

"Crossfire" is not the answer to militancy

It is inhuman and anti-democratic

WE cannot but express our total dismay at the rising number of deaths of suspects in police custody. Just after the news of Golam Faizullah Fahim's mysterious death in a police shootout, after ten days remand, we hear the news of a prime suspect in the Abhijit Roy and Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy murders being killed in a 'gunfight' with detectives. This is contrary to everything Bangladesh or any other civilised nation, stands for and makes a mockery of the rule of law.

The frequency with which such deaths are occurring has created a tremendous sense of unease among the people. The unofficial logic, if it can be called so, behind such occurrences is that the legal system will either grant them bail or acquittal or a sentence of a few years completing which, the militants will be free to commit more murders. While this may be an expedient in the very short term, in the medium and the long run, such extrajudicial measures go against all fundamental values of humanity.

This dangerous 'quick fix' that has been ruthlessly carried out cannot be the way to combat militancy. We are shocked at the blatant way these 'crossfire' shootings are occurring with the same incredible rhetoric of suspects somehow getting killed in encounters between cohorts and law enforcers.

We must stop this reprehensible practice and find other means as adopted by many countries and that are not in contradiction to basic human values, to make anti-terror strategies more effective.

Blood from Mumbai

A rare act of empathy

IN a remarkable act of compassion, four people from Mumbai have donated a rare group of blood, known as 'Bombay blood' to Mohammad

Kamruzzaman, a victim of a traffic accident who needed it for a life-saving surgery. We thank the Indian authorities, especially Think Foundation, a Mumbai-based NGO that facilitated the export of the blood. In saving the life of Kamruzzaman, the benevolent act is saving an entire family as his ailing mother's medical treatment is dependent on his earnings. We also commend Arinoba Plastic Industries Ltd, the company where Kamruzzaman worked, for standing by him financially and psychologically through this difficult time of his life.

The trans-boundary endeavour proves that our common humanity is stronger than our differences. There are, however, lessons to be learnt on both sides of the border. Bangladesh needs a robust network for blood distribution the absence of which was felt by the victim's colleagues when they were told by our hospitals that they had never heard of this particular blood group. According to WHO, blood donation by 1 percent of the population can meet a nation's most basic requirements for blood. And on the Indian side, Think Foundation had to navigate through multiple bureaucratic hurdles to export the blood. Surely, rules can be eased in special circumstances like this, and ultimately they were.

In the end, the message that gets through is this: That compassion transcends geographic boundaries, colour and creed. When Kamruzzaman recovers from the surgery, it will not matter to him whose blood is running through his veins.

C R ABRAR

THE final week of May 2016 was a grisly one. More than 700 asylum seekers and migrants died as three boats attempting to carry them to Italy sunk in the Mediterranean, and the death toll for the year crossed 2000. A week ago, Unicef reported a doubling of the number of unaccompanied children arriving as asylum seekers this year. The report also highlighted that these children are subjected to sexual violence, forced prostitution and other forms of abuse.

UN refugee agency, the UNHCR, informs that, of the 157,574 arrivals in Europe in 2016, 90 percent were from the top 10 refugee producing countries of the world -- fleeing war, violence and persecution in their countries of origin, and were in need of international protection. A breakdown of the total reveals almost 90 percent of the cases were from three countries: Syria (49 percent), Afghanistan (25 percent) and Iraq (14 percent). These figures debunk the myth that most are economic migrants, who have left their own countries by choice in search of economic opportunities.

The magnitude and nature of the global refugee situation has changed considerably over the last few decades. It has become increasingly 'protracted, politicised and complex'. This has made the task of finding a durable solution further challenging.

Evidence is replete that states are not only reluctant to uphold ethical standards of refugee protection, but also that they are actively contributing to the erosion of the principle and practice of asylum. Refugees are increasingly seen as subjects of charity. There is little acknowledgement that the principle of non-refoulement, the cornerstone of international refugee protection, is now a provision of customary international law, binding even on states that are not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Over time, many Western states, particularly those of Europe, have introduced measures to reduce the number of individuals seeking asylum in their territory through non-arrival policies, diversion policies, an increasingly restrictive application of the 1951 Convention and a range of deterrent policies, such as detention of asylum seekers and the denial of social assistance; on the other hand, some states, like the UK, have openly advocated for dismantling of the 1951 Refugee Convention and instituting of a new international refugee regime, premised on containing of refugees within their region of origin.

