

World's silence perpetuates genocide

Stop ethnic cleansing of Rohingyas

ONE needs only to wonder what horrific extremities of persecution and hardship can push people to flee their homelands, to try every inconceivable way to be allowed on other shores. And yet, the ethnic persecution of Rohingyas in Myanmar, denial of their rights and refusing to deem them as citizens only rings forth as a hollow silence on the world stage. This newspaper, in a news analysis published yesterday, called it a genocide in progress.

We are horrified by the muteness of the international community. Where is the condemnation, the words of protest, except the feeble few that we have heard? We stand shocked, as Rohingyas continue to be killed and raped. What other word than genocide can describe it, when it is obvious that it is a systematic targeting of an ethnic minority that continues unabated? And loudest silence in the midst of this is that of Nobel peace prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi.

Rohingya men, women and children continue to take great risks in trying to cross into Bangladesh. We believe it is our humanitarian duty to give them refuge, to do whatever a country like ours can to not add further to their despair. Yes, there are security and financial constraints that need to be vetted, but we cannot, on principle turn a blind eye either. Bangladesh has offered succour in the past, and continues to do so, with all its constraints.

Having said that, we also believe that whatever humanitarian effort we undertake cannot be the solution. Myanmar cannot on account of this continue to persecute and push these people out of the country that they have known to be theirs for centuries. The international community must wake up. The UN and the West need to take a stand, otherwise, it is genocide that their silence perpetuates.

Airport cargo handling still a problem

How long must trade suffer?

SPACE constraints, scarcity of manpower, inefficient ground handling equipment and incidents of theft are the nagging problems associated with the cargo village at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. A report published in this paper on November 24 found that goods are left strewn out in the open, on the tarmac because of space constraints. These are not the only problems. The bigger issue of ensuring security after a series of bans on direct air cargo flight out of the airport by Australia last December followed by Germany in March and the UK in June, we find to our dismay that not much has improved. Despite claims to the contrary about putting into effect a series of measures by way of purchasing requisite equipment and hiring a British aviation security company at considerable cost to the national exchequer, we find that most of the equipment have not been operationalised.

And it is not only about security equipment, but the recruitment process that was supposed to induct 300 ground handling staff is still ongoing, and we are assured that will be done by end of November. All in all, not a very confidence boosting situation and we really must get our act together. With the ban still on three major destinations, there is much consternation amongst exporters that unless the loopholes in the system are addressed soon, more countries in the European Union (EU) may follow suit. That is something we simply cannot afford because already exporters are counting extra costs by rerouting their cargo through a third country. Our focus should be to expedite putting in place security measures and improving management at the airport as soon as possible to get the existing bans lifted.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Sexual harassment in public transport

There is no any security measure for female commuters in public vehicles. Often women are sexually harassed by drivers, helpers or other male passengers. They are sometimes forced to stand in the crowded aisle with men touching them inappropriately, and also have to brush their way past helpers who deliberately block the exit path. Countless women silently face these situations on a daily basis.

Given the prevalence of such practices in our society, I believe we should allocate specific seats for women in public transport systems. Meanwhile, the government should telecast programs to increase public awareness over these issues, and take stern action against culprits of sexual harassment. I urge the Ministry of Roads, Transport and Bridges to facilitate a safe travelling environment for women.

Akib Sumon
Bangladesh Agricultural University



New Dawn in Pakistan

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDEEP NAYAR

THE Dawn is a fairly respected newspaper in the subcontinent. It was founded by Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah at Darya Ganji in New Delhi to propagate his cause of Pakistan. When Pakistan was founded *The Dawn* started appearing from Karachi. Since then, the newspaper has continued its publication from there.

It recently carried a story on the growing differences between the military and the civil government. The perturbed Nawaz Sharif government wanted the paper to disclose the source of the story. But it refused to do so. However, the government approached the Press Council of Pakistan, which has upheld the rights of the paper not to reveal the source.

