

Time for UN Security Council to take action

Myanmar must stop this carnage now!

THIRTEEN Nobel laureates including Professor Yunus, and 10 global leaders in a joint statement to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have urged world leaders to stand united and send a strong message to the Myanmar government that enough is enough. The systematic brutalisation of the Rohingyas, their forceful eviction from homes and the subsequent attempt to push them into Bangladesh all bear the hallmarks of the makings of an unfolding genocide. Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the UN and chairman of Myanmar's Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, who led a peace mission to Myanmar recently, stated that journalists should be careful about leveling charges of genocide. Yet, as the world now knows that is precisely what is going on there, thanks to the tales of horror told by Rohingya refugees who made it to safety in Bangladesh.

The statement by eminent personalities is echoed by the Bangladesh government, which has formally demanded that Myanmar take back its citizens because they are Myanmar and not Bangladeshi, as falsely claimed by the Yangon government. The international community and the UNSC have till date merely issued statements condemning brutality against the Rohingya. These people have had their homes burnt, faced arbitrary arrests and allegedly been shot and killed in large numbers. The excuse used against these people that a group of Rohingyas had attacked and killed Myanmar police does not warrant mass scale repression against an entire community of hundreds of thousands. The time has come for a much more forceful response from the UNSC, one that would make clear to Yangon that the world will not stand by and watch in silence the systematic persecution of the Rohingyas.

Water preservation

Conserve the water bodies

WE appreciate the Water Resources minister for calling for a more efficient water management system in order to ensure a sustainable water regime but cannot help asking what actions are actually being taken by the authorities to save and protect our water bodies. While it is well and good to make such an appeal, who will, meanwhile, stop the innumerable number of rivers, canals, haors and beels from being encroached upon by powerful people? Who will check the uncontrolled pollution of rivers and canals that has rendered the water unfit for human consumption? How are we going to address the diminishing levels of groundwater, rising salinity and arsenic contamination of water in many parts of the country?

The media is awash with reports of rivers and canals being filled up by land grabbers for profit. A recent survey shows that all of the major rivers surrounding Dhaka are polluted with non-degradable chemical waste making the water unfit for human consumption. It does not come as a shock that an astounding 60 percent of the population does not have access to safe drinking water and the situation is only getting worse every year. We have to do a better job of preserving natural water by retaining the catchment areas across the country.

There is no alternative to conserving water bodies if we want to ensure availability of safe drinking water for all. Awareness has to be raised about judicial use of water. Those who pollute indiscriminately should be punished severely.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Children and malnutrition

Many children in rural areas and shanties are plagued by malnutrition in our country. This problem needs to be eradicated soon. A child with malnutrition can never attain a good health in future.

Committees should be formed in affected areas which will arrange food, medicine, safe drinking water, sanitation to improve their conditions. There will be many people and organisations including the students who will give financial help to run the program. This is how we can eradicate malnutrition and improve our national health.

Shafkat Rahman
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Refugees, a matter of concern

The matter of refugees is one of the hot topics in the contemporary world.

An unprecedented 65.3 million people around the world have been forced from their home. Among them are nearly 21.3 million aged 18.

Each day war forces thousands of families to flee their homes. To escape the violence, they leave everything behind – everything except their hopes and dreams for a safer future. We all believe that all refugees deserve to live in safety.

Governments must act with solidarity and shared responsibility. The world should ensure every refugee children's education, ensure every refugee's safety and that every refugee can work or learn new skills to make a positive contribution to their community.

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Children in the grip of pornography

SHAHANA HUDA

A young woman I know was telling me about her son, a student of class three, a few days ago. While fiddling with her son's tab, she found some disturbing sites -- all with adult or pornographic content. She was horrified but didn't know what to say to her son, what to ask, or even what approach to take, since a child so young isn't supposed to be aware of these things.

Why did he visit the sites? How did he even know about them? And how much did he actually understand? She felt hesitant about involving the father, since she had been the one to buy the tab for her son without his consent in the first place. She finally approached her son and tried to talk to him about it. She asked him what he liked to watch online, and warned him to stay away from violent and non age-appropriate content.

Soon her son opened up. He said that he had been searching for ways to make chocolate when these "weird" sites popped up suddenly, much to his surprise. She was visibly worried and said she couldn't sleep at night because of this. She had already disconnected the wifi internet at home, but this was also causing a furore in the household, since almost every member either used or was addicted to constant internet usage. So she knew that turning the wifi off was not a solution. But what could she do? How could she protect her child from this inappropriate content?