This two-facedness of the western states has placed significant burden on

asylum countries of the South, especially of Africa and Asia. This, in turn, has led some of the Southern countries to close off their borders to prevent arrivals, push for early and unsustainable return of asylum seekers to the country of origin and, in a few instances, forcibly expel entire refugee populations.

There is little recognition that protracted refugee situations do not remain confined to the host states of the South and have major regional and international implications. A UNHCR commissioned survey on Somali refugees has indicated that the absence of durable solutions and effective international protection in the first country of asylum is a major motive for secondary migratory movements to Europe and elsewhere.

There is a propensity in most quarters

In October 2014, Italy abandoned its 'search and rescue' Mare Nostrum operation that prevented mass drowning of asylum seekers in the Mediterranean. This resulted in an increase in the number of deaths of migrants trying to seek asylum in the continent. The demand for re-launching of the operation was met with stiff opposition and, on April 23, 2015, the European Council adopted a British-drafted resolution vowing to "undertake systematic efforts to identify, capture and destroy (refugee) vessels". This was a palpable shift from humanitarian commitments to a military solution. It is worthwhile to note that British fascist Nick Griffin made the proposal five years earlier.

The European border agency Frontex reported that since its adoption 14 vessels have been destroyed and 69 'suspected

migrants turned to more sophisticated smugglers to facilitate their crossing.

All these led the UK House of Lords EU Committee to observe, "The Mission (Sophia) does not... in any meaningful way deter the flow of migrants, disrupt the smugglers' networks, or impede the business of people smuggling on the Mediterranean route". The House of Lords report quotes Amnesty International's Steve Symonds that the EU's reinforcement of external borders policing had brought about "the movement of ever larger number of people around different routes by different journeys, usually at greater danger and cost to them, and so of greater profit to smugglers". The opening sentence of the report quoted Peter Roberts of the Royal United Services Institute, "migrants in the boat are