A fairly countrywide debate has begun in Pakistan on whether or not the source should be disclosed. The overwhelming public opinion is in favour of *The Dawn* and supported the newspaper's right to withhold the source.

For the newspaper to confront the army, which governs the country in the real sense, is a courageous step. But it also shows the tenacity of the Pakistan press and the weak-kneed policy of the Sharif government. One doesn't know how the matter will ultimately be

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resolved but at present the Pakistan media has won the bout.

The lesson that the Indian media can draw from the newspaper's example is that however powerful the government

maybe, the media can raise its voice as long as they hold the ground. They do not have to wilt against the government's pressure. If the story *The Dawn* has broken is correct or the comment it has made is without rancour or prejudice, there is no need to be afraid of the powers that be.

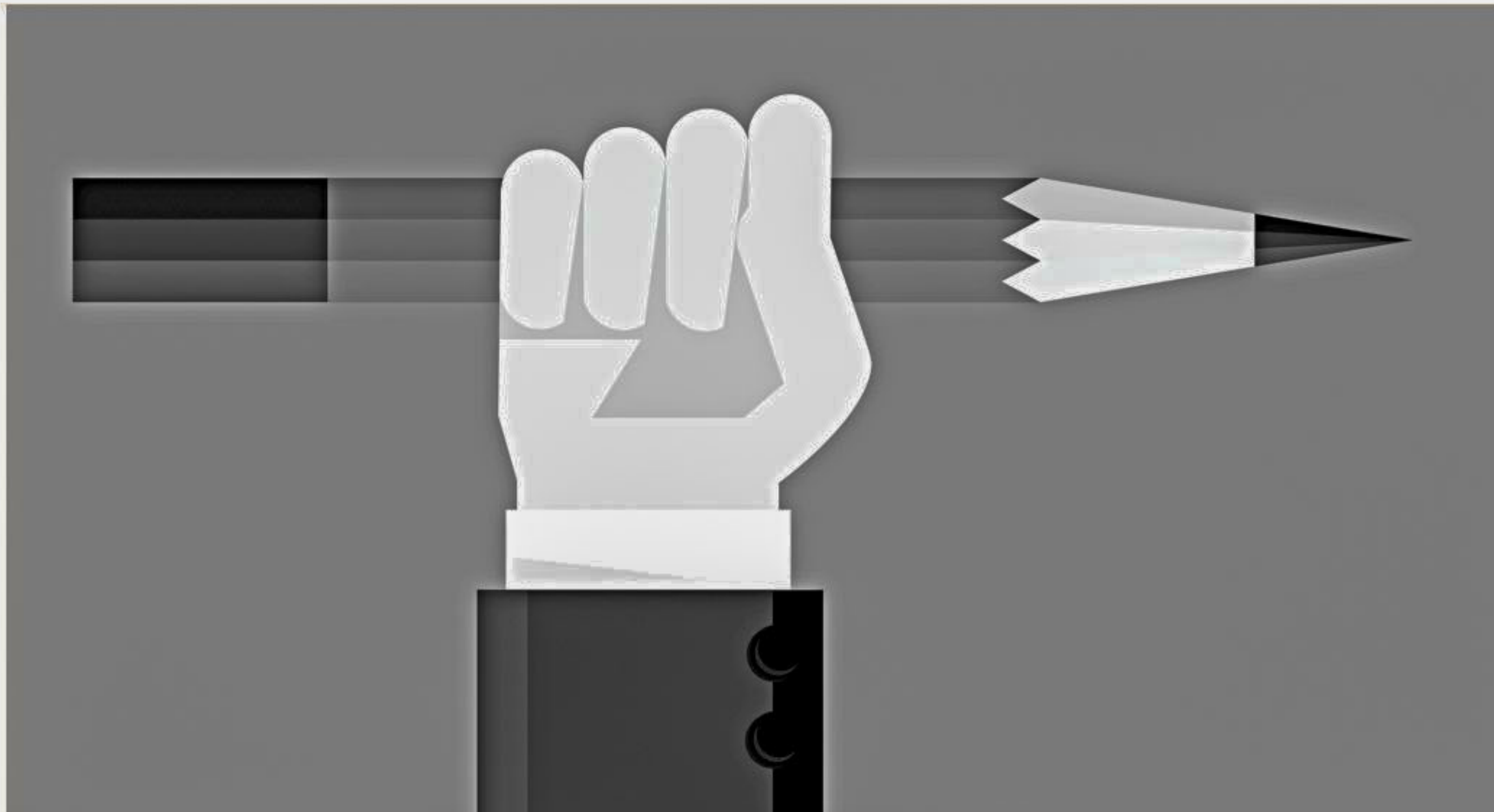
This is a far cry from what happened to the Pakistani media some years ago. It would look towards Islamabad and

