

# Rohingyas pouring into Bangladesh

## All must be registered

ROHINGYAS are flooding over the border into Bangladesh in the tens of thousands. We fear that this will create a lot of problems for us in the future because these Rohingyas are not being registered by the administration. By the UN's estimates, some 1,23,000 Rohingyas have crossed the border over the last two days. Our own reports put the number at 95,000. Again estimates vary wildly across media outlets. So, there is no accurate number of refugees crossing the border daily. Given the gravity of the issue and future developments, it is imperative that the Rohingyas are registered and accounted for. It is also necessary to separate them from the local populace, which is not the case now.

Unless we register these displaced people, Myanmar might not take them back later on, claiming that they are not ethnic Rohingya but Bangladeshis. If we look at the first wave of Rohingyas who came to Bangladesh fleeing persecution in 1978, they were registered as refugees and it provided the groundwork for their subsequent repatriation at a later stage. However, it has not been the case in recent times. Today, we have six camps and only two of them are registered (Kutpalong and Balukhali). Many of the new arrivals are living on public land, along the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway without effective control mechanism in place.

The newly arrived Rohingyas are now mingling with the local populace, and unless we control this situation, it will become a serious problem for us in the future. It is time for us to work with UN agencies to put in place some sort of registration mechanism to avoid future problems when the time is right to repatriate them to their own country.

# Deaths in road crashes continue

## Is there no end to it?

AS people have started to return to their workplaces after spending the Eid with their near and dear ones, news of road accidents have also started to reach us. According to our report, at least 38 people died in the last four days in road crashes while dozens others were injured.

Every year during Eid holidays the number of road accidents increases, particularly because the buses try to take as many trips as possible for making more profit and so drive recklessly resulting in so many deaths in road accidents.

What the authorities must do is spot the rundown vehicles and take them away from the roads, identify the unskilled drivers, and punish those who are responsible for so many deaths on roads. In addition, the authorities must make sure that our roads are in good condition and there are separate lanes for slow moving vehicles. These small steps, if taken, will surely reduce the number of road accidents.

Time and again we have raised our concerns about this staggering number of deaths in road crashes. But as it seems, no one in the authorities really cares, as no measures have so far been taken to stop these unnatural deaths. The authorities concerned must come up with a well coordinated plan so that roads can be made safe for the commuters and people won't have to die on roads while coming back from home after enjoying a vacation with their loved ones.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Teach your children to respect women

There has been a rise in sexual abuse and violence against women in recent times. While flipping through the newspapers every day, it's almost certain that you would come across reports of violence of different sorts against women, which I believe indicates the moral degradation taking place in our society.

The brutal murder of Rupa Khatun in Tangail, who was gang-raped and then killed, reminds me of the much-talked-about case of Nirvoya in Delhi. In my opinion, lack of emphasis on teaching children about moral values may be a contributing factor to the rise of the disturbing phenomenon. Children should be taught how to treat and respect women which will impact their demeanour as they grow up.

Parents—especially mothers—can play a crucial role in this regard.

Nafis Sadik, Farmgate, Dhaka

## International standards for domestic pitches

I agree with the national cricket team's opening batsman Tamim Iqbal that pitches used for international Test matches should also be used in domestic cricket. A key reason for playing domestic cricket is for the cricketers to be prepared for international cricket. For that to happen, the playing conditions in domestic cricket must be the same as in international cricket.

Playing on similar pitches would better prepare our players before facing tough teams like Australia and South Africa. They would be able to adapt to the pitches more comfortably. Most importantly, what's the point of playing on home ground if the pitches seem foreign?

Aminur Rahim, Mohakhali

# Where is our Rohingya Policy?

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
NDC, PSC (RETD)

WHAT we have today in the Rakhine State of Myanmar is a regime of ethnic cleansing. This latest round of pogrom of the Rohingyas is the result of the international community's abject lack of action. Not only has the persecution of the Rohingyas not stopped, there has been a renewed vigour in the activity of the state agencies of Myanmar to ensure that the State of Rakhine is emptied of the Rohingyas.

And the rest of the world, apart from some episodic comments from the United Nations, has done nothing palpable to restrain the wanton persecution by the State of Myanmar of one of its ethnic minorities, while Bangladesh has had to bear the burden for the last three decades.

