

# Playing with words or playing with fire?

*With each get-away of the diabolical masterminds and perpetrators of the hackings, the vicious cycle of impunity gets an oxygen of support to spring more lethal surprises*

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

**I**N our verbal society, the toolbox to exchange banter is getting full up with instruments employable with dramatic, if sometimes dangerous effect. There is a picturesque Bangla maxim *aketo nachumi buri tar upore dhole bari*. This approximately translates into: 'raring to dance an

old lady that she is, a drumbeat to top it up makes her crazily waltz.'

Blogging, a perfectly decent, liberating word has turned into a pejorative in the mouths and handiwork of bigoted elements. A useful device for self-expression and exchange of thoughts is now corrupted because of being abused by the fanatical fringes to advance their vicious agenda. The feverishly topical postings in the social media go viral in the literal sense so that any dark, obscurantist agenda risks being exposed to a very wide audience, sometimes with a potential contagion effect.

On the other hand, even those who post responsible and progressive views get pitted against religious extremists latter with a penchant for labeling or categorising of their imagined adversaries. Thus, expectations of any rational debate nursed by a greater proportion of the Internet users come a cropper. Instead, what they are dreadfully dished out is a lengthening catalogue of hit lists. This is a bad omen, particularly in a politically divisive society. The four brutally slain bloggers, were all named in a hit list and despite threats on their lives, preemptive surveillance had not been put in place. On the contrary, such issues were treated as something of a double-edged sword cutting both ways and therefore a subject of malevolent attitude. Do nothing strategy may be comforting but it is clearly counter-productive and self-defeating when it comes to containing 'ideological' violence.

This brings into a sharper focus than ever before the frightening lack of security of members of the intelligentsia and people with ideas. The state should be unwavering in defense of the rights to freedom of thoughts and expression so long as these do not militate against our long-cherished ethos.

For let's not forget that with each get-away of



PHOTO: AFP

the diabolical masterminds and perpetrators of the hackings, the vicious cycle of impunity gets an oxygen of support to spring more lethal surprises. The heinous crimes are nothing short of ISIS' beheadings that flies in the face of well-it-has-not-come-to-such-a-pass kind of smugness. Already this has invoked a forceful repudiation of Islamic thinkers all over the world. Our own proponents of true Islam should come forward in strength to provide necessary ideological backup for an effective counter terrorism campaign.

The word 'disappearance' has been turned on its head by equating it with hiding or an act of

self-disappearance, as though someone's bag of sins was too heavy to carry in public. If that be so it is all the more reason why they should be brought to the surface. But the inexplicability of the disappearances and their very long duration into oblivion make them appear like vanishing acts forced on them. There is a smack of retribution about them as well. When the state is constitutionally obliged to be protecting all its citizens including the accused who are entitled to due process of law in a context where rule of law is upheld, it cannot renege on this.

Just as an aside, in the McCarthyism era of the

early 1950s in the US 'accusation had been deemed as evidence'. Surely the world has moved way ahead from that regressive philosophy to even recapitulate it.

On a serious note, even the phrase liberation war values which are our most prized possession have been subjected to controversy by antagonistic forces. Little surprise even the word 'secular', which by definition is a neutral expression is a pejorative in the eye of the extremists.

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## NEW BOAT PEOPLE

# Creation of exclusion, inanity and inaction

C R ABRAR

**O**VER the last few weeks the international community has witnessed yet another round of human disaster. It is aghast at the reports, photos and television footages of the new boat people of Asia. This is not a homogeneous group. It is a mix of refugees, economic migrants and trafficked victims. Many among those are desperate Rohingya refugees, fleeing systemic persecution of an apartheid regime in Myanmar, who were denied refuge in adjoining Bangladesh. Some in the group are economic migrants from Bangladesh trying to reach a destination that has jobs to offer to eke out a living. The third group consisted of the new slaves, who were either forcibly abducted from Cox's Bazar, Ukhiya and Teknaf areas or were lured with promises for well paid employment overseas and who mostly hailed from non-migration intensity climate change affected districts of Satkhira, Barisal and Sirajganj.

Revelation of the existence of a series of mass graves of the boat people and rescue of a few victims in the Thai side of the Thai-Malaysian border the week before had stirred international attention to this forsaken group. This week harrowing details are emerging from the Langsa makeshift camp of boatpeople who were rescued from the sea by Achenese fishermen defying instructions of their government.