a one-day ban on *NDTV* was in the interest of the nation. Who is he to determine what is in the national interest and who gave him the authority. Apparently, the minister realised the mistake and did not pursue the matter further.

Indeed, the media scene has changed. I recall what the then editor of *The Times of India*, Shyam Lal, telling that Shanti Prasad Jain, the owner, did not even

Even the integrity of most is questioned unlike in the past.

There could be several reasons attributed for this change in attitude. One, the owners of the media houses have come to consider newspapers or the television channels as commercial ventures. Profit, not principle, is their motive. It also leaves no room for the handful of honest journalists to pursue their profession with full freedom.



mould its policy which mostly suited the government of the day. The misadventure of General Pervez Musharraf at Kargil, when he was the chief of army staff, was accepted without demur. Even there were instances of journalists being pilloried for stories which did not show the government in good light.

Unfortunately, the Indian media of today does not measure up to *The Dawn* example. The one-day ban by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry on *NDTV* for the Pathankot coverage was defended by the channel itself. Others stood apart until the Editors' Guild voiced its protest. Subsequently, the channel also filed a case in the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, the pressure applied by other political parties, too, mounted. *The NDTV* owner, Pronnoy Roy, was told to appear before the Information and Broadcasting Minister where the channel was offered a compromise formula. But it goes to his credit that Roy did not rescind from his stand.

Information Minister Venkaiah Nadidu looked small when he said that

indirectly tell him what the paper should or should not carry. I knew Shanti Prasad Jain and he really thought that the owner was only a trustee as Mahatma Gandhi had defined the role newspaper owners.

The role of Ramnath Goenka, the owner of *The Indian Express* was equally commendable. I was working with the newspaper and I know even though Goenka was at the end of the road facing financial crisis because of the Indra Gandhi government's ban on advertisements. But Goenka did not budge even an inch and gave his editors full freedom which they used to express their anti-government views freely.

In the face of the emergency, *The Indian Express* bore the wrath of the establishment and yet continued its lonely battle against it. There were several instances of the newspaper defying the censorship. The language papers were bolder than the English ones.

Today's Indian media, by and large, does not appear to be anti-establishment. The journalists themselves prefer to go in the direction of the wind that blows.

The Dawn example should give heart to the media in the rest of the subcontinent. The freedom of the press is inviolable in a democratic setup. It cannot be compromised in any circumstances. People themselves take vengeance from the rulers who restrict their freedom.

Mrs Indira Gandhi, whose centenary birth anniversary is being celebrated, is an example. Her Congress Party was swept out of power in the 1977. So much so even she lost her own seat in the election held when the emergency was relaxed. In any democratic setup the sovereignty lies with the people. And they have shown again and again that they are the masters to give verdicts on political rulers.

By defying the government, *The Dawn* has reminded the people of Pakistan that they can confront the military rulers and restore democracy in the real sense. Political parties have a vested interest in power. People's interest is in the betterment and development. The latter should prevail.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

My Bittersweet Thanksgiving with Obama



ASHFAQ SWAPAN

THANKSGIVING is the most quintessential of American holidays. With the arrival of winter, as the weather is buffeted by chill winds, people travel the length and breadth of the country to seek warmth in the affectionate ties of family.

