

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## Suu Kyi's first public speech

### A huge disappointment

NEEDLESS to say that Myanmar's state counselor Aung San Suu Kyi's much awaited public speech regarding the crisis in the Rakhine state is deeply disappointing. We are shocked that she has chosen to gloss over the gross human rights violations carried out by Myanmar security forces against Rohingyas. Instead, she has said that Muslims have been fleeing the Rakhine state and crossing the border to Bangladesh because of attacks by armed Muslim groups.

Despite firsthand accounts of Rohingya refugees regarding the horrible crimes committed against them by the Myanmar security forces—the shooting and slaughtering of innocent, unarmed Rohingya men, women and children, raping women, burning their houses, and forcing them to flee their country—Aung San Suu Kyi seems to be living in a different reality than the rest of the world. Not once does she mention any of these atrocities. Rather, throughout her speech, she has repeatedly talked about achieving “peace, harmony and progress of the country” as a whole and her government's efforts to achieve that peace. We find it hard to understand from her speech what peace even means to her, in the context of the brutality against the Rohingya people, who are the rightful citizens of her country.

The international community, different human rights organisations and even her fellow Nobel laureates have appealed to her to take a moral stand on behalf of the Rohingya people, but, apparently, she has failed them. Suu Kyi has wasted the perfect chance to condemn the atrocities and call for an immediate halt to them. Amnesty International has rightly commented after her speech that she and her government are still burying their heads in the sand. Her talks about peace and human rights ring hollow when juxtaposed with the ground reality in her own country.

## Air cargo ban to UK may be lifted

### It would ease cost of doing business

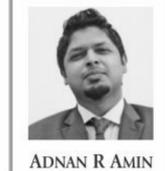
THE UK prime minister's trade envoy for Bangladesh, Ms Rushanara Ali has hinted that the British ban on direct cargo flights from Hazrat Shahjalal Airport may be withdrawn in the foreseeable future. These comments come in the backdrop of a weeklong visit to Dhaka. However, no exact date of the withdrawal was given. Bangladesh had appointed a British company to make necessary changes with regard to ensuring security at the airport and the changes are still ongoing.

The annual bilateral trade between the two countries in the current fiscal is about USD 3.57 billion and currently all air cargo headed to the UK needs to be rescreened in a third country in the Middle East before flying to Britain. Needless to say such an arrangement is both time consuming and adds significant costs for exporters. This is perhaps the first time we have received some hopeful news since Australia, the UK and Germany slapped a ban on our air cargo more than a year ago.

It goes to show that our authorities have taken steps to work towards improving security measures, but these are measures that need to be continually reinforced and maintained. Security is a major issue in countries of the West, especially in the wake of a series of bombings that have shaken the UK of late and we must do our part to uplift the image of the country that has been tarnished with our premier airport being branded “unsafe”. With a meeting between UK officials and their Bangladeshi counterparts due to take place at the end of this month, we sincerely hope that some good news will be forthcoming. A lifting of the UK ban could pave the way for lifting of bans by other countries in the EU where the bulk of our RMG exports go.

# Rohingyas and the cost of kindness

## THE MIDDLE PATH



ADNAN R AMIN

IT is certain that the present Rohingya sensation will soon die down, and be replaced in public memory by something far more banal. For now, international aid will flow in, journalists will fly in and young activists will donate from their own pockets. Then, when the headlines wane and public fancy shifts, the latest entrants will become like the old Rohingyas: forgotten inside their ghettos. This is when the real work begins.

Speakers at a seminar organised by the Center for Bangladesh Studies (CBS) reminded everyone that the “illegal Myanmar nationals” (informally “refugees”) call for long-term strategic response and long-term commitment.

To start with a recurring theme: the prime minister's bold and generous stance has made citizens proud and garnered global admiration. While it may be dubbed “populist” in the short term, there could easily be unpopular, long-term repercussions. Yet, we remain on the right side of history and that too despite zero support from key allies.

While India, China and Russia have made their positions clear, there could be scope to further lobby the US, the EU and nations in the Middle East. The goals of engagement could be to secure: a) public support, b) aid and relief, and c) technical assistance. International sanctions, deployment of peacekeepers and creation of “safe zones” could be included in a hypothetical “wish list”. For a realistic shot at these ends, Bangladesh needs a strategic, proactive approach.

For an example of strategy, consider the phrasing, “Rohingya Shomoshya” (the Rohingya Problem or Crisis). Quite apt, right? Yes, apt—but not very helpful. The repeated pairing of “Rohingya” with “problem” completely overlooks the perpetrators. Alternative phrasing would shift focus back on perpetrators with words like “apartheid”, “massacre”, “ethnic cleansing” and possibly “genocide”. Yes, tragic stories can move hearts, but reports of systematic persecution can move Humvees.

