

What's next on the Rohingya issue?

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

IT was called an Asean crisis meeting at a Yangon retreat on December 12. It might well have been termed a solidarity get-together to do some much-

needed hand-holding to Aung San Suu Kyi facing criticism for the atrocities on Rohingyas in the northern Rakhine state.

Suu Kyi, foreign minister and state counselor of Myanmar, convened the meeting in her capacity as the current chairperson of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean). Obviously, she was aiming at killing two birds with one stone: She wanted to be seen doing something about the fall-out of the Rohingya crisis; at the same time, she employed regional diplomacy to spruce up her rather tainted image.

In the process, Asean offered Myanmar humanitarian assistance stressing that aid will be distributed to those affected in northern Rakhine state.

The advent of pro-democracy leader and Nobel Laureate for Peace Aung San Suu Kyi from protracted imprisonment had raised high hopes for liberalism and fairness to pervade in Myanmar. As its next-door neighbour, we looked forward to a resumption of repatriation of Rohingya refugees encamped in Bangladesh for years.

Instead of that happening, Rohingyas men, women and children fleeing the worst forms of persecution since October 9 in their natural habitats, have pushed for Bangladesh's shores in large numbers.

The question is why Aung San Suu Kyi should be putting her life-long reputation on the line? This can be ascribed to two reasons. First, the systematic routing of minority Rohingya Muslims from the Buddhist majority Rakhine state feeds into a paranoia that one-sided demographic preponderance has to be maintained at any cost. Secondly, the Rohingyas having been divested of citizenship since 1982 and cannot vote; so why bother about them now? Instead,



A group of rescued Rohingya children housed in the new confinement area at the fishing town of Kuala Langsa, in Aceh province, Indonesia.

PHOTO:AFP

If the powerful countries be acquiescent on these points to the peril of human rights standards they would be only courting emotional blackmail.

cultivate the voting Buddhists – an expedient line of thinking one has great difficulty in assigning to someone like Suu Kyi.

Speaking of restoring citizenship rights to the Rohingyas, a very strong and unassailable case can be made out for the same. They have deep historical and ancestral roots to Myanmar, especially to the Arakan province which is now the Rakhine state. Aquiab, now known as Sittwe like Arakan is an Arab name. The places have had mosques since early seventeenth century.

It is a matter of recorded history that during Rosango kings, Alowal, Daulat Kazi and Magan Thakur used to be court poets. Alowal is said to have served King Sri Sudharam, a sanskritised name.

Hamilton Buchanan's book refers to Ruinga or Rooringa community inhabiting Arakan, a part of Burma which was under British suzerainty

with Chittagong adjoining it. They had shared dialects.

The people of Chittagong Hill Tracts too had migrated some three to four hundred years ago to make CHT their homeland.

Ethnic communities belong to certain territories by virtue of continuous residence, let alone the internationally recognised provision for naturalised citizenship.

The Myanmar authorities would do well to remember that a large number of their compatriots had fled oppressive military regimes migrating into Britain from time to time. For generations they have been living in the UK with full citizenship rights which they have denied to the Rohingyas for a good three and a half decades. This is as uncivil as it is untenable.

As if that was not enough, the religious affairs ministry in Myanmar is now taking up a project to rewrite the

history of Myanmar keeping Rohingyas completely out of the equation. They are bent upon discarding the continuous residence of the Muslim ethnic community in the northern Rakhine state, although this is a well-documented historical fact. The distortion of history is designed to justify and intensify the ethnic cleansing drives.

They are stepping on a disinformation campaign to hoodwink world opinion which is now focused on a single demand: Since the roots of Rohingya persecution and their spill-over effects lie in Myanmar, Yangon should take full responsibility of righting the wrongs.

There shouldn't be any waffling on this point; for, some criticism of Yangon's cloak and dagger policy on Rohingyas has betrayed a certain lack of conviction by emphasising that (a) Aung San Suu Kyi is too tied down by

the military to have any freedom of action; and (b) an assertive policy vis-à-vis Myanmar government in matters of reinstating the Rohingyas could backfire on investment prospects. If the powerful countries be acquiescent on these points to the peril of human rights standards they would be only courting emotional blackmail.

Rather than taking such a course of action, the countries having clout with Myanmar need to have a word with its government to restore citizenship rights to a segment of people who have been a part of Myanmar's man and landscapes. With such a persuasive approach failing, the big countries can think of pressing levers on Myanmar. Once tasting openness, Yangon could ill-afford sliding back to political hermitage with all the lure of animated connectivities around the corner.

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The writer is a senior journalist and former Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

Knotty note

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

UBER in Bangladesh kicks off. I nickname it Butterfly, for (officially) living a long life of three days before being shot down for providing a commercial service using private vehicles. There is perhaps the confusion of Uber being like the oldest profession in the world where private parts are used for commercial purposes, which is illegal.