Children, especially school-going children often end up on porn sites with or without understanding what they are doing, from simply browsing the net. These sites are linked to very innocent and simple words like 'chocolate', 'ice-cream' and 'strawberry', words that young children are familiar with and might want to search on the net. Children today are exposed to the internet at a very early age. Parents are busy with work, chores at home, social responsibilities, and even personal entertainment, among other things. It becomes difficult to give the necessary time to children because of such preoccupations. Parents don't have the time to play with their children, or to explain things to them. How many parents today can say they read stories to their children? Or buy them story books?

Parents take comfort in the idea that as long as their children are at home, they are safe, which is not necessarily true. Children today study, watch TV, and play games on smartphones and tabs, and browse the internet at home. Children from the middle and high income groups live with various kinds of gadgets. I was surprised to find even children in the villages now spend their time in front of the TV screen. Although there are fields, open air, rivers, flowers and all other

bounties of nature, yet even theirs is a childhood captive to technology.

A survey by Manusher Jonno Foundation in 2009 revealed that about 77 percent of school-going children in Dhaka city are either watching or have already watched pornographic material. A large number of them also get involved in the making of the material. That research was done a few years ago, and the government has enacted an act to control pornography, taking into consideration the revelations of this research. The law enforcers are also active in trying to address this issue. And yet, with the widespread use of smartphones/tabs/laptops, the availability of pornographic content, and its aggression into the lives of the children, has increased manifold than before.

Nowadays it's not just the cities, even

good telling off followed. But the boy kept denying having brought it. It is assumed that the local shopkeeper must have inserted it along with the songs. This is in fact how many children and adolescents, the main and very gullible targets of porn, get initially exposed to the material.

A couple of months ago, in October, I myself witnessed such a horrifying incident. A simple Google search about a renowned local institution revealed several scandalous video clips, not one or two, but more than a dozen, all in the same vein. Initially I thought the girl might have been trapped into being filmed like that. But I later found she in fact was the initiator. A large number of young people were already familiar with the clip.

Pornography or sexually explicit videos are nothing new for people. But

Another researcher of the study mentions that the videos coming out nowadays are far worse than those that were considered scandalous in the past. He also said that the number of child and adolescent users is increasing every day. The prevalence of smartphones, tabs, pads, laptops is making access to porn much easier. There are also different modes now—people are reading or privately listening to pornographic content, with the help of ear phones. How are parents or guardians supposed to put a check on that?

I cannot help but wonder where we are headed. The youth we consider our asset, a part of the same youth, while pursuing education from the lap of relative luxury, is getting used to porn, drugs and a generally lawless way of life. They are marketing themselves as sexualised objects.

As guardians we must be more



the village shops are stocked up with x-rated material. Simple roadside shops carry them, and there is no check on who can access them. Laws do exist, but there isn't enough effort to enforce those laws. Anyone who wants to can watch porn, and those who don't know or do not want to, are still being shown such content by others who do like it. I came across such an example while talking to a family in Bogra. Their school-going son had brought home some songs from the shop, on a pen drive. When his sister wanted to listen to those songs, the boy himself was left dumbfounded after connecting the drive to the TV. A porn film started playing after just 3 or 4 songs. The son was horrified, and his sister was left speechless. She simply assumed that the child had brought the material intentionally. And of course a

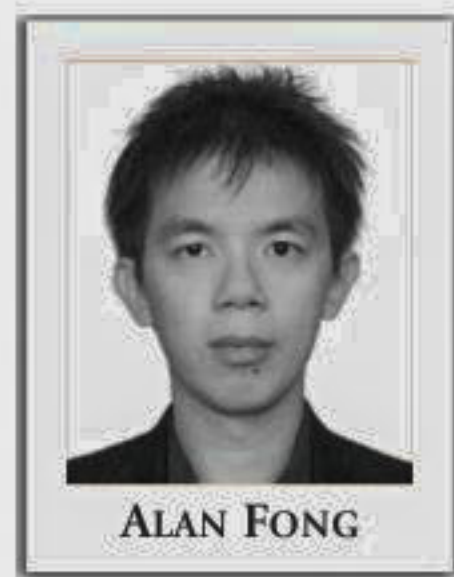
even then, why this perverse desire to put your own private moments into the hands of strangers, just for fun? And yet it is commonplace now. Because it pays well, it sells well. A pornography related research expert recently said that locally developed content is more popular with audiences here, compared to content from abroad.

