

Myanmar must recognise Rohingyas as its citizens

A key solution to the humanitarian crisis

IN the wake of a much publicised international humanitarian crisis relating to boatpeople, thousands of whom are languishing in the high seas, Myanmar's reluctance to attend Thailand's May 29 regional summit to solve the issue, is disconcerting. There is no denial that countries such as Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, the usual destinations of these Bangladeshis and Rohingyas who end up in terrifying slave camps, must discuss how to humanely deal with the crisis. But Myanmar cannot go on a denial mode when it comes to providing citizenship to the Rohingya people. In fact Myanmar has intimated that it will not attend this crucial summit if the term 'Rohingya' is used. The official line of Myanmar's government is that those whom we (and the rest of the world) refer to as Rohingyas, are actually illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

The 1982 Citizenship Law of Burma (now Myanmar) denied the Rohingyas citizenship despite the fact that they have been living in that country for centuries. The abhorrent persecution of Rohingyas in the Rakhine State, led to thousands of displaced Rohingyas to take refuge in Bangladesh. While Bangladesh, which still has thousands of Rohingya people in their refugee camps, must not turn away Rohingyas or any other boat people, the present circumstances behooves Myanmar to recognise its role in the matter. Although the democratically elected Aung Sun Suu Ki's party did not display the expected change in attitude towards the Rohingyas earlier, the recent statement by her party's spokesperson that stateless Muslims in Myanmar should be given citizenship, gives us a sliver of hope. We eagerly wait for a possible end to the miseries of the Rohingya people through their official recognition as Myanmar citizens.

Improved signalling system!

It met traffic messier

THE horrendous tailbacks suffered by Dhaka residents last Saturday and Sunday were, we are informed the result of a new signal system installed by the authorities at a cost of Tk14 crore. Indeed, going by reports published in this paper, we note that Tk 37 crore has been spent over the course of the last 11 years to "improve" the signals system. If what we witnessed on the two days in question is any measure, the tax payers' money has been less than well spent.

The new countdown timers installed alongside traffic lights to help traffic police to conduct the flow of vehicles on roads failed for a number of reasons. Seldom are signal lights relied on to direct traffic by police. Equally important is the failure to follow traffic signals by drivers. It is essentially more manual than mechanical or electrical on the ground.

It is difficult to comprehend why city residents were apparently not informed of the installation of these new devices and how to follow them. There was no public awareness campaign carried out prior to installation or operationalisation so that failure was built into the experimentation. The resulting chaos that ensued would have been entirely avoidable had the road motor vehicle operators been sensitised in advance. The authorities really need to get their act together. Lessons need to be learnt from this trial-and-error process of what works and what does not need but ad-hoc experimentation is not an option.

The risky flight of repute



RUBANA HUQ

BUSINESS is a risky business indeed. One doesn't rest in ease in the corporate world. Tensions come flying in; every second phone conversation adds to the stress level; breaking news cause fresh tremors; every meeting means having more issues piling up on the desk. This is what being involved in business means in this country. And no, being a businessman does not always mean big cars, big houses, money being stashed overseas, having second passports and children being parked in safe havens. Being in business often means carrying a lot of baggage of unresolved issues. It's mostly about trying to tell a good story and about living one day at a time. In the span of 24 hours, one may peak to a star height and in the next 24, one may land nose down on the ground, never wanting to surface again. This only happens when one is in profile. Living and dying in high profile is a curse in most part of the world. Yet many of us are uncontrollably drawn to the flames and in the process, often burn ourselves with public exposure... especially because stories of success are quickly covered and hard to come by. And when and if there are any success stories, one may as well start counting down to zero and eventually review the shelf life of the story with caution.

One such success story is Apex Footwear. The father started the business and now the son runs it with success. Many of our children have joined our businesses and many of them are indeed doing better than what we could have ever hoped to have achieved in our lives. Just a few months ago, Forbes ran a full story on the Apex father-son duo and called their industry "a different face of Bangladesh manufacturing." Apex is located 25 miles north of Dhaka city in Gazipur district. It's spread over a 24-acre site where 5,500 workers, mostly women, make leather shoes. The company ships 4.5

million pairs annually and caters to 130 retailers. On top of that the company has 550 outlets in the country and sells three million pairs domestically. Forbes also reported that the factory pays \$100 wage to the workers along with two bonuses and a share of profits. Equipped with an effluent treatment plant, a purification plant for drinking water, a medical clinic and a day nursery, Apex is known for good practices.

But then, earlier this month, when an employee suffered a miscarriage in her workplace toilet at Apex, after she was "allegedly" refused medical leave, all hell broke loose. The woman's name was made public in the media. At this point, one may want to recollect that for many days, one didn't know the name of the Delhi rape case victim and referred to her as the Daughter of India. But here, all of us got to know the name of the worker from minute one, way before it was even minimally required. The story was simple: she wanted leave; the factory supervisor denied her the same; and she suffered miscarriage in the toilet. The report was pretty straight cut: a four-month old baby had died as the mother was denied leave by the factory authority and hence, the owner had to be taken to task. In the industrial town of Kaliakoir, the story got covered with the fastest of speed possible. That the worker had never asked for "maternity" leave, had never informed the authorities that she was pregnant (we are forbidden to ask a worker if she is pregnant), and had only complained of abdominal cramps, and was reported to have declared that she did not want the pregnancy and was on medication to terminate it, was far from the spot. And therefore, a supplier which has won the US department store Macy's "Five Star Award" for four consecutive years between 2010 to 2013 "in recognition of the continued support and outstanding service", has suddenly brought the spotlight back on Bangladesh for having an unacceptable level of labour conditions.

