

THE UN CHARTER AT 70

Towards a safer and sustainable future for we the peoples



BAN KI-MOON

LONG before I became Secretary-General, the United Nations occupied a special place in my life. I was six years old when the Korean War broke out. I have memories of my village in flames as my family sought refuge in nearby mountains. But another sight is even more lasting: the UN flag. We were saved from hunger by UN food relief operations; we received textbooks from UNESCO; and when we wondered whether the outside world cared about our suffering, the troops of many nations sacrificed their lives to restore security and peace.

I know from my childhood, and now from decades of public service, the immense difference the United Nations can make. As we mark the anniversary of the adoption of the Organization's founding Charter on June 26, 1945 in San Francisco, my hope is that the human family will come together with greater determination to work for a safer and more sustainable future for "we, the peoples", in whose name the Charter was drafted.

The United Nations at 70 can look back on a proud record of working

with many partners to dismantle colonialism, triumph over apartheid, keep the peace in troubled places and articulate a body of treaties and law to safeguard human rights. Every day, the United Nations feeds the hungry, shelters refugees and vaccinates children against polio and other deadly diseases. Our relief workers brave remote and dangerous environments to deliver humanitarian assistance, and our

conflict, exploitation and despair. At least 59.5 million people have fled their homes – more refugees, displaced persons and asylum seekers than at any time since the end of the Second World War. Violence against women blights all societies. At a time of pressing human needs, huge amounts of money continue to be squandered on nuclear weapons and other destabilising military arsenals. The consequences of climate change

urbanisation, migration, demographic shifts, technological advances and other seismic developments continue to remake our societies and transform international relations. Yet the Charter's vision of a world of peace, and the values enshrined in the text – dignity, equal rights, tolerance and freedom – remain touchstones for people everywhere.



mediators strive to find common ground between warring parties and peaceful solutions to grievances and disputes. The United Nations was founded to prevent another world war, and it has succeeded in that core mission; despite grave setbacks, the past seven decades would surely have been even bloodier without the United Nations.

Yet we are keenly aware that today's landscape is scarred by

are ever more apparent—and have only just begun. And although the world said "never again" after the Holocaust, and again after genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica, we continue to witness atrocious crimes by violent extremists and others.

New powers have emerged since the representatives of 50 nations gathered to draft the Charter, and membership in the Organisation has grown to 193. Globalisation,

The 70th anniversary falls in a year of potentially momentous decisions on our common future. Members are shaping what we hope will be an inspiring new sustainable development agenda and moving towards a meaningful agreement on climate change. Our goal is transformation: we are the first generation that can erase poverty from the earth – and the last that can act to avoid the worst impacts of a warming world.

As the distinctions between the national and the international continue to fall away, challenges faced by one become challenges faced by all, sometimes gradually but often suddenly. With our fates ever more entwined, our future must be one of ever deeper cooperation – nations united by a spirit of global citizenship that lives up to the promise of the Organisation's name.

The author is the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Pushing the rock uphill

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

WHETHER we choose to move forward or lag behind, life goes on. However, there comes a time, when looking back at the many achievements and failures of our life, we ask: "Have I become redundant or are there more challenges ahead?" The past appears to be a sequence of tasks fulfilled and duties performed. In our youth, it's the pressure of completing our education, acquiring skills, pursuing a profession and dreaming of reaching for the stars. With age, most of us grow leery of dreams and

accept that life may just turn out to be a series of routine experiences. Routine, but essential – getting a job, raising a family, shopping for groceries, preparing meals and going to work day after day.

There are a few fortunate ones who live inspirational lives and actually realise their dreams. But most of us continue in an auto pilot mode and stop asking why or what next. Gradually the fast forward motion slackens... we reach that rare moment of reckoning with our inner selves and begin to take stock.

My life seems to be entering such a juncture. The children have moved out and seem to be rotating in their own orbits. Having retired from my job, my career ambitions have waned. Unless I am entertaining, I rarely cook a gourmet meal. The day unfolds with the dull prospect of "more of the same." But, I am grateful for good health and being free from want. I must also admit that so far it has been a fruitful life lived with passion and intensity. Nevertheless, once in a while I do reflect on whether or not, things could have been different. For example, was I too focused on the children's report cards rather than their emotional and mental state? Was I fixated on the things that were likely to make a big impact? Consequently, did I overlook the seemingly insignificant opportunities that could have added to happiness and contentment?

Some people strive to find purpose in life through high achievements – be it acquiring wealth and fame, reaching the peak of academic excellence or discovering a formula that will impact millions. But, for most of us, life is simply about toiling away to complete the small daily tasks. However, in the process, we can perform myriads of insignificant acts that can create an



impact. We can simply be doers of everyday good deeds. Visit a sick friend or relative, pick up the phone and call someone whom most people shun. Happiness can be derived from the daily duties of sustenance and the small things that may end up making a big difference. Singing that perfect song or penning that perfect story may not happen. But singing solely to uplift the spirit and writing to relieve oneself of painful experiences are also important. For these serve as antidotes for the crushing burden of solitude that may hit us at certain crossroads.

