

Floating coffins Tragedy of the Rohingya boat people

MD. IDRIS

ONCE again the Rohingya crisis has come to the attention of the international mass media. This time thousands of Rohingyas are found adrift in the sea without adequate food, water and other provisions in their boats for several days. Several boats carrying Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants are found stranded in the Andaman Sea, Strait of Malacca and along the coast off Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia; the captain and crew of many of the boats that carried the migrants have abandoned them.

Some boats carrying more than 2,000 people have been allowed to land in the Indonesian province of Aceh and the Malaysian offshore island of Lankawi, after fishermen rescued them when their boats were about to sink. However, the Indonesian authorities have turned away other boats approaching their coast without permitting them to land. The same has been done by Thailand and Malaysia. Navies from all these countries are patrolling their maritime borders round the clock to ensure that no such boats could land in their shores. According to reliable sources, at least 8,000 people including women and children, are drifting in the sea and have sent distress signals to rescue them

while many are dying daily onboard. Although the United Nations, other international human rights organisations, many high profile politicians and individuals have been urging these countries to allow these distressed boat people to land on their shores on humanitarian grounds, so far, there is no indication of any positive response from these countries. The governments of the said countries are content pointing fingers at each other, as they insist that this is not their problem and it's not their responsibility to accommodate them.

This fresh series of the Rohingya crisis began a few weeks ago after Thailand started massive crackdowns on human traffickers and smugglers, following the discovery of mass graves. The remains of more than 30 people, believed to be Rohingyas and possibly Bangladeshis, found in the jungles of southern Thailand where traffickers run several camps for dumping the trafficked people and extorting ransom from them, have been exhumed.

Many high level Thai officials are allegedly involved in this human racket and Southern Thailand is a transit station to smuggle people into Malaysia across their common land border. As the crackdown continues in Thailand, boats loaded with several hundred people cannot land in Thailand and therefore

many of them have been forced to remain suspended in the sea while many traffickers abandon their boats.

The Rohingyas are not economic migrants as some people wrongly state. If they were economic migrants, why should Muslim Rohingyas be the only ones fleeing Arakan? What about the Buddhist Rakhines? Since 2012,

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thousands of Rohingyas died in Arakan, and more than 150,000 people have been herded in the so-called Internally Displaced People Camps. These camps are in fact glorified open air prisons with no adequate provisions for food, clothing, healthcare services and no expectation for a better future or hope to return to their former homes.

Those who are living outside the IDP camps are also subjected to continuous oppression and repression, killing, torture, rape and slave labour. This tragic situation plaguing the Rohingya people compels them to take the hard decision of abandoning their centuries-old homes for the hope of a better future.

The crux of the Rohingya migration problem lies in the attitude of the Myanmar regime whose treatment of the Rohingya people has been described as "crimes against humanity" or even "manifest genocide" by many international observers monitoring the Rohingya issue closely. However the Myanmar government, as usual, has been rejecting the call of humanity to change their policy regarding the Rohingya issue.

Whatever be the steps that need to be taken by Myanmar's neighbours and the international community to find an ultimate, sustainable solution to this long-standing problem, saving the lives of tens of thousands of people, who are described as "floating coffins" on the surface of the sea, is the pressing call of the day.

Therefore the international community must press the need to allow these people to land on the shores of the countries concerned on humanitarian grounds before it is too late.

The writer is a contributor.

People and public decision

Z A KHAN

TODAY, in the 'mouse-click-away-world', a single wrong decision or a single bit of irrationality is likely to set a whole train of traumatic events in motion. The degree of insularity that has set in our national life insinuates at the negligence of the political leadership to recognise the 'Vaux Populi' and their aspirations. The undisguised contempt of the people towards lawmakers and failure of the government to pervade development in national life have generated frustration which may carry the situation to anarchy.

Burdened with antiquated bureaucratic or legal procedure, the decision making process has become an area of preposterously buoyant sycophants and the caucus of the power that be. Laws that are enacted today seem to be devoid of the credo of humanism as they hardly reflect popular wishes and aspirations. I believe political leadership, public servants, and even the public are to be blamed for ineffective decision making on a national level.

What denotes public decision? A public decision is a "decision made by a society for itself or for society by its elected representative or by groups that have material effects on individuals other than those involved in making the decision". From this definition we can understand that elected representative and bureaucracy are the two pre-dominant elements that form the core of a decision making body.