To begin with, Bangladesh did not need such news; the poor girl deserved to have her name hidden from the media splurge and Nasim Manzur could have been spared. Though I belong to the same world that Nasim

does, where we wear different hats and juggle our roles being part of the civil society, truth is that we also don't always have direct and immediate control of what happens on all our factory floors. Most of your columnist's time is spent on trouble shooting issues, which the workers raise and not so much on securing business anymore. As a manufacturer, I can afford to lose business, but I cannot afford to lose my credibility. In other words, I don't want to be the one trying not to read the papers, as long as there is a bad story out in the open. It's like wanting to keep our eyes closed pretending to play night when the entire daylight of accusations plague us every time we open our eyes for want of light.

Now where is the light in all this? Media is the light for the public and the private sector. Without the gatekeeping of the media, many of us would be running like headless chickens sans accountability. Having said that, this will also not be an honest commentary if your columnist does not mention that media, too, needs to cover all sides of the story before bringing sensational headlines to public attention. Since we tread on an economy that thrives because of exports, and since these exports are often dependent on mid-level management on the floors, as much as we will have to educate our supervisory level to act with utmost caution and sensitivity, the story of the private sector must also be accurately portrayed to the rest.

People engaged in honest businesses with no bad debts to their names deserve better. And one incident should never prompt media shaming and one incident in isolation should never smear a lifetime of honour, achievement and credibility.

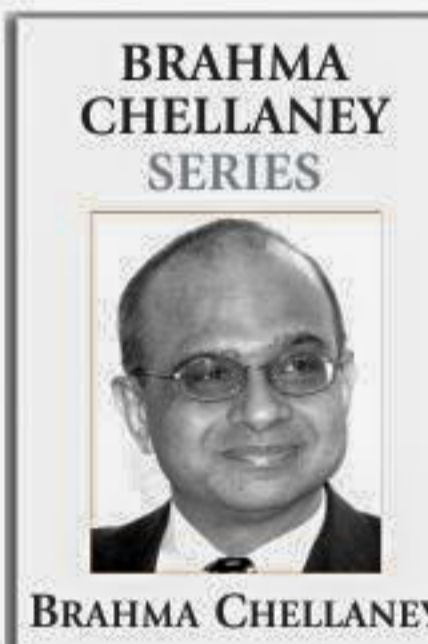
As much as it is possible for any of us to fall prey to extremely unfortunate happenings on factory premises, one must sympathise with the simple fact that it takes decades for an entrepreneur to earn repute, soar to the skies, and suddenly sadly crash below as the wings of wax melt in the heat of the sun.

Alas, Icarus. You deserve a full flight.

The writer is the Managing Director of The Mohammadi Group.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Modi in China



BRAHMA CHELLANEY

CHINA and India have a fraught relationship, characterised by festering disputes, deep mistrust, and a shared ambivalence about political cooperation. Booming bilateral trade, far from helping to turn the page on old rifts, has been accompanied by increasing border incidents, military tensions, and geopolitical rivalry, as well as disagreements on riparian and maritime issues.

Since taking office last year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has sought to transform his country's relationship with China, arguing that Asia's prospects hinge "in large measure" on what the two countries - which together account for one-third of the world's population - "achieve individually" and "do together." But, as Modi's just-concluded tour of China highlighted, the issues that divide the demographic titans remain formidable.

To be sure, China's leaders feted Modi in style. When Modi arrived in Xian - one of China's four ancient capitals and President Xi Jinping's hometown - Xi took him on a personal tour of the Big Wild Goose Pagoda. (Modi subsequently boasted of his close "plus one" friendship with Xi.) In Beijing, Premier Li Keqiang posed for a selfie with Modi outside the Temple of Heaven.

What China's leaders did not do was yield on any substantive issue - and not for lack of effort on Modi's part. Despite Modi's pragmatic and conciliatory tack, his request that China "reconsider its approach" on some of the issues that are preventing the partnership from realising its "full potential" went unheeded.

Consider discussions relating to the ongoing dispute over the two countries' long Himalayan frontier. Alluding to a series of Chinese military incursions since 2006, Modi declared that "a shadow of uncertainty" hangs over the border region, because the "line of actual control" that China unilaterally drew after defeating India in a 1962 war that it

had initiated was never mutually clarified. Modi proposed resuming the LAC clarification process, but to no avail.

In fact, the reason for the continued ambiguity is that, in 2002, after more than two decades of negotiations, China reneged on a promise to exchange maps with India covering the two main disputed sectors - the Austria-size Arunachal Pradesh and the Switzerland-size Aksai Chin, along with its adjacent areas - located at either end of the Himalayas. Four years later, China revived its long-dormant claim to Arunachal Pradesh, and has since

undermine India's sovereignty, by issuing stapled visas to residents of Arunachal Pradesh.