It may be useful to reinforce these thoughts with the story of Sisyphus from Greek mythology. Sisyphus was a brilliant man who sometimes played tricks on the gods to get what he wanted. Finally, the gods condemned him to eternal hard labour. His punishment? Rolling a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back to the bottom each time he reached the top – a task intended to be futile, unrewarding and repetitive. The toil of Sisyphus is often used as a metaphor for difficult labour that is frustrating and promises no ostensible reward. Nobel laureate Albert Camus, however, wrote in a brief essay ("The Myth of Sisyphus" – 1940) that Sisyphus' fate and his endless toil is not futile. He said: "If the descent [i.e., Sisyphus' returning to the bottom to start pushing the rock upward all over again] is sometimes performed in sorrow, it can also take place in joy." And, "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

I tend to agree with Camus. Sisyphus' success at reaching the summit with the rock may be temporary, but he can rejoice in each climb because he achieves his goal. The fact that he has to do it all over again need not diminish its value or his happiness, but provide motivation.

Our routine lives are in some ways like Sisyphus' toil. We can find satisfaction in accomplishing our task, no matter how labouriously monotonous the climb may be. And that the boulder does not reside on the peak permanently does not mean that the journey has been futile. Because in the final analysis, life is about the challenges, joys and disappointments that we face along the path. The destination is just an excuse to start the voyage. As long as one is alive, one must continue to push the rock uphill and try to find meaning and happiness in the process.

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REMITTANCES THAT COME WITH A PRICE

SYEDA ROZANA RASHID

DESPITE women's crucial role as remitters, there is widespread antipathy towards female migration. It also epitomises the poor response towards government's call for registration to Saudi Arabia which has recently signed a MoU with Bangladesh to take 50,000 women, mostly as housemaids. To the surprise of many, over the last four months only 161 women have migrated under the scheme.

Though the formal employment of rural women was first evident in the 1980s with the rising demand of cheap labour in export-oriented garment factories, it was not until the 1990s that women from low-earning rural families in Bangladesh started migrating independently to the Gulf and Southeast Asian countries to work as nurses, garments workers, manufacturing labourers, cleaners and housemaids. The late arrival of Bangladeshi women into the global labour market is primarily due to the restrictive policies of the state. While in the early 1970s there were no clear cut policies on female migration, over the 1980s and 1990s the state imposed a complete or partial ban on women's labour migration for unskilled, semiskilled and skilled jobs on the grounds of 'protecting the dignity of women'. The decision to impose restriction on the female migration of labour in all categories in 1997 was heavily opposed by the association of recruiting agencies (BAIRA), migrant associations and human rights organisations.

Consequently, it was lifted in 2003, but new conditions were imposed, that women undertake compulsory skill and orientation training for domestic work. The labour migration procedures for Bangladeshi women still remain more complicated than those for men, who do not need to satisfy such requirements for migration.

The reasons of such low representation of women may be traced back to the public discourses on gender roles and relations, which presuppose man as the principal provider and woman as the carer of the household. From this perspective, women's earning is always secondary to that of their men. In rural Bangladesh, women embody prestige of their patriarchs. The gender ideologies of honour, prestige and seclusion thus inscribe women's geographical mobility within the boundary of

'home' and perceive *Bidesh* as 'dangerous', 'unsafe' and thus 'disgraceful' for women. On top of that, in the highly segregated international labour market, poorly paid and low-status jobs as housemaids, cleaners are almost reserved for Bangladeshi women who are also vulnerable to abuse and torture at the hands of the employers.

An ongoing RPC-RMMRU study, however, has come up with some intriguing findings about remittance behaviour of Bangladeshi men and women. The research shows that although absorbed in low-paid unskilled work, women are altruistically better remitters than men and send almost all their earnings back home for their family, while men can

remittances sent by men and women is beyond question, unlike men, female remitters accumulate little social status for their contribution to the household economy.

