

## Give back citizenship to the Rohingyas

Myanmar govt. must act now

We agree with the opinion of the visiting Rakhine Commission that granting citizenship to Rohingyas is imperative for a lasting solution to the ongoing crisis. The Commission issued the statement during a discussion organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies on Tuesday following the visit of the three-member delegation to two Rohingya refugee camps in Ukhaia and Teknaf upazilas in Cox's Bazar.

The urgent need to grant citizenship status to Rohingyas cannot be emphasised enough given that they are one of the largest groups of stateless people in the world. The Rohingya cause has begun to gain ground only recently despite there being a long history of abuse of the ethnic Muslim minority often called the most persecuted group in the world.

The Myanmar government's discriminatory policies towards the Rohingyas, particularly the 1982 Citizenship Law that essentially stripped them of access to full citizenship and denied them of the most fundamental rights, have led to one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time. Myanmar's willful silence on allegations of mass rapes, indiscriminate killings and torching of entire villages by security forces can only be interpreted as state sanctioned violence to carry out a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the minority.

Since the Commission only has recommendatory powers and the Myanmar government isn't legally bound to comply with its suggestions, international bodies and world leaders must prioritise the plight of the Rohingya and pressurise Myanmar into starting the deliberation process of granting Rohingyas citizenship. The Myanmar government cannot forever deny their responsibility and complicity in fomenting the decades-old crisis and bringing about the dehumanising ordeal of the Rohingya that has gone on for far too long.

## A grand fete

Who's paying the bill?

How does one describe the lavish feast hosted by a local Awami League leader in Akkelpur upazila of Joypurhat recently? Four schools were closed so that 30,000 people could enjoy the food! The host had contested and lost the bid to win Rukindipur union parishad chairman post since the nomination went to someone else. The event was hosted on 30 acres of land, which included the four primary schools. Now, if we calculate that it cost Tk 100 per head then the bill comes to around Tk 30 lakh but others say it could be double that amount. As heard through the grapevine the fund was provided by his elder brother, who is reportedly an audit officer with a certain ministry. If that is true, where does an audit officer get that sort of cash in the first place? This is certainly something worth looking into by the concerned government department.

May we also ask on whose authority were these schools closed? Since when has it become expedient to close public property to hold a private function of a political leader? We would like to know how the district administration officials allowed this to happen. Who will compensate for the break of study for the students, or is that not a concern of the ministry of education these days? Interestingly, the feast was attended by local political leaders (both ruling party and opposition) and government and non-government personnel. We don't suppose it dawned upon any of the guests to protest the illegality of occupying and utilising schools to satisfy the whims of a political leader which created inconvenience for students because he felt it was within his right to do so. Where does it all stop? Or is this the new normal in Bangladesh where political leaders can and will do anything they please?

# Which is the real face of America?

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN SHAHEEDUL ANAM KHAN MDC, FSC (RETD)

THE face of America that we witnessed following the US Presidential election was quite new to many around the world, quite different from the moderate face of the country, that had greeted people, most of the times, of all races, colours and religions with open arms – that was the face of America that the world was used to seeing. That has changed since Donald Trump was elected president. He had conducted his campaign exploiting fear, sowing seeds of division and sponsoring exclusivity. His "America First" is a new appellation for the very exclusive nature of some of his policies that he promised to craft, both external and internal.

Trump had promised to construct a massive wall between his country and Mexico at a time when political boundaries are losing relevance if not becoming altogether redundant, and at a time when people are trying to remove manmade barriers, both tangible and intangible, that separate countries and peoples. And to the surprise of many, he won. But then we

taking some comfort in the fact that we are in good company when it comes to false voting and ballot tampering.

It is perhaps a solace to many that the majority of the American electorate doesn't concur with his views or his policies. But the fact is that nearly 48 percent of the electorate do not seem to have realised that the agent of change they had voted for would cause the country to relapse to the days of mid-fifties and early sixties when the American society was nearly torn asunder by the exclusive and divisive nature of American politics. And that is borne out by the events following his many presidential fiats, particularly on the travel ban from seven Muslim majority countries, in his so-called attempt to "keep America safe". And that also includes Iraq, a country that was under virtual occupation of the US for more than a decade, and whose soldiers are still fighting shoulder to shoulder with the US military against the IS. The furor he has managed to create in his very first week in office has compelled commentators to liken him to the bull in the China shop. And perhaps this is the first time that the US has acquired the dubious distinction of being considered an existential threat to its allies. The European Council President Donald Tusk has called the US under President Donald Trump, "one of the external

threats to the EU along with China, Russia and radical Islam."

But fear mongering and exploiting the collective psyche of the American people has been a tool of the American polity since the seminal stages of the country trying to gel as a nation. And this was particularly acute when it came to the question of migrants. The anti-immigrant protagonists forget that the country is a nation of immigrants, although there has been periodic enactment of anti-migrant policies. Immigrants were at times unwelcome, out of fear and anger.

The first group that was treated with suspicion and fright and met with resistance, and the entire community traduced, was Irish immigrants, who in turn looked apprehensively at the Italian migrants who followed them seeking better pastures in the 'land of the free'. A passage in an article in *The Atlantic* dated November 21, 2011 sums up the traditional anti-immigrant slant. It reads, "There was a more sinister attitude toward immigrants in the country at the turn of the 20th century. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 made it government policy to restrict an ethnic group's ability to enter the country. In 1896, an Atlantic author called immigrants "a hopeless burden" that would dilute the industriousness of the nation. In 1917, the Immigration Act

barred a whole range of individuals -- including the illiterate, the "feeble minded," and homosexuals -- from entering the country. Many of the images in this gallery echo these fears and portray immigrants, particularly the Chinese and the Irish, as parasites devouring what Americans hold dear."