It is really incomprehensible why young people from educated families and reputed educational institutes would be involved in making pornographic content? Why would they risk their reputation and that of their family, friends, institutions they belong to? I want to understand what motivates them to such an extent? Don't they realise, despite their education, that this increases sexual violence against women in the society?

proactive if we are to protect our next generations from the grip of pornography. We must give more time and attention to our children, we must teach them good values, and try to understand our children. Leaving children with open access to technology, for whatever reason and having no time to talk to them, is not justifiable. Of course, we have to allow children to use technology, as it is the necessity of the times, but we must also properly monitor how they use it. The most important thing is to increase our own knowledge about internet use. We must become more aware, of technology and of the society, and know what is happening and where. We must also support any steps the government takes to combat this social malady.

The writer works in communications.

The problems behind Taiwan's 'Nazi parade' scandal



ALAN FONG

A school event in Taiwan came to the forefront of international media last week. A group of students from a private high school wore self-fashioned Nazi uniforms and wielded swastika banners at their school's "Christmas and Thanksgiving Costume Parade" on December 23. Photos taken at the parade served as fodder for a

heated debate on PTT, Taiwan's largest online forum.

When one netizen forwarded the photos to the Israeli representative office in Taipei, the debate escalated into a diplomatic affair.

The Israeli representative office condemned the display of Nazi paraphernalia as "deplorable and shocking" and called on Taiwan to initiate programs to teach students about the Holocaust. The Presidential Office apologised for the presentation, which it described as

sentations of Nazis deserved universal and high-profile condemnation in a nation where people seemed to have no problem role-playing, or even outright worshipping, other authoritarian figures such as Taiwan's former President Chiang Kai-shek.

Taiwan's complicated history means that some of its citizens have a less-than-straightforward interpretation of World War II history. Taiwan came into the war technically as part of the Axis powers, as it was a colony of the Japanese empire. Taiwan was handed to the Republic of China by Japan after the latter's defeat in the war. However, this "retrocession" – which, incidentally, the high school in question (Kuang-fu Senior High School) is named after – is regarded by a number of people in Taiwan as merely a change of rulers. The ambivalence of Taiwanese people toward their national identity remains one of the biggest sociopolitical issues in the nation.

Just as the event was going the way of all gaffe-prompted scandals in Taiwan -- with strong reactions, public condemnations, heads rolling and the public