In most cases millions of people implement the decision made by a handful of politicians with the active participation of bureaucracy. Many may contend that elected representatives voice peoples' need and aspirations but this is not quite an accurate situation in our part of the world. Over the years we have seen that the peoples' representative do not have enough time for their constituencies after the election.

Today passionate politics has given way to professional ambitions and therefore politics to hold on to power has become the trick of the trade. These representatives know that a broad majority of our people are ill-informed and barely literate and can be swayed by emotional speeches and dreamy promises.

One can say that public decision making ability does not have pre-eminence in our national agenda these days. Will it be wrong to conclude that one of the major reasons of failure of public decision making is the lack of political vision of our electorate and betrayal of our political leadership as they, wearing the façade of a 'holier than thou' image, grossly mislead the people?

Failure to ensure balanced growth is probably another vital factor that has affected public decision making. Plans are formulated in the parliament but their execution is left to the bureaucracy. Governments seek advice from a few high profile advisers who are alleged to lack adequate knowledge of the ground realities and that is why they often falter in prioritising the development agenda. The bureaucrats, who are unassailable because of their deep rooted corporate interests, do not feel obliged to execute the plans dispassionately if they find that this does not fit into their scheme of things.

Flow of information pertaining to local hopes and desires is affected to the extent that only those pieces of information are made available to the national leadership which suits the interest of the leaders at the constituency level. Public decision makers' dislike for stipulations, organisations or institutions, their inherent inability to accommodate each other when they interface because of red tape, the low morale of the staff responsible, incomplete or distorted records and readymade solutions of the interest groups often greatly affect public decision making.

Government organisations do not, unfortunately, enjoy the reputation for making efficient use of individual skill or competence. Also our legislative process itself is not a model of efficiency. The quality of representation at public bodies such as the parliament, municipalities, union councils etc, has to improve. Our electorate should be educated through mass media about the consequences of falling prey to the enticements of the unscrupulous aspirants of power.

A comprehensive redesigning of the procedure to hold public offices will be necessary. This would entail development of transparency which should be promoted through mass media. An environment to bind the entire nation in a fabric of co-operation and understanding for the welfare of people should be created. Leadership's tolerance to public criticism will be necessary to institutionalise democracy or else whims and caprice of the leadership will mar the healthy growth of democracy.

The writer is a former advisor of the chairperson of Bangladesh National Party (BNP).

Hurdles to investment

FAARIA TASIN

WHAT is the one thing that can help Bangladesh to achieve the 7 percent economic growth rate that it is so desperate for? We know that Bangladesh has been successful in attaining 6 percent plus growth rate even during the US recession and the Eurozone Debt Crisis, when most economies crumbled.

Since 1970s, the Gross Domestic Product has grown at a steady rate. GDP has grown at an average rate of 3.7 percent during the 1980s, 4.8 percent during the 1990s and 6.3 percent between the Fiscal Year 2010 and 2014.

One of the key determinants behind this growth rate has been the accumulation of capital (i.e., investment). The regulatory environment for business in a country can have a direct impact on this. A list of cumbersome procedures and bureaucracy can act as a deterrent to private investment. Whereas, if a country is able to look after investors' interests and simplify setting up of businesses and its transactions, it will help to encourage investment.

In Bangladesh, investment in FY 2014 was reported to be 28.7 percent but has it been good enough? If Bangladesh is to attain middle-income status by 2021, it is crucial that it increases its investment to GDP ratio. Countries with middle income status have investment to GDP proportions ranging from 35 to 40 percent.

It is particularly important for a country like Bangladesh to increase its investment-GDP ratio. One important reason is because Bangladesh is currently experiencing a demographic dividend and each year 2 million people are entering the job market. Without adequate investment, the economy would be unable to absorb the new people joining the labor force.

Private investment in Bangladesh had started to rise since the early 1990s which occurred due to a number of factors including trade liberalisation, privatisation, and fiscal incentives among many others. However for the last five years, it seemed to have lost its momentum as it has been hovering at 21 percent of the GDP.

Now let us take a look at the Foreign Direct Investments in the country. In 2013, Bangladesh man-

aged to rake in only \$1.5 billion FDI as compared to India (\$28 billion), Malaysia (\$11.5 billion), Indonesia (\$23 billion), Vietnam (\$9 billion) and China (\$347 billion). We know that on the upside, Bangladesh has the advantage of cheaper labour over its comparators and a large market size. But despite the positives, the country is raking up only a fraction of FDI compared to its neighbors.

