people in from the margins; and politically, to reduce tensions over resource that could lead to violence, and to give every man and woman a voice and choice in deciding their own lives, but not at the expense of future generations.

It is high time that societies throughout the world work in a way to ensure that economic growth and environmental protection go together, and not be at odds. We can't think of development alone in total disregard of the environment. Prosperity built on the despoliation of natural environment is no prosperity at all, only a temporary reprieve from some immediate disaster.

Energy needs and climate are likely to bedevil all developmental programmes in future. Surely, all development efforts start with putting in the electric plug. About 2.5 billion people have no access to modern energy services, and the power demands of developing countries are expected to grow by 25% per year. But if those demands are met by burning fossil fuels such as oil, coal, and gas, more and more carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases will hit the atmosphere. For sustainable development to occur, the world must go for exploiting solar and wind energy on a mass scale.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star. E-mail: aukhandk@gmail.com

Global and national finance to tackle climate change

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

(UNFCCC) has set up a new Green Climate Fund (GCF) to handle the money. The GCF is a separate entity with its own Board (on which Bangladesh has a member on behalf of the Least Developed Countries Group) and its secretariat is based in Korea.

These global funds are meant to support all developing countries in their mitigation (reducing emissions of greenhouse gases) as well as adaptation (managing the risks of adverse climate impacts) activities.

At the moment, the GCF is empty, but it is expected that some of the developed countries heads of state will make pledges at the Climate Summit called by the Secretary General Ban Ki Moon in New York on September 23.

In the meantime, however, most of the developed countries have been funding activities through bilateral aid agencies or

multilateral agencies, including the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

It is quite difficult to find out accurately who is giving how much to whom and for which activities. The best estimates are that around \$10 billion to \$20 billion are being provided through different channels for both mitigation as well as adaptation activities. However, when looked at in more detail, over 90% of the money is going to mitigation actions in larger and more developed developing countries such as China, India, Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa while less than 10 % is going towards adaptation activities in the poorer developing countries such as the LDCs.

Katmandu Declaration; At the eighth international conference on Community Based Adaptation (CBA8) held in Katmandu, Nepal in April, over four hundred participants from around the world gathered to share best practices and concluded by adopting the "Katmandu Declaration on Financing Local Adaptation," which makes the following demands to global and national financial decision makers:

1. To global funders: that at least 50% of funding for tackling climate change be allocated for adaptation.

2. For national governments; that at least 50% of funds to tackle climate change be allocated to local level adaptation by most vulnerable communities in each country.

The reason for holding the conference in Nepal was to spotlight the policy of the government of Nepal to allocate not just

50% but 80% of climate change funds to local level where they have pioneered the development of Local Adaptation Plans of Action (LAPAs).

The Katmandu Declaration is now being taken to all the relevant global and national decision makers, including the Board of the GCF which has actually adopted a decision to allocate 50% of the funds to adaptation and also to prioritise the LDCs. The Board members from the LDC group (including Bangladesh) played a significant role in getting this decision.

Situation in Bangladesh In Bangladesh, the government has set up two pioneering climate change funds, namely the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF) which has received nearly half a billion Dollars so far over a number of years from Bangladesh exchequer. There is also a Bangladesh Climate Resilience Fund (BCRF) which is based on contributions from international donors and has several hundred million Dollars in it. Both funds are used to support the forty plus actions under six pillars that were identified under the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) some years ago. Both Funds are currently under review to decide what their future should be.

In terms of how much each of the two funds delivers to the most vulnerable communities, both have already allocated 10% each towards community level adaptation activities through NGOs, which is delivered through the Palli Karma Shyok Foundation

(PKSF) who has allocated most of the funds to a number of NGOs through a competitive bidding process.

However, when examining the rest of the 90% which is delivered through government agencies and ministries it is clear that very little of that is targeted specifically at the most vulnerable communities or to the local level. Hence, it is important that Bangladesh also think carefully about how to better target the climate change funds that it already has to the most vulnerable communities at the local level. For this it needs to focus more on the ministries of local government and rural development in future.

Conclusion As the global funds for tackling climate change become available there will inevitably be some competition from developing countries to get a share of those funds. The most successful countries will be those that can demonstrate that they have the absorptive capacity to manage large funds well and have robust monitoring systems in place to demonstrate that the funds are being spent well. If Bangladesh wishes to capture a reasonable share of the global climate change funds in coming years then it needs to invest in management and monitoring of the climate change investments that are already being made.