Moreover, China - which, by annexing water-rich Tibet, has become the region's hydro-hegemon - also declined to conclude an agreement to sell India hydrological data on transboundary rivers year-round, rather than just during the monsoon season. So China is not only refusing to create a water-sharing pact with any of its neighbours; it will not even share comprehensive data on upstream river flows.

Making matters worse, there is an

unequal. Many of the deals Modi made with business leaders in Shanghai - supposedly worth \$22 billion - entail Chinese state-owned banks financing Indian firms to purchase Chinese equipment. This will worsen India's already massive trade deficit with China, while doing little to boost China's meagre investment in India, which totals just one percent of China's annual bilateral trade surplus - a surplus that has swelled by one-third since Modi took office and is now approaching \$50 billion.

Indeed, China and India have one of the world's most lopsided trade relationships. Chinese exports to India are worth five times more than its imports from India. Moreover, China mainly purchases raw materials from India, while selling it mostly value-added goods. With India making little effort to stem the avalanche of cheap Chinese goods flooding its market - despite Modi's much-touted "Make in India" campaign - China's status as the country's largest source of imports appears secure.

China is well-practiced in using trade and commercial penetration to bolster its influence in other countries. In India's case, it is leveraging its clout as a major supplier of power and telecommunications equipment and active pharmaceutical ingredients, not to mention as a lender to financially troubled Indian firms, to limit the country's options. By allowing the trade distortions from which China profits to persist - and, indeed, to grow - India is effectively funding this strategy.

As hard as Modi tries to put a positive spin on his recent visit to China, highlighting the 24 mostly symbolic agreements that were concluded, he cannot obscure the harsh strategic realities affecting the bilateral relationship. Without a new approach, the Sino-Indian relationship seems doomed to remain highly uneven and contentious.

The writer is Professor of Strategic Studies at the New Delhi-based Center for Policy Research, is the author of *Asian Juggernaut, Water: Asia's New Battleground, and Water, Peace, and War: Confronting the Global Water Crisis*.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese Premier Li pose for a selfie at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing.

breached its border several times. It fulminated against Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh in February.

Nonetheless, in his zeal to build the bilateral relationship, Modi announced that Chinese tourists are now eligible to receive electronic visas on arrival in India - blindsiding his foreign secretary, who had just told the media that no such decision had been made. China's foreign minister hailed the measure as a "gift" - an accurate description, given that China has yielded nothing in return. On the contrary, China has aimed to

unmistakable air of condescension in the pronouncements, contained in the joint statement issued at the end of Modi's visit, that China "took note of India's aspirations" to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and "understands and supports India's aspiration to play a greater role in the United Nations, including in the Security Council." China is the only major power that has not backed India's bid to become a permanent member of the Security Council.

Economic outcomes were similarly

COMMENTS

"Nuke power plant cost up three times"
(May 17, 2015)

Bazlur Rahman

Because half of the money will go to the pockets of some people!

"900 survive"
(May 16, 2015)

Ron Hak

The government has no concern for these unfortunate people; so sad.

"Save migrants drifting at sea"
(May 16, 2015)

Anis Rahman

How inhumane! I can't bear this anymore. Please someone do something for them.

Nazia Ahmed

The cheapest thing in this world is the life of the poor and the powerless.

Mahmudul Hasan Sajal

While the whole world takes their time to ponder on who can take these poor souls in, many of them will die. What is happening to mankind? At least give them food and water.

Rehan Alam

Why isn't our PM raising her voice regarding this problem?

Syeda Farjana Ahmed

Please take proper legal actions against those who are luring these poor people to take such risks.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Impunity to gold smugglers and associates

Almost every day we come across the news of gold smuggling through our international airports at Dhaka and Chittagong. Those who are involved and get caught are not given due and exemplary punishment and that is one of the reasons why they continue to commit this crime. The way the smuggling is carried out indicates that the immigration/custom and airport officials could be involved. And the amount of gold that is seized is only the tip of the iceberg. Unbridled corruption has plagued almost all sectors.

A. H. Dewan
Dhaka Cantt., Dhaka



PHOTO: STAR

BD cricket team's tour to Pakistan

I fully endorse Mr. Aminur Rahim's letter published in your esteemed daily a few days ago, regarding the Tigers' performance during the second Test with Pakistan. I am sure Musfiqur Rahim will learn from his mistakes, improve further and perform better in future. All the best to him and to our cricket team for the upcoming match with India in June.

I am concerned about the Bangladesh cricket team tour to Pakistan proposed by the PCB chairman. I think it should be discussed at length before any decision is made. Only a couple of days ago, in Karachi, 43 unarmed Islamis were shot to death by terrorists in broad day light. I think BCB should think twice before sending our team to Pakistan, keeping in mind the last Sri Lankan cricket team tour to Pakistan in Lahore. I am not sure if our players will be safe in Lahore or any other cities in Pakistan because of the worsening security situation there.

Jamshaid Taher
Banani, Dhaka