As a first-generation transplant – I do not have that opportunity. My sisters and mother are 10,000 miles away in Bangladesh. The Thanksgiving spirit touches me differently, making me reflect on my emotional ties with a country rather than a family – this diverse, exciting, maddening, wondrous, frustrating nation that I have made my home.

This year, I had a symbolic Thanksgiving party – it was watching US President Barack Obama on television as he gave out the Presidential Medal of Freedom at a White House ceremony. This medal is the highest civilian honour the US president can offer.

The recipients, indubitably distinguished, were diverse in terms of not only gender and ethnicity, but also in terms of the disciplines chosen for recognition.

Many honourees are familiar worldwide. Hollywood film stars Tom Hanks, Robert De Niro or Robert Redford need no introduction, nor do entertainers like Diana Ross or Bruce Springsteen. Bill and Melinda Gates are household names, as are basketball stars Michael Jordan and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

But it is fair to say that few Americans have heard of some distinguished scientist honourees who deserve to be better known.

As a young MIT scientist and working mom, Margaret H. Hamilton led the team that created the on-board flight software for NASA's Apollo command modules and lunar modules when Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin became the first humans to land on the moon. The mathematician and computer scientist contributed to concepts which set the foundation for modern, ultra-reliable software design and engineering.

"She symbolises the generation of unsung women who helped send

humankind into space," Obama said. "Her software architecture echoes in countless technologies today."

Rear Admiral Grace Hopper, known as "Amazing Grace" and "the first lady of software," was at the forefront of computers and programming

Honourees also included pioneering educators like Eduardo Padron who is president of Miami Dade College. "In the early 1960s, thousands of Cuban children fled to America, seeking an education they'd never get back home," Obama said. "And one refugee was 15-



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PHOTO: NASA

development from the 1940s through the 1980s. Hopper's work helped make coding languages more practical and accessible, and she created the first compiler, which translates source code from one language into another. Hopper was honoured posthumously.

year-old named Eduardo Padron, whose life changed when he enrolled at Miami Dade College ...

As Miami Dade's president since 1995, Dr. Padron has built a 'dream factory' for one of our nation's most diverse student bodies -- 165,000 students in all."

Activist Elaine Cobell, honoured posthumously, was a Blackfeet Tribal community leader and an advocate for Native American self-determination. She used her expertise in accounting to champion a lawsuit that resulted in a historic settlement, restoring tribal homelands to her beloved Blackfeet Nation and many other tribes.

As I watched on television, I marvelled at this brilliant, talented group of people.

This was my symbolic American family that I celebrated Thanksgiving with.

For all its policy failures, blunders and even reprehensible actions – I still cannot think about George W. Bush's Iraq war without getting outraged – this is where America's soft power lies. And it is formidable.

This is also Obama's America. My respect and fondness for Obama grew as I thought how this perceptive, sensitive, wise man had selected not only people of distinction, but also unsung women who deserve the limelight; he chose not only artists, but also activists; he chose an educator from a community college who has opened the middle-class dream for hundreds of thousands of underprivileged students rather than some president of an exclusive, fancy-pants university.

"It's useful when you think about this incredible collection of people to realise that this is what makes us the greatest nation on earth," Obama said. "Not because of our differences, but because, in our difference, we find something common to share. And what a glorious thing that is. What a great gift that is to America."

This ceremony was, in a way, Obama's swan song.

Obama, as is his wont, wore his position lightly. His speech praising the winners of the medal was full of human and humane anecdotes, and it was peppered by the trademark Obama wit.

"Everybody on this stage has touched me in a very powerful, personal way," Obama said. "These are folks who have helped make me who I am and think about my presidency, and what also makes them special is, this is America."

This is the America I will miss when Obama leaves the White House.

The writer is a contributing editor for *Siliconeer*, a monthly periodical for South Asians in the United States. He has been writing for US-based South Asian media for over 25 years.