Narratives of survivors provide a chilling account of vessels being marooned on high seas for lack of fuel, of abandonment of ship by the navigators, of denial of ration to additional members of the families, of murders committed by the traffickers and human smugglers, of passengers killing each other for control over dwindling supplies of food and water, of sexual violence against women and throwing of corpses overboard. The images of emaciated bodies of the survivors provide only an inkling of the sufferings they had to endure in their search for refuge and

of life with dignity.

The question that comes to any discerning mind why all these should have to happen. Although it is difficult to account for this complex phenomenon involved a wide range of actors and interests, one can identify a number factors that have contributed to the emergence of this new set of boatpeople. Foremost among them is the denial of citizenship rights of the Rohingyas and persistent discriminatory policies pursued against them by the Myanmar state. In the last few years the resurgence of communal and religious violence by the Rakhines against the Rohingyas in the northern Arakan and other regions, that were aided abetted by the state agencies, created conditions for fresh round of exodus for the members of the community.

The altered stance of Bangladesh government in denying access to the incoming Rohingyas and pushing them back to the high seas left the victims of violence from across the border with very little choice but to move on to new destinations through uncharted routes. Bereft of any protection they did not enjoy the right to work, had no access to any kind of support unlike the their registered counterparts (the camp based refugees), were subjected to various forms of exploitation and had no recourse to legal redress even if grievous harms were done to them.

Under such circumstances they looked for options for survival and became easy victims to what was still a small incipient group of human smugglers. These human smugglers with the support of their overseas patrons facilitated movement of the Rohingyas. Malaysia became the favoured destination of the distressed Rohingyas. Some aspired to join their relatives who had reached there earlier. This route for them was a means of family reunification. For the vast majority of other Rohingyas Malaysia was a destination to secure refuge. The volume of flow of Rohingyas through sea route became more pronounced since 2012 as violence against them increased in Myanmar. Their movement to Malaysia encour-

aged other Bangladeshis to seek fortune through the same route. Within a short time they began tapping the services of the human smugglers to take them across to Malaysia for work.

The massive profit accrued from this human trade created conditions for the traffickers to cash in. They lured unsuspecting Bangladeshis with lucrative jobs in Malaysia. The traffickers targeted regions that generally do not produce large scale international migrants. In these areas information and awareness about pitfalls of migration through irregular channel is scarce. These victims were subsequently made targets of extortion and when they failed to pay hefty amounts of ransom that was demanded of them, they (the victims) were subjected to servitude in the plantations.

The nefarious activities of the human smugglers and traffickers were subjects of intense media scrutiny. Bold and creative investigative reporting by the Bangladesh media provided enough clues about the extent and modalities of operation of the traffickers, points of departure and routes taken, and even about the operators including masterminds. Despite such forewarnings little was done to stem the flow and bring the perpetrators to justice. The discovery of 170+ incarcerated Bangladeshis in Thai plantations several months ago was a stark reminder of the extent of the illegal human trade.

Initially there was a degree of denial about the extent of the crisis from the official quarters. The recent unfortunate unfolding of events have led the concerned agencies to come to terms with the grim reality. However, the senior functionaries tasked with public administration and law enforcement are beginning to acknowledge that locally influential persons are scuttling all efforts. The Director of Operations of Border Guard Bangladesh at a recently held workshop organised by the National Human Rights Commission claimed "members of Counter Trafficking Committee are in some cases involved in human trafficking". While the additional deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar blamed Coast Guards and

BGB for their roles, the Cabinet Secretary lamented that despite comprehensive laws to address the problems "their implementation is weak and monitoring over their implementation is even weaker". The Upzilla Nirbahi Officer of Teknaf was more pointed in his remarks when he stated that local administration cannot always play its role in preventing human trafficking due to involvement of local public representatives in the racket". The Additional Inspector General in his address also referred to "the big fishes involved in this heinous crime".