Similarly, using “Muslim” after the ethnonym “Rohingya” seems harmless enough. But it makes light of the fact that Rohingyas’ “Muslim-ness” is not the reason for their oppression. Hindus are fleeing to Bangladesh too. Repeatedly identifying them as Muslim reduces complex identity issues into oversimplified religious categories. To the layman, it could start to look like a Buddhist-Muslim conflict. And then the politico-economic motivation behind the crackdown is lost. So, our strategy should be to reinforce that Bangladesh was spurred into action not because of religious affiliations, but because of the unfolding humanitarian crisis.

Just as important as phrasing is circulating the right stories and evidence. As a “gateway” country, Bangladesh has ample

scope to enrich and give nuance to global media coverage and resulting narratives. It isn't only refugees that are coming across our borders. With them, news, footage, photographs and anecdotes are also arriving at the camps. Many are reaching with bullet wounds, signs of sexual violence and PTSD. Such stories and content constitute material evidence of state violence.

Yale University's Genocide Studies director David Simon says, “I would hesitate to say at the moment that there is a genocide [in Myanmar]; although that's mainly for lack of evidence, it's still a plausible conclusion.” The world needs evidence to act. Also, if there's to be restorative justice for Rohingyas in the future, collecting and documenting evidence is essential.

The more the stories are heard and the evidence seen, the better. Then the presence of international correspondents, photographers, aid workers, etc., in Bangladesh should be desirable. In fact,

part of the job, of course, is on ground, inside camps and relocation sites. I am neither trained nor qualified to comment on this. So I'll restrict myself to key points raised by public commentators.

The immediate need is emergency relief: drinking water, grains, baby food, medicines, etc. Multiple development agencies and INGOs are supporting the government in this regard. Individuals and groups have also attempted to distribute relief in the localities. The lesson learnt is that unannounced, untrained activities can do more harm than good. So, it is important to channel private charity through agencies that are trained to do this kind of work.

Key thinkers also talked about forming a national coordination committee. Comprised of multiple ministries, UNHCR, IOM, MSF, ICRC and local NGOs, such a committee could be headed by a senior bureaucrat from MoDMR. It could also include a media

behaviour often feeds on locals' insecurity, anti-other sentiments, and vulnerability of the victims. This is why the spectre of escalated conflict cannot be written off completely.

If you talk to residents of Teknaf or Ukhaia, you'll find that many locals resent sharing land, jobs and resources with illegal entrants. The Rohingyas are despised by locals, and sometimes outright branded as born-criminals. The mutual animosity can turn explosive when sentiments are manipulated.

For example, many have been peddling the claim that fresh Rohingya arrivals caused the recent hike in rice prices. True or false, such claims “otherise” refugees. And if you cannot connect the price hike to massive hoarding (by the president of the Rice Mill Association, among others), you too might blame Rohingyas. When mutual distrust prevails, any piece of propaganda can thus inflame passions and collective hatred.



Rohingya Muslim refugees disembark from a boat on the Bangladeshi side of the River Naf in Teknaf.

PHOTO: AFP

authorities would do well to support and facilitate fact-finding and evidence-collecting missions. Bangladesh could also consider a targeted PR campaign to make its case to the world. Nothing can be achieved without international pressure on the Myanmar regime.

For all their stories, the Rohingyas are really a voiceless people. When Myanmar authorities describe them, all Rohingyas become illegal Bengalis or Islamist terrorists. Such claims are dehumanising, and typical in the initial stages of genocide. And to think that such malice is endorsed by an illustrious Nobel laureate! You will see why the world might've been slow to comprehend how the champion of democracy could turn into a silent advocate for ethnic cleansing. And that's why, to make the world understand, Bangladesh needs to present more and more evidence.

The more difficult and unenviable

cell to work with international journalists and delegates.

Next we come to health and sanitation. Unsurprisingly, cases of HIV-AIDS, polio and malaria have already been reported in the camps. These need to be contained and treated. UNICEF is already supporting mass vaccination efforts for children. But amid the chaos, proper treatment, hygiene, sanitation and/or effective quarantine will not be easy.

It is high time to ask donors and development partners to commit increased funding and long-term refugee management programmes. To this end, an inventory and analysis of refugee management programming in various countries can be a good starting point.