Sigh. Uber, see you in Hyderabad as I prepare for my trip. Fly Biman? Absolutely, because my stand-up comedy shows are part of Biman's in-flight entertainment on its long haul international flights. That means every Biman Boeing 777 officially has a 'loose nut' on board. Someone at ground engineering took that a little too literally.

I take no chances and fly a different carrier, first to Kolkata. But as mandated by that airport, the cabin is sprayed with a, well I don't know, something. I always have a feeling it's nothing but a nice smelling insecticide and humanicide combined. And I always fear that when the jetway docks with the aircraft at the gate and the door is opened, one will find the cabin full of passengers on their backs and their arms and legs curled up like those of insects that have just been knocked out with a spray.

I catch my connecting flight to Hyderabad. Once at the hotel, I give my taxi a 2,000 Rupee note – a fare with 100 percent gratuity, as I get 32 teeth (of smiles) and no change back. It then strikes me – this is the Modi-fied economy with the severe cash crunch.

Then my first meal in Hyderabad, the land of the biriyani. And sure



enough, it is a sumptuous Maharajah Big Mac. This 300 Rupee meal is 'all' I can 'afford' with a 2,000 Rupee note. Like many there, I end up buying something unnecessary to get the change so as to be able to buy what is necessary. Unfortunately, this unnecessary junk

food leaves me with no room in my tummy for the necessary Hyderabad biriyani.

I guess there is a magic number between 0 and 2,000 where the seller is willing to sell and part with his precious change and the buyer is willing to

part with his precious money to buy something totally useless. I quickly learn that the magic number is (at least) 300 (Rupees).

I go to India and spend Singapore style. Now I know why that first meal of mine is called the 'Maharajah' Big Mac.

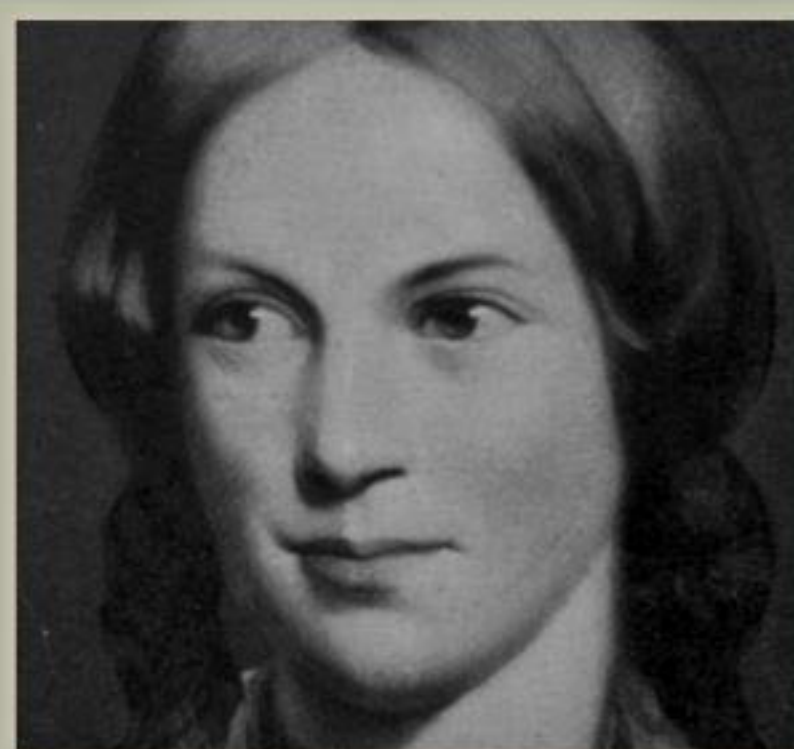
Never, ever have I carried so much cash, yet felt so poor so as not to be able to buy even a cup of road side masala tea. The signs are up everywhere with the pictures of 500 and 1,000 Rupee notes crossed out. Never have I seen so many crossed marks over so many pictures of Mahatma Gandhi. Had he seen this, not to mention the massive collateral damage inflicted on the average citizen, I doubt if he would have remained non-violent for long.

Such is life. It is like the spray in the planes, intended for one purpose, but resulting in something else. The 500 and 1,000 Rupee bombshell was meant to be a 'precision strike' on black marketers, but sure enough, it is the mass, even those from across the border, which end up suffering.

Are there really any precision munitions? Is that why Uber was also shot down? Wait, it's up. Phew! Or is it 'hush hush' up? If so, I've just blown the lid. Sorry!

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The writer is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of ABC Radio's Good Morning Bangladesh and the founder of Naveed's Comedy Club. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

QUOTABLE Quote



CHARLOTTE BRONTE
ENGLISH NOVELIST AND POET

The human heart has hidden treasures, In secret kept, in silence sealed; The thoughts, the hopes, the dreams, the pleasures, Whose charms were broken if revealed.

