

# On protecting refugees from Myanmar

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## Invisible felons

*How did they escape police watch?*

THE court appearance and subsequent bail of two former Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) cadres accused of brandishing and using firearms in an incident in Dhaka on October 27 is indeed a shocker to all. This is unacceptable, as the case had been well-publicised in the media, which in the aftermath of the duo's gangland like appearance in a brawl in Gulistan had run photographs that showed them wielding guns. The matter did not stop here. Faced with widespread criticism, the BCL had expelled the two leaders from its fold, who also happened to be its local office bearers. A case like this, where the crime is evidently manifest and is well publicised, demands a certain degree of sincerity from the part of law enforcing agencies, which has been absent.

The two accused have managed to walk into a courtroom through the crowded streets of the capital to seek bail and get one. We find no room for taking this lightly. Are we to believe that the police had no prior knowledge of this, especially after their photographs had been published in the leading dailies?

What importance are we supposed to attach to the police's human intelligence that fails to detect the movements of two wanted offenders in the heart of the house of law? It needs no reminding that it is against the background of such half-hearted approach to contain hooliganism of party affiliates that new manifestations of such dastardly behaviour come to light at regular intervals?

A proper investigation into the circumstances under which the duo has escaped the police's dragnet should be launched. The law enforcers must not delay any further in bringing the felons to book.

## Youth builds solar-powered tricycle

*Support such innovations*

YOUSUF Sardar is a young electrician from Chandpur district who spent six months and Tk 17,000 to build a tricycle that runs on solar power. While the aim was to make a cost effective mode of transport for himself and his disabled mother, it earned him instantaneous fame and brought in recognition at science fairs in Dhaka and Chittagong. Innovation and enterprising are two words that describe this young man and he even got a letter of appreciation from the prime minister. The trike, as it is known, was designed by Sardar whose work is an inspiration for other budding innovators and should be given more than just commendations.

It is an interesting to note that Sardar is now thinking of introducing technology that will allow for the trike to be operated with one hand. This represents the next step in innovation and requires capital infusion. We should be actively sponsoring products like this which could potentially be built and sold at a much reduced cost. It would certainly facilitate mobility for the physically challenged people in the country and being solar powered, offer an environmentally friendly and low cost transportation for many people. It is refreshing to come across a simple electrician like Sardar who thinks outside the box and with some financial aid; his trike could one day be produced in larger scale to benefit the public in general.

SHAMSUL BARI

SPeAKING at the UN General Assembly in September 2016, our Prime Minister spoke of the need to protect the rights of refugees and migrants globally and urged that the world must reach a consensus on shared responsibility and inclusiveness to address the crisis.

As a retiree from UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, her words were music to my ears. My 23 years of service with UNHCR gave me the opportunity to deal with the plight of refugees in every continent of the world. It is no exaggeration to say that whenever we received positive support from governments on refugee protection, we danced with joy.

UNHCR served as the focal point for all UN assistance to Bangalee refugees in India during our Liberation War. Some of my colleagues in the organisation told me how proud they felt to have helped the birth of our nation. I often told them that having been born through the world's largest refugee crisis, I had perhaps a better understanding of refugee situations than most of them.

I have always felt that, among all the nations of the world, we would perhaps be most protective of refugees because of our history. In fact, going beyond our recent experience of being refugees ourselves, we have had a long tradition of giving shelter to refugees from all over India and beyond. The prevalence of Sufi Islam in Bangladesh is a testimony to the generous asylum given by our rulers to refugees from Iran in those days. The composite nature of our population speaks of our long tradition of hospitality.

In more recent years, we have also given shelter to many hapless refugees from our neighbouring country, Myanmar. They have come and gone back in large numbers in the last four decades. In more recent years, as the socio-political situation in their places of origin in Myanmar deteriorated, more refugees have tried to enter our country.

But alas, our hospitality appears to be drying up. In the last two years, our border guards have pushed back so many of these refugees that many of them,

trying to go to more distant shores, have perished at sea. We are doing so even today. Reports in our news media in the last few days tell us how much our border officials are once again engaged in turning back many harried asylum seekers from Myanmar.

I know how refugees feel when they are not allowed to enter or disembark in the country of their arrival. My experience between 1978 to early 1990s, with the movement of over two million

population in refugee-receiving countries suffer a great deal due to the presence of a large alien population amidst them. We should remember, however, that we too had imposed a similar burden on our hosts in India. That was resolved even though many in India had feared that the refugees would never return to Bangladesh. Similarly, over five hundred thousand Myanmar refugees have returned to their country over the last three decades. In fact, I had accompanied

As human beings, we owe it to all other human beings to be given an opportunity to find humane solutions to their problems, however impossible they may appear at a given time. Let me end by quoting our Prime Minister: "We must seize this historic opportunity and deliberate on a robust, ambitious and bold commitment to protect refugees both to address current issues and to prepare the world for future challenges. This is bold statesmanship indeed."



Rohingya refugees fleeing Burma and Bangladeshi economic migrants were found in overcrowded boats in May.

Vietnamese boat-people in the waters of South East Asia, reminds me of the inhuman suffering they had to endure before many of them perished at sea or were finally able to land in a neighbouring country. Their suffering outweighed those of our own refugees in India. And the generosity shown to the latter by the government and people of India also far exceeded our own treatment of refugees from Myanmar.

I acknowledge that the host

a large group of these refugees back to Myanmar in 1979. When circumstances permit, refugees do return home. It is only when the circumstances are dire that they remain in their country of asylum for a long time. The history of world refugees is replete with examples of how they have endured most formidable difficulties and found durable solutions in the end. In the process, they have also contributed in so many ways to the host societies.