Thus one finds that while exclusion of Rohingyas by the Burmese state is the principal

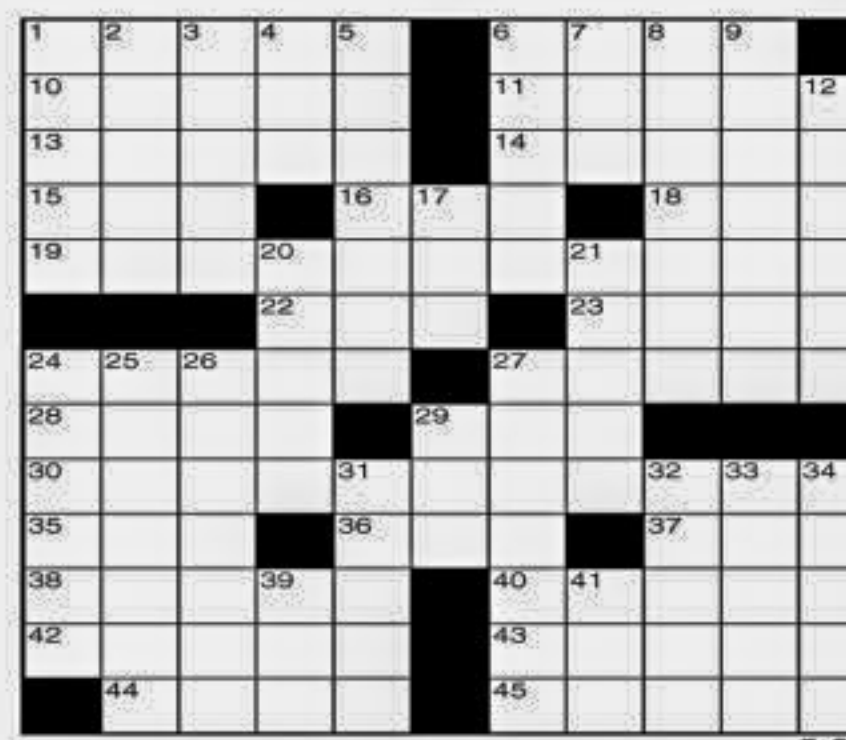
*The altered stance of Bangladesh government in denying access to the incoming Rohingyas and pushing them back to the high seas left the victims of violence from across the border with very little choice but to move on to new destinations through uncharted routes*

cause of the emergence of the new boat people, the neighbouring governments' refusal to grant asylum partly contributed to this illegal flow. The inaction of the Bangladesh administration to take stern action against the criminals at the early stages had allowed the latter to bolster their network and capacity. It is gratifying to note that state functionaries are now acknowledging the reality. This gives hope that the problem will finally be addressed.

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### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Moves slowly
  - 6 Halt
  - 10 Student of Socrates
  - 11 Henry VIII had six
  - 13 Shoe parts
  - 14 Chemically inactive
  - 15 Count start
  - 16 Rower's need
  - 18 Regret
  - 19 Bit of forgetfulness
  - 22 Caterer's pot
  - 23 Highlander
  - 24 Eccentric
  - 27 Verbose
  - 28 Passed with flying colors
  - 29 Polite address
  - 30 Mobile phone inserts
  - 35 Maple output
  - 36 Fireplace bit
  - 37 Bowler, for one
  - 38 Dark
  - 40 Spanish resort isle
  - 42 Chunk
  - 43 Radio dial
  - 44 Inquires
- DOWN**
- 45 Dwelling
  - 1 Derby town
  - 2 Without others
  - 3 Oregon's capital
  - 4 Summer, in Paris
  - 5 Words of apology
  - 6 Eddy
  - 7 Pewter component
  - 8 Like a duffer, usually
  - 9 Pored over
  - 12 Unwavering
  - 17 Writer Rand
  - 20 Surpass
  - 21 Old market-place
  - 24 Blocks
  - 25 Australia's area
  - 26 Places of worship
  - 27 Kansas City
  - 29 Method: Abbr.
  - 31 Billing info
  - 32 Safari sighting
  - 33 Stunned
  - 34 Rude look
  - 34 "That's repulsive!"
  - 41 Mac



### Yesterday's answer



### BETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



### HENRY

by Don Trachte



## QUOTABLE Quote



“THEY THOUGHT I WAS A SURREALIST, BUT I WASN'T. I NEVER PAINTED DREAMS. I PAINTED MY OWN REALITY.”

FRIDA KAHLO