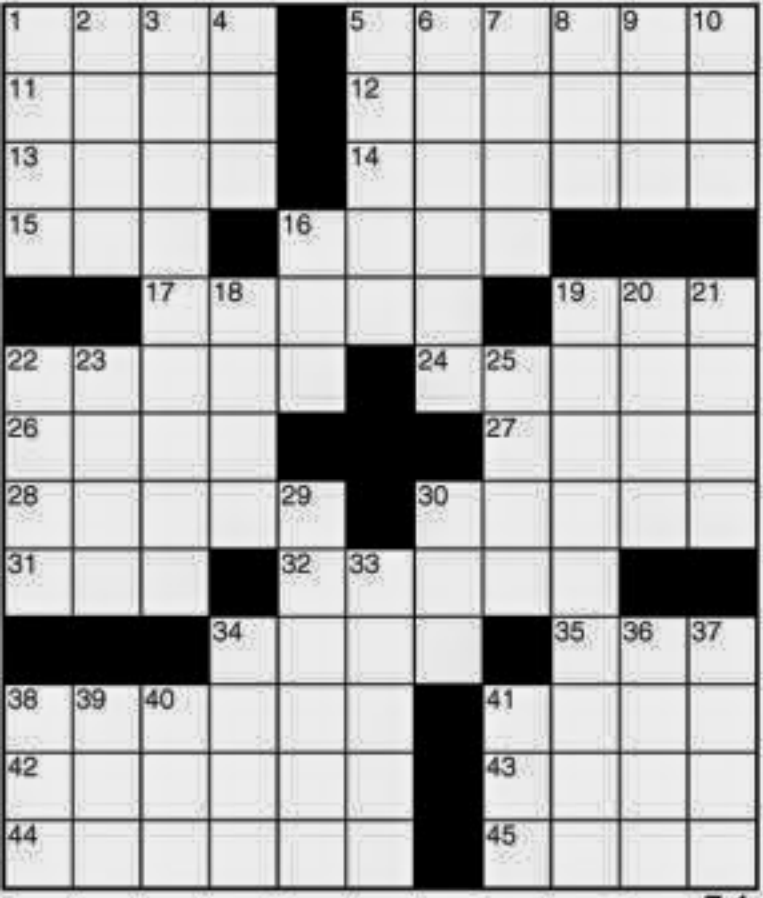
Encouraging women's increasing participation in labour migration thus requires changes in the social mindset in the first place, that sees migration as extremely 'risky', 'unsafe' and 'unwieldy' for women. To this end, nothing is more important than ensuring safety, welfare and justice for women in the workplace. Government's persistent migration diplomacy with the receiving countries as well as development of regular monitoring and huge support system are bound to bring positive results.



save a portion for themselves. The onus on migrant women to remit money is no less than their men due to the high social cost attached to women's migration. Women are expected to send the whole earning in exchange for their long absence from the family. Crucially, the remittances sent by women are used to meet household expenditure, pay off loans, marriage and education of children and siblings - which are commonly observed in male migration. Like men, women invest their remittances in land, house, small business and further migration of family members. While the economic value of

Also, our dependence on the Gulf countries as markets for female workers should be reduced by a large scale through skill training of women to help them get dignified jobs in the countries with good human rights records. In truth, the extent to which remittances can be used as a development tool depends on how effectively we can elevate the status of the 'disgraced' onto the ranks of the most valued and respected women of Bangladesh.

The writer is Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.



CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Give over
 - 5 Sausage skin
 - 11 "Once-a-time..."
 - 12 Broad street
 - 13 Lecherous
 - 14 Wood-ward of movies
 - 15 Finger count
 - 16 Hearts or clubs
 - 17 Located
 - 19 Bar bill
 - 22 Play Place
 - 24 Get a goal
 - 26 Cry out
 - 27 Was in debt
 - 28 Bars on cars
 - 30 Singer McCourt
 - 31 Frank McCourt book
 - 32 "Wouldn't that be great!"
 - 34 Shut with a bang
 - 35 Paris pal
 - 38 Was successful
 - 41 Proceed slowly
 - 42 Immediately
 - 43 Different
 - 44 Sweet drink
 - 45 Nick and Nora's dog
- DOWN**
- 1 Group of believers
 - 2 Fencing sword
 - 3 Ruins
 - 4 Last part
 - 5 Cuisine with cayenne
 - 6 Steers clear of
 - 7 Place at the table
 - 8 Road house
 - 9 Convent occupant
 - 10 "My word!"
 - 16 Take to court
 - 18 Lusty look
 - 19 Spots for mayors
 - 20 Vicinity
 - 21 Garden areas
 - 22 Jazz style
 - 23 Curbside cry
 - 25 Dove calls
 - 29 Sand, basically
 - 30 Friend of Huck
 - 33 Lake makeup
 - 34 Dispatched
 - 36 Largest amount
 - 37 Creative germ
 - 38 Chess piece
 - 39 Eroded
 - 40 Friend of Dopey
 - 41 Stew

Yesterday's answer

TURF LEAST
OBOES ALDER
WOMEN IN LOVE
NAE ACE REA
STRIKE BERT
SORES ODES
ASKEW
CHAT AXELS
HIDE TIDIES
UGH MES BAA
THE LOST GIRL
EUROS SIDES
SPEWS SODA

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