It is now clear that the formation of the Annan Commission by Su Kyi was merely a ploy. It is not difficult to see through her trick to show to the world that she was alive to the situation in Rakhine State and wanted a resolution of the problem. She had no intention of implementing any of the Commission's recommendations. Apparently, Myanmar is working on the basis of a long-vision policy on Rohingya. Do we have a Rohingya or indeed a Myanmar policy?

My query is triggered by the way we have handled the Rohingya issue so far. At best we have been reactive, at worst we have botched it up being caught up in the mesh of our own ad hoc reaction to evolving situations in Rakhine State. This reconfirms the fundamental folly in our foreign policy, if there is one at all, vis a vis Myanmar. For all too long we have taken our only other neighbour for granted. Our energy and indeed preoccupation was fixated on the larger and the more overwhelming neighbour. It is time we seriously addressed the Rohingya issue and revisited the conduct of our policy with Myanmar. But first let us look our handling of the recent Rohingya crisis since 2012, and the likely consequences.

We have resolutely refused to accept officially the persecuted Rohingyas as refugees and have tried to prevent their entry into Bangladesh with little success. Where possible we have pushed them back, into the fire literally.

In 2012 the Rohingyas were technically not refugees according to the definitions of the international covenant on the matter. Since they did not then face any state persecution, a requirement to qualify as a refugee, as we were made to believe by official sources in Myanmar, they could not seek sanctuary in another country. We were

told it was an ethnic matter of Myanmar. But commenting on the matter in 2012 we had warned that, "by refusing to accept the Rohingyas, we have given the wrong signal to Myanmar. It would leave the Rohingyas at the mercy of the majority and would literally have to choose between the devil and the deep sea." That is exactly what the Rohingyas are faced with at this very moment.

Our handling of the Rohingya influx now is in sharp contrast to the way Bangladesh handled it in 1998. We had then allowed the nearly 300,000 refugees in and registered them. But we eventually made Myanmar take them back. Bangladesh must have done something right surely in its stance on the matter that had persuaded Myanmar to take back most of the Rohingya refugees. Why can't

registered as refugees the Rohingyas could be sequestered, their movement controlled, and provided relief under supervision of international aid agencies. And we could project an accurate picture of both the number and plight of the Rohingyas. Not having them registered provides Myanmar with a bargaining chip. It will refuse to accept the unregistered Rohingyas when the situation improves enough for the Rohingyas to go back on the grounds that they were not Rohingyas but locals and we were passing them off as Rohingyas to inflate the number of Rohingyas in Rakhine state.

Turning them back has another very dangerous potential, apart from sending them back to face more persecution. The younger ones among them would be

chauvinistic motive. This something that our friends must be made to understand.

Regrettably, the role of Myanmar's two close neighbours, have been disappointing. India and China are the countries who can and should bring to bear pressure on Myanmar. And that is the reason that has given the sense of impunity to Myanmar. So far India has been absolutely quiet on the issue, belying its much vaunted principled stand on human rights. Not surprisingly, the BJP's ideology sees the Rohingyas as bunch of terrorists. China, although expressing its willingness to help us in resolving the Rohingya issue, has, along with Russia, either blocked issuing of a statement by UN or vetoed draft UN Resolutions on Myanmar since 2007. What have we done to put our case to these three, who



"As of now, in spite of our declared intention of not allowing in the Rohingyas, a large number of them have entered Bangladesh. The figures varies between 90,000 and 150,000."

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

that stance be replicated now?

The reality is that the Rohingyas are victims of state terrorism. And there are benefits of registering the Rohingyas even if we are unwilling to acknowledge them as refugees. For one thing we can have a tab on the exact number that have entered the country. As of now, in spite of our declared intention of not allowing in the Rohingyas, a large number of them have entered Bangladesh. The figures varies between 90,000 and 150,000. And most of them have settled well inside our territory and many have merged with the locals. Has our current stance helped in effectively addressing the matter?

And that is what begs the question. If

provoked to join the ranks of the extremists, as some of them already have, to provide their own protection against the Myanmar forces.