And in the early 40s the U.S. government had turned away thousands of Jewish refugees, on the excuse that they were Nazi spies, in the same manner as some immigrants from some Muslim majority countries are being barred from entering America under a Trumpian fiat, suspecting that there may be IS infiltrators among them. The fate that the Japanese American had to bear during WW II is well-documented.

Therefore, one may well ask, which is the real face of America? And as the good professor Dr. Ali Riaz, a scholar with very deep insight of America, says, both are the true faces of America. It is the prevailing political force that gives one the preponderance over the other. Luckily, for the greater part of the last century and until now it was the rational and inclusive moderate face of America that we had witnessed. One hopes that the change, for the worst, that Trump has wrought, will be short-lived.

The writer is Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*.

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also see a face of America that has stood up to Trump's bigotry, bias and prejudice through the spontaneous display of disgust and abhorrence to his policies, the travel ban in particular, and rejecting his isolationist policies.

It is redeeming too that the majority of American voters did not vote for Trump. He managed only to garner the Electoral College votes. He was in deficit of more than three million in the popular vote count. And that is why he is now trying to castigate the very electoral system that elected him to the office of the president. And this is also a new face of America that we are witnessing. An America where the voting system can be tinkered with. And perhaps a few amongst us in Bangladesh may be



SOURCE: PINTEREST

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Addressing the ground realities of the Rampal protests

Rubana Huq's article "The alternative road to dissent" published in your paper yesterday raised many troubling questions. The author's apologist stance completely reduces the concern of activists and environmentalists protesting the project to an absurd simplicity.

The author speaks of decorum, and how Al Gore had none when debating about Rampal with our Prime Minister. "Courtesy matters," she wrote. But the entire article fails to mention even once the treatment of the activists at the hands of the police last week. How can she justify policemen brutally beating up activists and journalists with an anecdote about a senior government official going to visit an activist in the hospital!

She also suggests that much of what is being said about Rampal is for the social media, and lacks "real gumption, knowledge and the courage to share, educate and confront." She suggests a debate in Rampal between the government and the activists. She seems to forget that the government has from the start refused to have an open debate about the issue, instead resorting to public relations through propaganda.

Her article tries to justify a project which could seriously cause irreparable damage to the Sundarbans. We are entirely in agreement that there needs to be open debate between the activist and the government; but she seems to forget that it is the government who is unwilling to engage.

Mayitre  
By email

## The cost of honesty

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE humiliating spectacle of the uprooting of the nameplate of an Assistant Commissioner of Customs at his Chittagong office, allegedly by enraged clearing and forwarding agents, along with the transfer of the said official in indecent haste, has unfortunately not evoked the desired reaction. An impression has been given that the official, in the exercise of due diligence, has delayed taking action while carrying out his duties thus causing harm to both public and private interest.

Media reports quoting credible sources, however, mention that the disgraced official, Abu Hanif Mohammad Abdul Ahad, has never taken or demanded any speed-money for his services. On the contrary, he has reportedly unearthed numerous incidents of duty evasion and in particular, identified 132 consignments that evaded duties to the tune of Tk. 43 crore. In fact, his vigilance led to the fine of the importers responsible for the major evasion. These affected and disgruntled importers were suspected to be the schemers behind the agitation of clearing and forwarding employees demanding the transfer of the Assistant Commissioner.

The unsettlingly shameful part of the

incident is that hardly a week had passed after the so-called agitation of the C&F employees that the Assistant Commissioner was transferred to the Training Academy by the National Board of Revenue. To add insult to injury, the disgruntled C&F employees had the audacity to demonstrate before the office premises in the protected area of Chittagong Port, and finally uprooted the official nameplate of the Assistant Commissioner placed outside the office.

Readers may recollect that the above unfortunate incident has been graphically reported in this newspaper under the caption 'Snapshot of Reality'. The snapshot has, in fact, highlighted our moral depravity and manifestly mocked the government. In the process, a young upright official stands helpless and cornered because nobody seems to care.

In Bangladesh a principal factor for large-scale corruption is that upright officials committed to protecting public interest have not only been not protected and accorded the due respect, but also subjected to punishment and harassment. The irony is that under the existing law there are provisions for protecting officials in their lawful discharge of duties.

Raising revenue for the sovereign State is a solemn task of the officials of the republic. Experts opine that but for the evasion and other corrupt practices in collecting customs duties and VAT, the internal generation of revenue and consequent all-round development could have been of a much

bigger dimension. Interestingly, the deficit caused by corrupt practices was so large that in the not-too-distant past, there were talks of outsourcing the raising of revenue to an international agency as had once happened in Indonesia.

Fortunately for us, that scenario is a thing of the past, although, much needs to be done to enhance the tax-GDP ratio. In that onerous task, upright officials like Abdul Ahad would be welcome facilitators. We need to bear in mind that the recent significant enhancement in pay and perks of officials has not altered the corruption perception in the Customs Department as borne out in a detailed report in a Bengali daily.

The cynics amongst us may say that corruption in our society is pervasive and uncontrollable and therefore we do not need to analyse or dilate upon its determinants, contexts, quantum, and impact. However, we cannot let our young men and women join the ranks of the corrupt by promoting the lack of accountability and general acceptance of corruption as a way of life.

Under the circumstances, it would be proper to post Assistant Commissioner Abu Hanif Mohammad Abdul Ahad so that his honour is restored. At the same time, the mischievous C&F agitators must be subject to enquiry and adequately punished under the Customs Act 1969 for obstructing the lawful discharge of duties.

The writer is a former IGP and a columnist of *The Daily Star*.

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