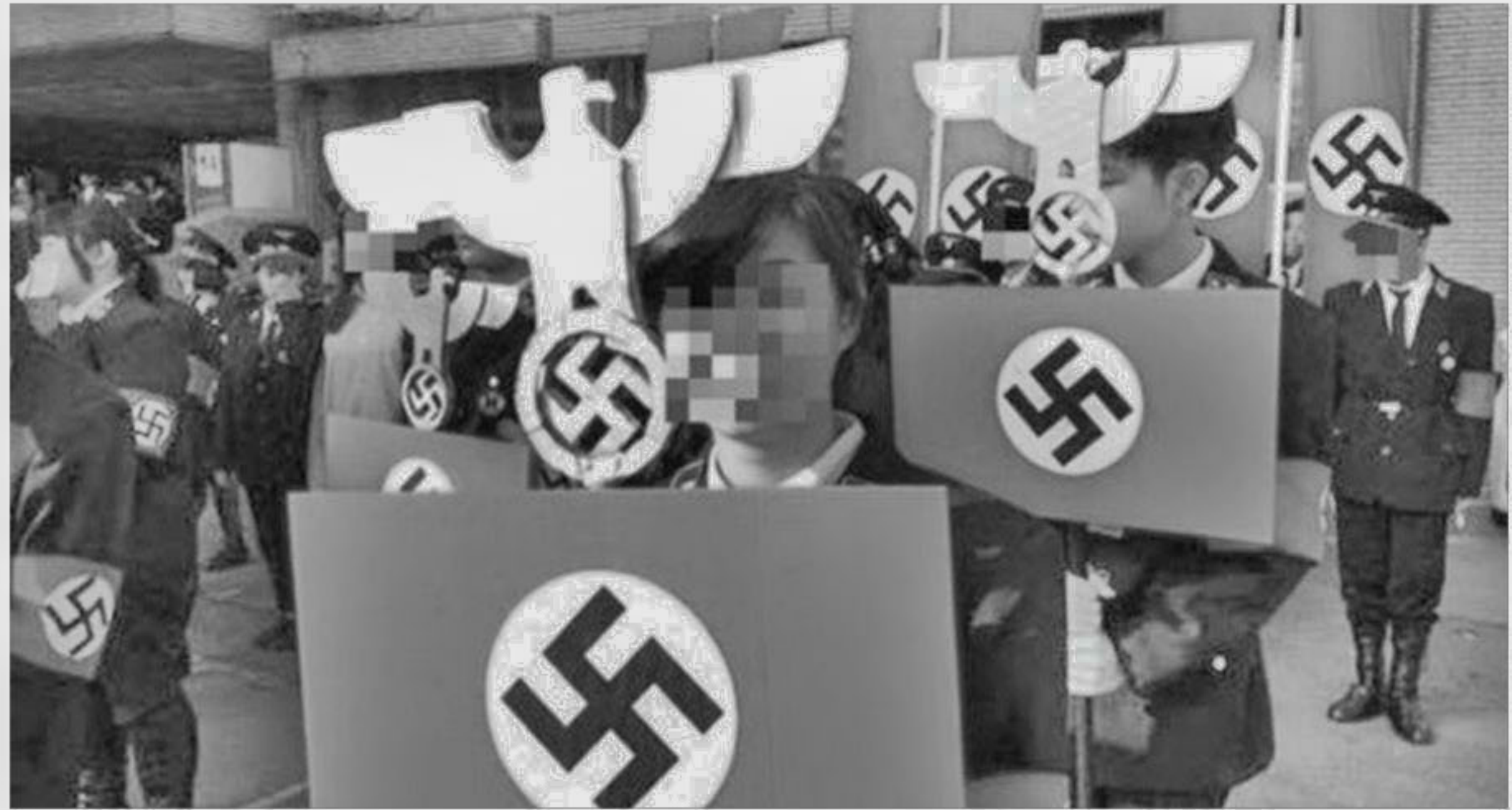


PHOTO: EPA/AP

"disrespectful to the Jewish people's suffering at the hands of war and representative of ignorance toward modern history." The Ministry of Education also responded by threatening to cut subsidies to the school. Before the day ended, the school's principal had apologised for the school's negligence and failure to educate the students. He resigned the next day.

The parade was widely criticised in Taiwanese society, but there were also people who questioned why repre-

moving on to the next buzz topic -- some of the school's students released a strongly-worded online response rallying for support for the resigning principal and challenging the government. In the post, the students said that they did not deserve such public humiliation as they had "done nothing wrong" and were simply taking part in a "costume event." They questioned why they were expected to understand taboos about Hitler, as they were Taiwan-born citizens

who only loved their country and high-school students whose only concern was to finish school. They concluded by challenging President Tsai Ing-wen for siding with Israel and Germany while punishing her own people.

Instead of drumming up support for the principal, the article was criticised even by people who regarded the government's response as heavy-handed, who decried the students' astonishing lack of civic consciousness in a global community, their narrow mindedness and blatant nationalism. Online sleuths continued their probe into the school and released video footages of other racially discriminating parades held in the school Christmas events in the past.

While the online post revealed the students' lack of understanding of the significance of holding a mock Nazi parade, it also demonstrated that they were not heartless teenagers who cared nothing about other people's suffering. The students wrote the post out of concern for their principal, who was reportedly beloved at the school and demonstrated care for his students by assuming full responsibility for the scandal. They could have hidden behind the principal, who offered his own head to shield them from public pressure, but they decided to take responsibility, regardless of how ill-advised they were.

The "why should I care" attitude demonstrated by both the students who staged the rally and those who penned the response reflect the failure of Taiwan's utilitarian education system, in which school is regarded as little more than a two-decade vocational training program. Students have little respect for history lessons because they are trained to view the subject as a series of facts that will allow them to pass an exam.

In fact, these students are the victims of a shallow utilitarianism that prevails in Taiwan. President Tsai recognised this in her first response to the incident on December 29, saying that "the students are not at fault, the fault lies in (us) grownups."

Ironically, such utilitarianism is evident in the government's response to the Nazi parade controversy. The Ministry of Education's first reaction was to threaten to cut funding for a school that clearly needed more support. The government approached the incident purely from a political and diplomatic point of view. The students who organised the display and those who responded clearly lack civic sensibilities and historical knowledge, but they were right to feel that, instead of receiving guidance for their errors, they had been thrown under the bus by a government that handled the event merely as a PR scandal to be contained.

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