Lastly, let us turn to social effects of a burgeoning refugee population. There are (unconfirmed) reports of violence by locals, especially against unprotected Rohingya women and children. Such

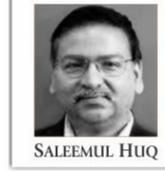
Locals in the south need to come to terms with their new reality. They need to realise that their country asks of them a measure of sacrifice. Local government officials, law enforcers, NGOs and civil society could play a mediating role here. Public awareness campaigns and moderated dialogues could also be useful. However, these things can take place only with central planning and directives.

As we prepare to meet these national challenges, let us not forget that the latest influx of displaced peoples may not be the last; and that the refugees may not leave any time soon. Either way, Bangladesh has taken a rare, exemplary moral stance in this tragedy. We need to reckon with the consequences, put our heads down and see things through.

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# Trump's flip-flop on climate change

## POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

WHILE he was still running to become President, Trump Tweeted that climate change was a Chinese hoax. Then after he was elected there was speculation that he might change his mind. This became especially acute when his daughter Ivanka held a high profile meeting with former Vice President Al Gore in which Trump also dropped in.

Then the Whitehouse held a series of meetings to decide whether or not to withdraw from the Paris Agreement and before each meeting announced that the decision would be made. However, after several such supposedly “decisive” meetings with no decisions, it was clear that there was a strong internal debate going on with Ivanka and the Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in favour of staying in the Paris Agreement and Steve Bannon and Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environment Protection Agency (EPA), wanting to leave it.

We all saw the final result when Trump made his speech in the Rose Garden of the White House where he finally announced the withdrawal of the United States of America from the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Since then, he has tried to bring other countries to agree with the US and also either withdraw or ask for opening renegotiations of the Paris Agreement. However these efforts all ended in failure and even a strong ally like Saudi Arabia refused to support him at the G20 Summit meeting where all the other 19 leaders refused to accommodate the US, and the section on climate change of the final G20 official communiqué was adopted by 19 leaders which had a separate dissenting paragraph from the US.

Since Trump became President, the battle over climate change has not only focused on the Paris Agreement but also on the more substantial part of the science of climate change and domestic actions and discourse.

Here the climate change sceptics have reigned supreme; under the leadership of Scott Pruitt, the EPA scrubbed all mention of the words “climate change” from their websites and even went so far as to instruct all federal government officials and scientists to never mention the term! Most recently, when the States of Texas

even though they have already submitted the official letter of withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, their departure does not come into effect for at least three years.

Hence, the US will indeed participate in COP23 by sending a delegation, but it is still not clear what their role will be. In the last few days, they seemed to have indicated to some allies that they may be willing to stay in the Paris Agreement if they are allowed to renegotiate their obligations under it. In fact, Secretary of State Tillerson even said so in an interview.



President Trump and EPA administrator Scott Pruitt.

PHOTO: JIM WATSON/AFP

and Florida were devastated by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma in quick succession and even Republican mayors and governors were finally accepting that human-induced climate change was indeed real, Pruitt insisted that climate change was not manmade.

As countries are preparing to meet in a few weeks in November at the upcoming 23rd Conference of Parties (COP23) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) being held in Bonn, Germany, the US has announced that

However, no sooner had he done so that messages started coming out of the White House that there was no such desire to renegotiate the terms of the Paris Agreement.

This latest flip-flop may have been due to the very firm reaction from all the other countries that let the US know in no uncertain terms that the Paris Agreement was not up for renegotiation, nor was any country allowed to reduce its commitments under the agreement.

Hence, it looks as if Trump, while continuing to send mixed messages about

his intentions, will eventually choose to renege on the commitments made by President Obama's administration. If there is any one single ideology that Trump has, it seems to be to reverse every Obama initiative.

The rest of the world remains intrigued to see what the rhetoric of the US delegation will be in Bonn at COP23, but as far as tackling the actual problem of human-induced climate change goes, not only has the rest of the world, without exception, decided to fulfil their commitment, but even the different States,

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cities and companies in the US have decided to actually fulfil the obligations made by Obama, despite the White House and the federal government trying to reverse it.

This makes it seem that when it comes to tackling human-induced climate change, all Trump has achieved is to make the US the world's sole rogue state.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Ease university admission process

My friend's son is currently busy applying for admission to public universities both general and specialised. The fact that admission tests of these universities, scattered across the country, are held on their respective campus means he and whoever accompanies him will have to visit each and every campus physically—a challenge that all admission-seekers will have to face.

There are also the burdens of cost and time that they have to bear. Rajshahi University, for example, has 11 units. One can apply for as many units as one wants in order to increase their chance of succeeding. For each unit, you have to pay a good amount of money and the cost of units varies from one university to another. The online admission process is not very helpful either.

I think we can ease the admission process by introducing a combined admission test system for all public universities, which will both reduce hassle and save money.

Md. Tofazzel Hossain, Kushtia