The diplomatic front needs to be geared up more. The plight of the Rohingyas and the impact of that on Bangladesh is not very well known to the outside world. One is not aware of any coherent strategy to handle the Rohingya issue. There must be constant diplomatic effort in this regard and not episodic, waking up when there is an influx from Myanmar. The underlying issue—citizenship of Rohingyas—is a settled issue unsettled by Ne Win in 1982 with an extremely narrow

happen to be our very good friends too?

We understand that there is a National Task Force on Rohingya. We would like to think that the TF has formulated a policy to proceed on in handling the issue, if not then one should be made immediately.

The Rohingya issue is more complex, and impacts our national interest in more ways than we want to acknowledge. And we cannot play it by ears. A Myanmar policy, with a corollary Rohingya policy, must be devised immediately. Its consequences on the region and certainly on Bangladesh, if allowed to simmer is imponderable.

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## PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

# Combating hatred with history



GUY VERHOFSTADT

AFTER a white-supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in which anti-fascist campaigner Heather Heyer was killed, and many others injured, US President Donald Trump notoriously blamed "both sides" for the violence. By equating neo-Nazis with those who stood against them, Trump (further) sullied his presidency. And by describing some of the participants in the Charlottesville rally as "very fine people," he gave a nod to far-right bigots worldwide.

A few weeks thereafter, just as Hurricane Harvey was bearing down on Texas, Trump pardoned Joe Arpaio, the former sheriff of Maricopa County in Arizona. Arpaio had been convicted of contempt of court in July for defying a federal judge's order to stop racially profiling Latinos. But the way Trump sees it, Arpaio was "convicted for doing his job."

Arpaio once boasted that the outdoor jail where he held undocumented immigrants was akin to a concentration camp. And he is now a leading exponent of the Tea Party and other xenophobic right-wing movements that rallied behind Trump in last year's election. By pardoning Arpaio, Trump was, once again, implicitly embracing white supremacists and nativists worldwide.

Sadly, many of Trump's allies in the Republican Party have barely raised an eyebrow in response to his latest words and actions. And according to a recent ABC News-Washington Post poll, 9 percent of respondents—"equivalent to about 22 million Americans"—find it "acceptable to hold neo-Nazi or white supremacist views."

This is a shocking finding. But it is not limited to the United States. Europe, too, is witnessing a worrying surge of racism, nationalism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia. In a recent poll conducted for Chatham House, 55 percent of European respondents agreed that "all further migration from mainly Muslim

countries" should be stopped. That is higher than the 48 percent of Americans who, in February, supported Trump's executive order barring travel from seven predominantly Muslim countries.

It is time for Europeans who would prefer to dismiss white supremacy as an American phenomenon to mind their own backyards. Since Trump's election in the US and the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, hate speech and crimes against ethnic minorities and foreign nationals have started to become normalised in many Western countries.

Most worryingly, intolerance may be

people enjoy, and exposing impressionable minds to dangerous falsehoods and conspiracy theories. And more often than not, they are being operated with impunity by Russian-sponsored trolls in Macedonia or elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

But it is not just online trolls who are empowering people to be racist, anti-Semitic, and homophobic. Many world leaders and prominent opinion makers are doing it, too. Although mainstream European leaders offered a clear rebuke to the Charlottesville violence and Trump's reaction to it, they need to go

sanction these increasingly authoritarian governments for their transgressions.

After an increase in anti-Semitic incidents in 2004, when I was the prime minister of Belgium, I launched an initiative to remind young people of the costs of World War II. During their history lessons, Belgian students would learn about the implications and negative consequences of certain ideologies.

With hatred on the march again today, we must remember that education is crucial in the fight against authoritarianism, which can thrive on generational complacency. To ensure that



White nationalists carry torches on the grounds of the University of Virginia, on the eve of a planned Unite The Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, US. August 11, 2017.

PHOTO: REUTERS

*To ensure that democratic values prevail, we must encourage all people to reflect on the lessons of the past, when grotesque abuses were perpetrated against millions.*

democratic values prevail, we must encourage all people to reflect on the lessons of the past, when grotesque abuses were perpetrated against millions.

We owe it to all of those who suffered under past authoritarian regimes to stand up now for democratic values. We can start by pushing back, as Heather Heyer did, against the right-wing populists who are openly fomenting hatred across the West.

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