The writer is Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development, Independent University, Bangladesh and Senior Fellow, International Institute for Environment and Development.

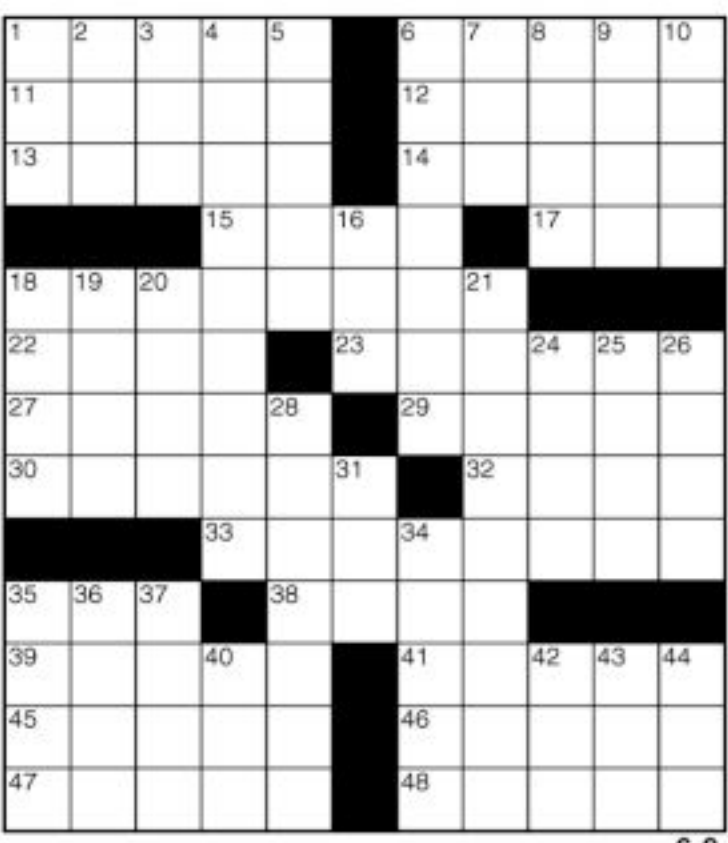
CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS
 1 Turning tool
 6 Command to a dog
 11 "The Waste Land" poet
 12 Nebraska city
 13 Comb parts
 14 Bit of gossip
 15 Be furious
 17 Lamb's mother
 18 Stun
 22 LummoX
 23 Furry wraps
 27 Watches over
 29 Mail business
 30 TV ratings period
 32 Murder
 33 Thought out
 35 Lynx or lion
 38 Drawn out
 39 From the country
 41 Eyeballs
 45 Make speeches
 46 "Superman" star
 47 Origami need
 48 Pick up the tab

DOWN
 1 Rent out
 2 Saloon quaff
 3 Even score
 4 Drag race participant
 5 Patriot Allen
 6 Groves
 7 Flightless bird
 8 Unexciting
 9 Eats
 10 Loser of a fabled race
 16 Basic soldiers
 18 Play parts
 19 Murdered
 20 Musical sound
 21 Showoff on the slopes
 24 Diving bird
 25 Pennsylvania port
 26 Dispatch
 28 School primer
 31 -- Paul
 34 Derivative sound
 35 Field yield
 36 Mystique
 37 Catch
 40 Had supper
 42 Rebel general
 43 Longoria of TV
 44 Filming site

CRYPTOQUOTE
 UZZ PXOE GXLS JMRNSORSJ FMUG
 ISOSQZRMUE MO ZQJSQ UZ
 NQXHUMHS HGXQMUE.
 -- XDYSQU HXPVR

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:
 IN THEORY THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE
 BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE. IN
 PRACTICE THERE IS. - YOGI BERRA



Yesterday's answer

S	T	A	F	F	A	M	O	N	G
L	O	V	E	R	D	O	N	O	R
A	L	O	N	E	D	E	E	R	E
L	E	W	D	E	R	A	W	E	
O	D	E	S	O	D	A	C	A	N
M	O	D	P	L	E	N	T	Y	
			P	A	L	E	Y		
T	E	A	C	U	P	L	I	L	
F	O	R	C	E	P	S	A	C	E
O	U	R	S	P	I	T	E	S	
A	P	A	R	T	A	R	E	A	S
M	E	T	O	O	C	O	N	G	O
S	E	A	M	Y	E	N	T	E	R

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



HENRY by Don Trachte