Let us hope that our Prime Minister will pursue her efforts with the Myanmar leadership to find durable solutions to the refugees who come to our country. In the meantime, let all those engaged in policy making and in physically pushing back refugees from our territory take heed of the commitment of our Prime Minister to protect refugees.

The writer is a former Director of UNHCR and Chairman Research Initiative, Bangladesh (RIB).

## PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

# Uniting for an Asian Century

### THE ASIAN CONVERGENCE



LEE JONG-WHA

THERE is no question that Asia's standing in the global economy is stronger than ever. The region now produces about 40 percent of the world's GDP, measured according to

purchasing power parity. During the recent economic crisis, Asia accounted for more than half of global GDP growth. Add to that a massive population and growing political influence, and Asia finally appears ready to lead on a world stage long dominated by the West.

But it is too early to open the champagne. The United States and Europe maintain an advantage, in terms of global strategic influence, while Asian countries are facing major political, economic, and security challenges.

In fact, Asia's growth momentum is declining. China is working overtime to achieve an economic soft landing, following decades of breakneck expansion. Japan is preoccupied with escaping slow growth and coping with population aging. Asia's other economic powerhouses – India, Indonesia, and South Korea – each face their own set of economic and political problems. Across the region, rising income inequality, financial instability, and environmental degradation are hampering development.

More problematic, despite being deeply interdependent, the region's countries struggle to act collectively. The persistence of power rivalries, historical resentments, and territorial disputes, together with pronounced disparities in economic and military might, create substantial obstacles to unity. A recent surge in coercive behavior by China, a nationalist revival in India, and a shift toward conservatism in Japan have exacerbated these challenges.

But, at a time when Western countries are moving toward isolationism – exemplified by the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and the election of Donald Trump as US president – intra-regional trade and investment are more important than ever. Beyond the economic benefits, integration would yield important political benefits, with an integrated Asia enjoying more influence on the international stage. To

reap those benefits, Asia must mitigate regional military and political conflicts and develop a long-term vision for regional integration.

Asia is home to some of the world's most dangerous flashpoints. There is a risk of armed clashes in the East and South China Seas, and North Korea continues to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, despite tougher sanctions pushed by the United States and the United Nations. Stronger cooperation among Asian countries, together with the international community, could ease regional tensions and lead North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons programs.

Some regional institutions have already been established, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN+3 (the ten members of the ASEAN plus China, Japan, and South Korea) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). Such institutions will be critical to

of time and effort.

Perhaps the best way to kick-start this process is to identify areas where the region can gain the most from integration, and take steps that will bring quick returns. For example, Asian countries can move toward a single market with common rules governing trade and free movement of workers, especially skilled ones. Launching the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a free-trade agreement currently being negotiated by ASEAN and six partners (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand), would be an important step in this direction.

Given the vulnerability of cross-border capital flows, Asia must also pursue joint action on financial supervision, surveillance, and regulatory issues to prevent and manage crises. One specific goal should be to improve the Chiang Mai Initiative

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IMAGE: PINTEREST

resolving conflicts and establishing a framework for peace that can support regional prosperity and global leadership.

But that is only the first step. And whether Asian leaders share a common vision for regional integration remains unclear. Judging by Europe's experience – from the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 to the establishment of the European Union in 1993 – there is no need to rush the integration process. But it will take a lot

Multilateralisation, a USD 240 billion currency-swap arrangement, and its surveillance unit, the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office. Another should be to establish a de facto Asian Monetary Fund with a broader membership.

It should be noted that none of these efforts would aim to supplant existing sub-regional, regional, and global institutions. Rather, by making Asia a more effective and united actor, new regional trade and financial measures

would complement and strengthen current arrangements.

For any of this to work, bureaucracies and the private sector, including business leaders and academics, must actively support high-level political commitments to integration. Such support should not be too difficult to muster. After all, integration would facilitate the exchange of valuable knowledge, from effective economic and social policies to technological and scientific insight.

Forums and dialogues on regional public goods could also prove valuable by promoting cooperation on cross-border challenges, including epidemics, natural disasters, and environmental degradation. Person-to-person connections would help to highlight for Asian societies their cultural commonalities and shared values, fostering progress in areas where particular countries might lag.

At a time when the global order is increasingly uncertain, Asia should take its fate into its own hands, by pursuing closer economic and political regional cooperation. If Asian countries can develop a shared vision for an economic community and a political association, this century could be theirs.

The writer is Professor of Economics and Director of the Asiatic Research Institute at Korea University. His most recent book, co-authored with Harvard's Robert J. Barro, is Education Matters: Global Gains from the 19th to the 21st Century. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2016. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Save Rohingyas, save humanity

The escalation of violence against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar is abhorrent. Rohingyas have been shot, raped, and looted, and their houses torched to the ground by the Myanmar military force. As a result, many of the victims are attempting to flee to Bangladesh in order to escape. According to the UN, up to 30,000 people have been displaced by violence, half of which occurred during the last week when dozens of people died in clashes with the military. What is more dubious is how Myanmar continues to deny this state of affairs, despite evidence to the contrary.

This ought to be considered as a humanitarian issue, not Buddhist or Muslim, or majority or minority issue. I urge the Myanmar government as well as the international community to take measures to bring about peace for the Rohingyas and other ethnic communities.

Selim Reza Mridha  
Chittagong University

### Unnecessary delay in BCS appointment

It has been over three months since PSC published the 35th BCS result. The government is yet to issue the date for medical test of the candidates. The recruitment process would be expedited if the government could conduct police verification after the appointments are decided upon. Why should the candidates sit around idly another six months even after the final result?

Ashkek Sarker  
Comilla