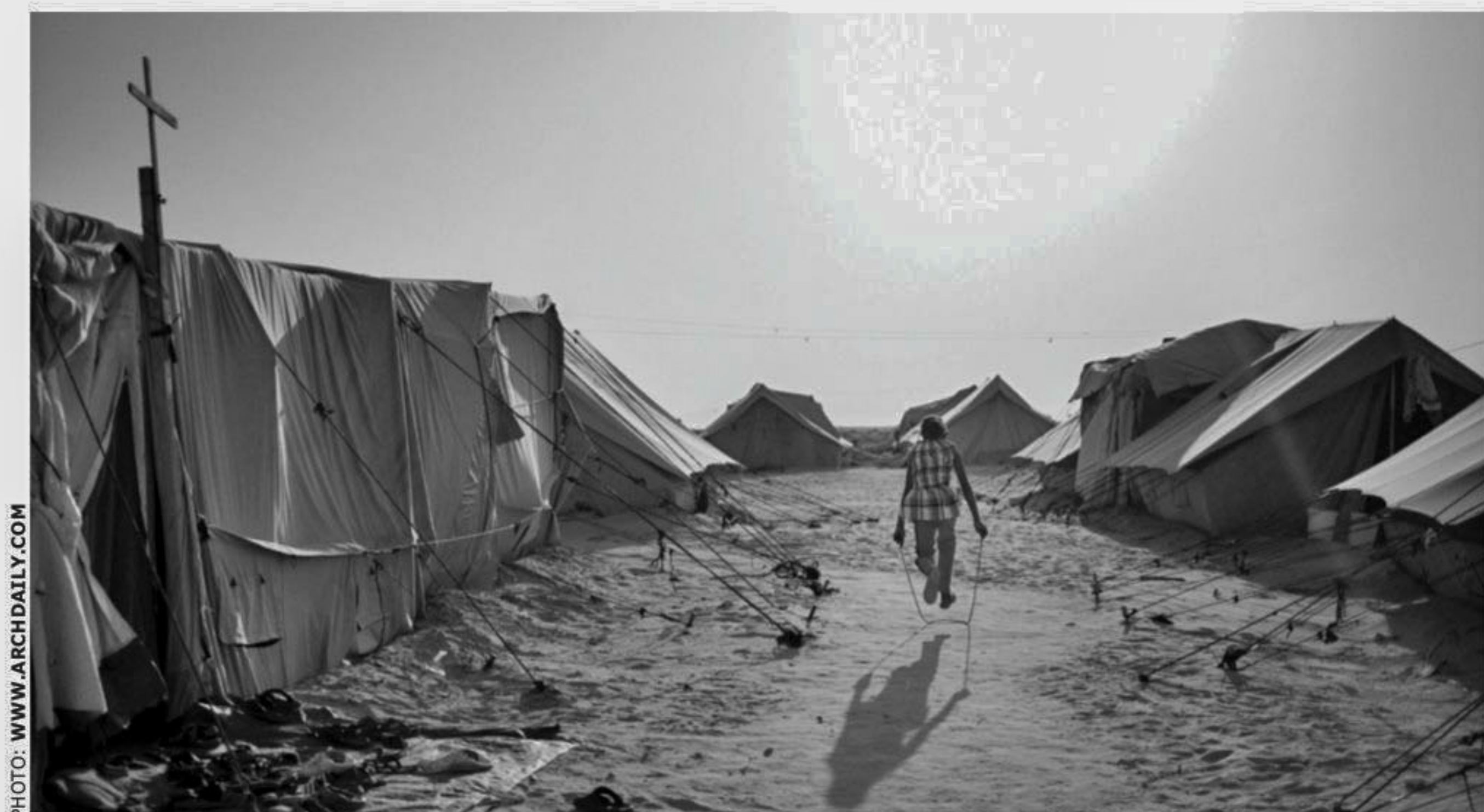


PHOTO: WWW.ARCHDAILY.COM

to view the refugee problem as a humanitarian problem. However, protracted refugee situations require more than humanitarian engagement. They entail meaningful and sustained engagement of peace, security and development actors. A comprehensive and holistic approach is perhaps the only way forward.

Thus while there is an urgent need to work out creative solutions to the global refugee problems, the international community appears to be hanging on to the old approach, premised on the concept of national security. This has been evident in Europe's pursuit of Operation Sophia in dealing with the current refugee inflow. The next part of this essay will explicate how ill-conceived the strategy was.

smugglers' were apprehended. The strategy was modelled to impede the human smuggling syndicates and limit the opportunities for would be refugees to flee to Europe. There is a little evidence that the new strategy worked at all. In the period from September 2015 to January 2016, the marginal drop of 9 percent in the Mediterranean flow was supplemented by the opening up of the 'Balkan route' to Europe. In order to minimise 'significant financial loss', the human smugglers amended their business model and replaced expensive wooden or fibre-glass boats by cheap mass produced Chinese inflatable rubber dinghies that have less carrying capacity and are more limited by sea conditions. In addition, as the borders became more challenging to navigate,

symptoms, not causes, of the problem".

The challenge, therefore, for the international community is to acknowledge that refugees constitute an overwhelming bulk of the flow and they are fleeing protracted conflict conditions that needs urgent political solution. Pursuing unworkable policies would only be acting like an ostrich.

Recently displaying a life jacket used by a Syrian girl who died while trying to reach the Greek island of Lesbos to a group of youngsters, Pope Francis explained, "Migrants are not a danger -- they are in danger". It's time the policy makers of Western nations paid heed to the pontiff.

The writer teaches International Relations at the University of Dhaka. He writes and researches on rights and migration issues.

A PLEDGE TO STRENGTHEN REFUGEE PROTECTION

Preserving hope

STINA E. LJUNGDELL

THE world we live in has been torn apart by wars and internal domestic conflict. The twenty-first century has seen human suffering and forced displacement, from new wars and old, in almost every corner. While armed forces battle it out, whether over lines on a map, natural resources under the ground, minor ethnic differences, or irreconcilable religious conflicts, the victims are one and the same -- innocent people who lose their lives or who leave their homes behind to flee to unknown territory to pass their days in uncertainty and often in destitution.

There is now a staggering 60 million people in the world today who are forcibly displaced from their homes. Sixty million people like you and me are bereaved from their loved ones, separated from their family members, uprooted from their land and livelihoods, torn from their social fabric and tossed into the dark pit of despair. Among these suffering victims of conflict and discrimination, almost half are children, and half are female. The trauma that each refugee suffers, is an experience that we must work collectively to end, for the generations that come after us. The human race has reached unprecedented heights of material and technological development -- in this age of advancement, we should unite to find a solution for those of us who continue to suffer meaningless losses. Peace and progress must be shared -- only some cannot reap benefits while others suffer.