So what are the constraints to investment and why is Bangladesh not being able to bring in as much FDI as its neighbours?

Two reports can help us to gain an insight into the matter; these are The Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) and Doing Business (DB) indicators.

The Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) is an indicator of investment climate which bases competitiveness on 12 components such as macroeconomic environment, education, health, infrastructure, goods and labour market efficiency, market size and the like.

TOP CONSTRAINTS TO BUSINESSES IN BANGLADESH		
ENFORCING CONTRACTS		
	Time (in days)	Cost (% of the claim)
Bangladesh	1,442	66.8
Vietnam	400	29
China	452.8	16.2
GETTING ELECTRICITY		
	Time (in days)	Cost (% of income/capita)
Bangladesh	428.9	3,890.1
Vietnam	115	1,432.8
China	143.2	459.4
REGISTERING PROPERTY		
	Time (in days)	Cost (% of property value)
Bangladesh	244	7.2
Vietnam	57	0.6
China	19.4	3.6

Source: Doing Business Report 2015

From the GCI, we can see that countries like India, China, Vietnam, Indonesia and Sri Lanka are more competitive than Bangladesh. Though Bangladesh has made some progress in recent years, the comparator countries have improved at a higher pace.

In the recent Doing Business (DB) report, Bangladesh ranks 173 out of 189 countries, with Singapore getting the best ranking and Eritrea getting the worst at 189th.

The DB report covers 10 regulatory areas that affect business decisions. In Bangladesh, the three biggest constraints to investment are enforcing contracts, getting electricity and registering property.

It takes Bangladesh 1,442 days to enforce a contract and the financial cost of enforcement is 67 percent of the claim. Whereas it takes only 400 days in Vietnam and 453 days in China and the financial cost are 29 percent and 16 percent respectively. The time lag acts as a deterrent to investment and must be improved in order to increase investments, especially FDI.

In acquiring electricity, it takes Bangladesh 429 days, which is much higher than Vietnam (115 days) and China (143) days. The relative cost of getting electricity measured as percentage of per capita GDP is much higher in Bangladesh relative to its comparators. The high cost is an indication of inadequate supply of electricity respective to demand. Domestic investors in many cases are able to use personal connections to cut through the time lag however, for foreign investors, the process remains difficult.

As far as registering property is concerned, it takes Bangladesh 244 days, whereas it takes only 57 days in Vietnam and 19 days in China. High population and rapid urbanisation have led to a scarcity of land; in addition, the land market is inefficient which lowers availability of land for industrial purposes in urban areas in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has the advantage of cheap labour and hence the ability to attract labour-intensive industries. This is why it is vital to provide an investor-friendly business environment that will help us to reap the advantages of higher investments in the country.

