

The twin tragedies of Syria and Myanmar



NO OFFENCE
NAHELA NOWSHIN

A heart-wrenching photograph of the lifeless body of a 16-month old boy, washed up on the shore of the Naf river, was recently published on CNN. The headline read, "The Rohingya Alan Kurdi: Will the world take notice now?" The name of the boy



ILLUSTRATION: E R RONNY

The forgotten Syrian and Rohingya children.

The 'Alan Kurdi Effect' at the time manifested itself in the form of the hashtag #RefugeesWelcome and a surge in sympathy for the millions of Syrians affected by the conflict now nearing the end of its sixth year. A study by the University of Sheffield also noted a change in online semantics—'refugees' versus 'migrants' (terms with distinct meanings with legal implications)—towards the Syrians, with 'refugees' being used increasingly. Many western nations agreed to take in a number of Syrian refugees while others closed their borders. Despite the outpouring of public concern, many argue that little changed for the Syrians as the death toll of total refugees and migrants fleeing to other countries actually increased from 4,664 deaths in the year before Alan Kurdi's death to 5,700 since (BBC, 2016). So in light of the harrowing photo of Mohammed Shohayet, can we realistically expect anything to change for the Rohingya?

As we learnt from the Alan Kurdi saga, the power of social media has its limits and is far outweighed by the geo-political interests of world leaders and nation states. Whereas the proxy war in Syria plays out between world powers vying for regional hegemony through foreign intervention, the Rohingya crisis should be seen in the context of Myanmar as "one of the largest untapped markets in the world". It is no wonder that western powers like the US that profess to champion democracy and uphold civil liberties aren't doing much to exert pressure on Aung San Suu Kyi's government to take heed of the escalating Rohingya crisis. Suu Kyi's landslide victory in Myanmar's first free elections in 25 years in November 2015, that ended decades of repressive military rule and were hailed as a "victory for democracy" in which the stateless Rohingya had no right to vote, serves the

interests of nations whose primary aim is access to an open market to the former pariah state with its abundant natural resources, and who care very little about the protection of the rights of the Rohingya. President Barack Obama formally announced the lifting of all US sanctions on Myanmar on October 7, 2016, ending three decades of strained relations between the countries. While Obama had been working towards rapprochement with the Southeast Asian nation for years, the removal of all trade restrictions are seen by many as a loss of leverage the US previously had on Myanmar's military which retains control over key ministries and core sectors of the economy. Just two days after Obama's formal announcement, the latest bout of violence in Rakhine State began, leading to the displacement of 30,000 Rohingyas. The country of 53m, which has lived under the rule of the Tatmadaw, the Myanmar military, from 1962 to 2011, is slowly transitioning into a democracy. Given the intricate relationship between democracy, basic values of freedom and respect for human rights, will the fate of the Rohingya, who are at the brink of mass genocide, change course? Not as long as political and economic interests of the international community prevail over humanitarian principles—both in the case of Syria and Myanmar. As graphic images blur the lines between photojournalistic ethics and aesthetic taste in an age of violence and social media, and as world leaders do nothing in the face of the worst kinds of human sufferings of our time, one wonders, what will it take to prompt them into action and 'take notice', as the CNN headline asks? The brutal truth symbolised by the images of Alan Kurdi and Mohammed Shohayet is best described in the words of Dimitri Beck, editor of the photojournalism magazine *Polka* in France: "It's not a sophisticated image, even in its framing, but the message is clear and direct: a kid has died and he's being picked up like a washed-up piece of wood on the beach. There's nothing more violent." The writer is a member of the Editorial team at *The Daily Star*. E-mail: Nahela.k@gmail.com

While Alan and Mohammed hail from different countries, the circumstances which led to their premature deaths are very similar, and sadly, all too frequent. Both the Syrian war and the Rohingya tragedy see no end in sight.

Blocking pornographic websites Counterintuitive and futile

FARHAAN UDDIN AHMED

As much as we need to appreciate the good intentions of the government behind blocking access to 560 pornographic websites in Bangladesh, we also need to analyse the effectiveness of the measure and ascertain whether it will actually achieve its stated goals. It is understood that the two goals of the initiative are to protect children (i.e. minors) from explicit adult or sexual content available on the internet and to discourage visits to pornographic websites by making it difficult to access the same. There is no doubt whether the initiative is morally, and ethically justifiable; these justifications are quite self-evident.