But while we wait for the solutions to come and for wars to finish, we must remember those whose lives have been halted by their displacement to new places. While the 60 million displaced persons cannot return to their homes by choice, there are some 15 million among them who have been furthermore displaced across an international border and therefore are 'refugees' as defined by

international law. Lives of refugees are an example of an opportunity wasted, because their activities are reduced to the mere act of survival, and they are not given the chance to be productive, contributing citizens. This is not only a loss for the hosting country, it is a grave injustice to the refugees. Today I would like to ask you to share cause with refugees, and recognise the incredible courage they display on a daily basis. Refugees, as I have seen them in my 20 year career, possess incredible strength and resilience, and face each day with more determination than the rest of us. Through their plight and fear, they preserve their hope -- they go on without giving up, and we can recognise their

movements expose vulnerable refugees to ruthless smugglers and human traffickers. The government estimates that an additional 300,000 to 500,000 ethnic Rohingya are living in Bangladesh without registration. They are regarded simply as migrants and sometimes detained for illegal entry. The government is presently enumerating these people in a Rohingya headcount. While effectively of a similar profile to the camp refugees, these unregistered Rohingya comprising 90 percent or more of the Myanmar population in Bangladesh are living in a protection void and have enormous - undocumented - needs for legal and humanitarian assistance. Other challenges to the condition of Rohingya in Bangladesh include "pushbacks" which continue on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, challenging international law. There are also worrying new reports of armed elements involved in drugs and human trafficking operating in the camps. These problems require a strong response from both the Government and its partners including UNHCR and NGOs.

UNHCR has been providing 'international protection' to the world's refugees for over 65 years now. The start of the 21st century has seen UNHCR help with major refugee crises in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Our organization is still hard at work, protecting and assisting refugees and while it takes a small effort, your solidarity goes a long way to shape the global agenda on ending refugee crises. Don't stay back -- learn, engage and support. On this commemoration of World Refugee Day, I want to remind ourselves that the voices of every one of us, is important to strengthen the protection of refugees globally. Let us take action and remind them that we are #WithRefugees.

Pledge your support today at www.refugeeday.org.

The writer is the UNHCR Representative in Bangladesh.

Rohingya from Rakhine State of Myanmar have been displaced for decades, which leads to hopelessness and frustration due to lack of political or socioeconomic prospects either in Bangladesh or back in Myanmar where they do not enjoy citizenship.

situations by being their champions, and lend our voices to end their distress.

UNHCR is working in 126 countries around the world today, where refugees who are spending each day with the hope that their lives would change, and they can build a home and a dignified life somewhere. While we cannot truly share their trauma, we can do what is within our capacity -- to reassure them that we are #WithRefugees, and we can advocate for humanitarian support until solutions are found. Once a refugee is not always a refugee -- with resolve and political will, we can find solutions for them, and UNHCR has helped more than 50 million refugees restart their lives.

UNHCR has worked in Bangladesh,

technology access have isolated the Rohingya into a life of darkness. Some families are living in such utter destitution that they adopt negative coping mechanisms to survive, at the risk of their own and their families' well-being.

Rohingya from Rakhine State of Myanmar have been displaced for decades, which leads to hopelessness and frustration due to lack of political or socioeconomic prospects either in Bangladesh or back in Myanmar where they do not enjoy citizenship. The desperate and static conditions of refugee life in Bangladesh has motivated some refugees to take dangerous boat journeys to Thailand and Malaysia and beyond, hoping for a better future. These irregular

COMMENTS

"Three-digit number in the offing for all emergency services"

(June 16, 2016)

Mehedi Hasan Samir

That would be an amazing step by the government.

Nasir Raju

Let's just see how long it takes.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Call for escalating the US-led bombing

Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump reacted to the Orlando shooting in the same manner. Both candidates called for an escalation of the US-led bombing campaign against ISIS in Syria and Iraq. But neither of them gave any explanation as to how that would stop attacks in the United States.

Ted Rudow III, MA
CA, USA