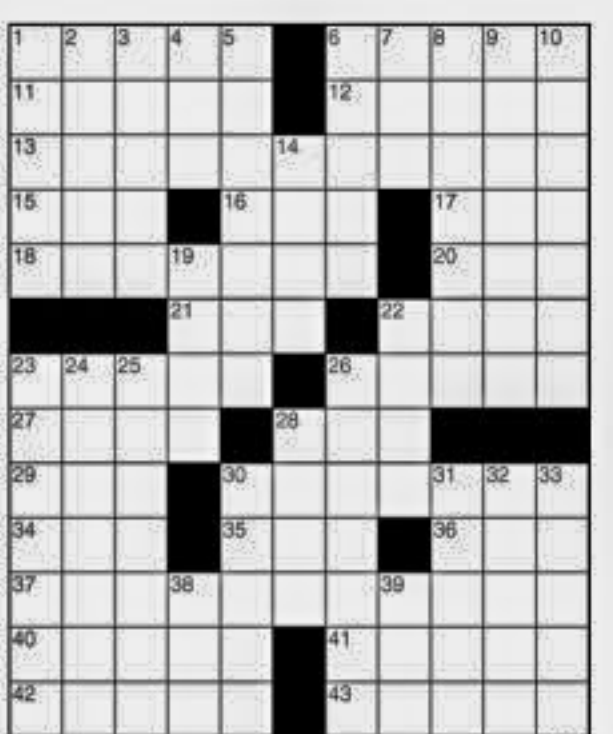
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Packed in boxes
- 6 Designer Bill
- 11 "Hello" singer
- 12 Main artery
- 13 Relaxing
- 15 Great weight
- 16 Tick off
- 17 AP rival
- 18 Historic cold periods
- 20 Sinking signal
- 21 Some AL batters
- 22 Feudal famer
- 23 Transplant a plant
- 26 Over-bearing
- 27 New Haven students
- 28 Chess piece
- 29 Overhead trains
- 30 Half of a double-header, maybe
- 34 Huge snake
- 37 Leaving in a throng
- 40 Land in the sea
- 41 Hospital worker
- 42 Bird abodes
- 43 Come in

DOWN

- 1 Spiny plants
- 2 Improvised
- 3 Paris river
- 4 Building wing
- 5 Tickle pink
- 6 River's bounds
- 7 Lumber unit
- 8 Wakes up
- 9 Dazes
- 10 Fill the bill
- 14 Angers
- 19 Commotions
- 22 Musical number
- 23 Lands, as a fish
- 24 Squashed circle
- 25 Flower parts
- 26 New Jersey city
- 28 The Wise Men
- 30 Shoulder muscles, for short
- 31 Stop the count-down
- 32 Cat's quarry
- 33 Glutton
- 38 Rent out
- 39 Colt creation

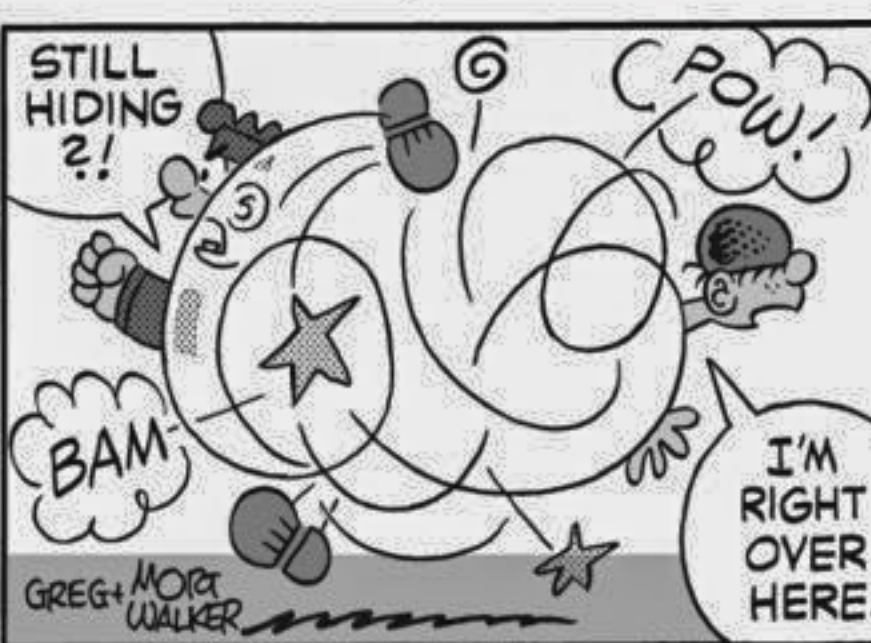


YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S	I	G	N	S	B	U	S	T	
T	R	A	I	L	I	N	E	R	T
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R	A	M	S		O	G	L	E	S

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