ILLUSTRATION: ANDERS NIENSTAEDT/MINTPRESS

However, when we come to the question of whether the initiative is pragmatic and reasonable, this is where the debate ensues. The first goal is to safeguard children from explicit sexual content available on the internet. The rationale behind this is that blocking access to pornographic websites results in the lower likelihood of children accessing or coming across such contents on the internet. Now, some would argue that the accuracy of this assumption is the subject of a large-scale research project. Nonetheless, the current scenario and the futility of similar endeavours in the past do not provide much support to the stated rationale. Moreover, we are near to the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, we need to understand that it is inevitable that our children will be exposed to adult contents, now at an even younger age than ever before; through social media, films (foreign as well as local), television shows, and various other types of media. We cannot realistically stop

these inevitable exposures of children to such contents since they are widely available and relatively easily accessible, no matter what. If the goal is to stop pornography from 'corrupting' the minds of the young, it cannot be achieved by merely blocking access to websites, considering the fact that there are way too many websites to block and there are equally many ingenious ways to bypass access restrictions such as the ones that have been implemented. Therefore, the only way to achieve the goal of safeguarding our children is by educating them and making them aware of such issues. Children need to understand why they should not be visiting pornographic websites; otherwise, a website-blocking

initiative only exasperates the situation by turning pornography into a forbidden fruit and consequently making it even more attractive by garnering greater curiosity in our children's minds. Rather, children need to be made aware of the moralities and social harms of pornography, such as, in addition to the religious and moral turpitude; pornography, to a greater extent, objectifies women, in some cases encourages child abuse and human trafficking, and devalues human emotions and relationships. Basically, the children's curiosity has a vital role to play here and it needs to be satiated through proper education and awareness programmes. Our

education system needs to incorporate such aspects of sexual education into the curriculum. Therefore, it is quite unlikely that blocking 560 websites will in any way significantly improve our ability to safeguard our children from adult content available and accessible on the internet. Moving on to the second goal, this is to discourage people from visiting pornographic websites by making it difficult to access the same. Here the rationale is basically grounded on the assumption that the users who visit pornographic websites are; for the lack of a better word 'lazy', hence, if access to these websites is made difficult for them or if some of them are blocked, the users will be discouraged due to

their laziness to visit such websites. Now, this rationale has two major flaws. Firstly, it assumes that there are no equally easily accessible websites other than the ones which have been blocked; on the contrary, there are over a million other alternatives. Secondly, it ignores the psychology of a person who would visit a pornographic website, assuming that they can be so easily deterred; which is quite unreasonable to accept. Yes, there is no doubt that arguably there will be a few fringe benefits but they would be negligible in comparison to the scale of issues in question. Furthermore, blanket blocks on pornographic websites have been tried and consequently discarded in developed and developing countries around the world without much success and noticeable improvements, the internet is way too vast, expansive, and free for such measures to bear any fruit. Therefore, rather than utilising precious resources on such initiatives, the government should rather target and aim to clampdown on major illegal activities on the internet, like child pornography, revenge porn, sexual abuse, cyber-bullying, harassment, and human trafficking. It would be advisable for the government to issue rules mandating that all websites containing adult content must notify the users that such content is for 'over-18s' only and may also ask the user to verify that they are actually adults, so that a user is aware as and when he or she is accessing any adult content. On the issue of safeguarding our children, there is no alternative to proper education about the online world, its immense utility and the threats that accompany it. The writer is Lecturer in Law, School of Law, BRAC University

Furthermore, blanket blocks on pornographic websites have been tried and consequently discarded in developed and developing countries around the world without much success and noticeable improvements, the internet is way too vast, expansive, and free for such measures to bear any fruits.

QUOTABLE Quote



JOHN BERGER
ENGLISH ART CRITIC, NOVELIST, PAINTER AND POET.

The past is the one thing we are not prisoners of. We can do with the past exactly what we wish. What we can't do is to change its consequences.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
1 Molten rock
6 Maze choices
11 Mistake
12 Pasty
13 Rough guesses
14 He-Man's female counterpart
15 "What was that?"
16 More frequent
18 Historic stretch
19 Once called
20 Exploit
21 One or more
23 Not recently cleaned
25 Heel
27 Bird of myth
28 Vinegar bottle
30 NFL players
33 Huge snake
34 Fragrant tree
36 Gallery fill
37 Lie back
39 Sping org.
40 Alan of "Argo"
41 Creative sort
43 Play part
44 Deal maker
- 45 Grazing group
46 Docking spots
- DOWN
1 Fits together
2 Music's Toscanini
3 S'more base
4 Unruly group
5 Fiery crime
6 Vaccine pioneer
7 Tennis great Arthur
8 Yule ballet
9 Galileo's crime
10 Trap
17 Nourished
22 Seine water
24 Soak up
26 Outlines
28 Compel by force
29 Pie dish
31 "We three Kings of ---are"
32 Sets off
33 Audacious
35 Change the boundaries of
38 Singer Jenny
42 Before now

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

REED SANTA
OTTO SHROUD
STAN TAINTS
YULETIDE
FIRESIDE
CAROLS DUG
AFORE DOING
LAP RANGES
FREERIDE
BONAFIDE
REREAD ODOR
ALARMS OLEO
MINTS TESS

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