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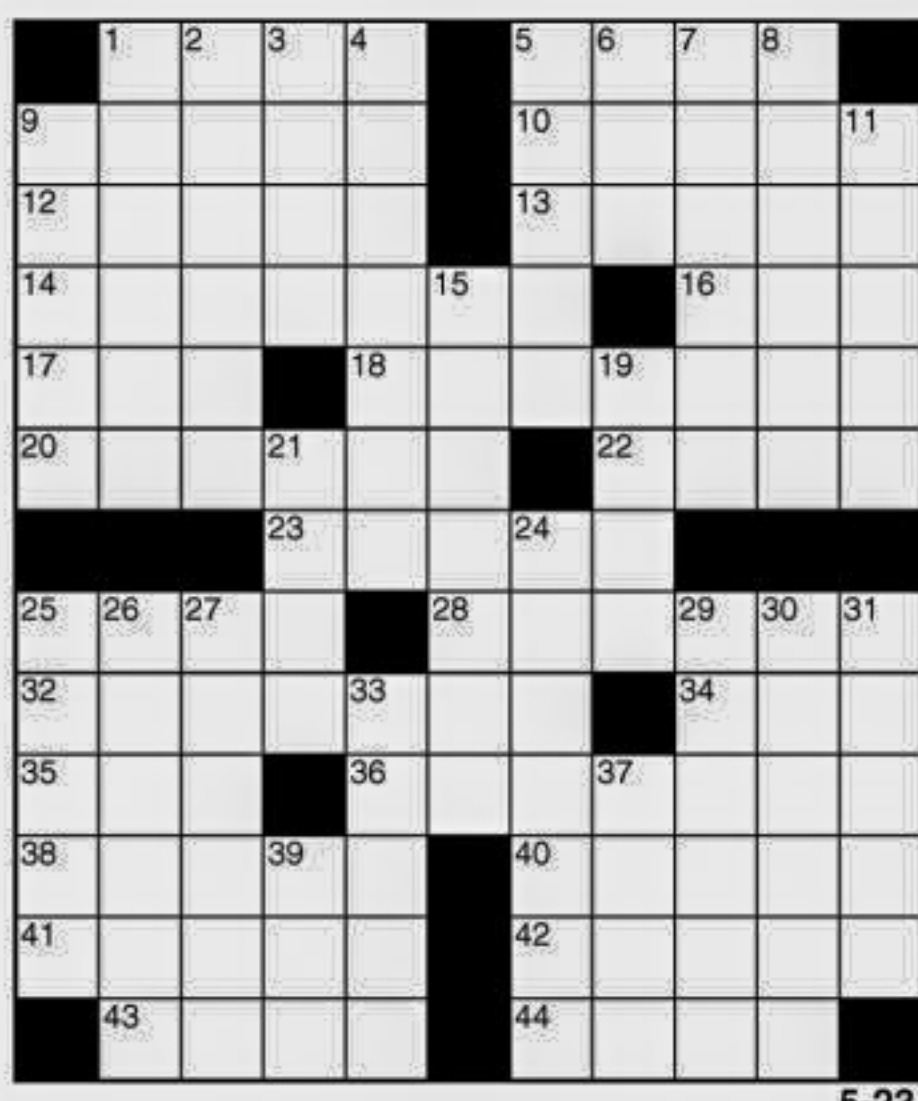
QUOTABLE Quote



ARUNDHATI ROY
THERE'S REALLY NO SUCH THING AS THE 'VOICELESS'. THERE ARE ONLY THE DELIBERATELY SILENCED, OR THE PREFERABLY UNHEARD.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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|-----------------------|------------------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 Expand | 1 Person with a beef |
| 5 Track figures | 2 Charity fundraiser |
| 9 Computer problem | 3 Capital on a fjord |
| 10 Anarchic events | 4 Cabby's query |
| 12 Biathlon need | 5 Make speeches |
| 13 Old marketplace | 6 Excavation site |
| 14 Jazzed | 7 Gizmo |
| 16 Oxford VIP | 8 Amble |
| 17 Sushi choice | 9 Vinegar bottle |
| 18 Green stone | 11 Yellow-gray |
| 20 Rover's rewards | 15 Apologetic words |
| 22 Without basis | 19 Singer |
| 23 Helpful push | 21 Aid illegally |
| 25 Apple or pear | 24 Is furious |
| 28 Show defiance | 25 Lock |
| 32 Make good as new | 26 Death personified |
| 34 Count start | 27 Will topic |
| 35 Put away | 29 Band aide |
| 36 "Glory be!" | 30 Like much junk mail |
| 38 Left over | 31 Mexican money |
| 40 Western contest | 33 Signs |
| 41 Become established | 37 Painted tinware |
| 42 Inventor Howe | 39 Tear |
| 43 Workout count | |
| 44 Title paper | |



Yesterday's answer

A M E N S L U M
D I X O N T I M I D
U L T R A A M B L E
L I E B A R B I L L
T E N D O N S L E I
U S U R Y F I R S
I D S P A C
W H O S D E C A L
R O N T I T T L E S
E N C O R E S C A T
S C O P E A T O N E
T H R E E T O R T E
O D D S O D O R

8th Death Anniversary



We pray for Marhum A. B. M. Kamal Uddin Khan on his 8th Death Anniversary today, the 20th of May 2015. Marhum A. B. M. Kamal Uddin Khan was a Founder Life Member of the North South University (NSU) Foundation, now changed to North South University Foundation, which established and administered NSU, now run by North South University Trust.

He was also the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the NSU Foundation, and a member of the then Parichalona Porshod of NSU. He was a successful industrialist, prominent banker and enthusiastic philanthropist.

May Allah bless his soul and give the members of his family the strength to keep on bearing the loss.

