

UN call to end Myanmar military campaign

Time for concrete action

AFTER the greatly disappointing speech by Aung San Suu Kyi that refused to acknowledge the Rohingya crisis let alone commit to finding a workable solution, the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in a quite anticipated reaction, reiterated his condemnation of the military operations in Myanmar's Rakhine State. He called for "unhindered humanitarian access" to the country as the crackdown that has so far forced over 415,000 Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh continues.

While we welcome the UN chief's acknowledgement of the crisis, despite Suu Kyi's defense that bore all the hallmarks of a guilty party trying to whitewash its activities, we are yet to see any action based on pronouncements made by the UN and other global powers. The clampdown is still in effect—although Suu Kyi would have us believe that it is not—with more and more people crossing the border every day. Those left behind face the very real dangers of displacement, violence and even death. The UN is rightly worried that the human rights investigators and aid workers cannot enter the country to probe the situation and bring help while Bangladesh, already an overpopulated country, is struggling with the upkeep of an ever-growing population of refugees.

As things stand now, Myanmar, bolstered by backing from the likes of China, Russia and India, is unlikely to act on its own to end its military campaign and restore the rule of law. This makes it imperative that the international community brings all their cards on the table—not just verbal, perfunctory condemnation—to force the government in Myanmar to stop.

Investigation into BASIC bank scam

Why this slow pace in realising defaulted sums

THREE and a half years have elapsed since the BASIC bank scam took place and a new board was placed at its helm after the removal of its chairman and the board. We find that the new committee is yet to identify seven borrowers but some progress has been made in identifying some 50 ghost accounts that have been used by many borrowers who took money and defaulted on these amounts. Although there is ample evidence of violation of rules in approving these loans, and 628 firms have been identified that owed the bank Tk 6,538 crore till June 30, it is disheartening to learn that there has been little progress in realising these vast sums of money.

A ruling party lawmaker who sits on the new board has stated that many of these borrowers are both politically and socially influential and some members belong to various political parties. As for the bank itself, it has published a list of defaulters and what is owed by whom to the bank. But the legal battle against defaulters is progressing at a snail's pace as most of the accused have filed writ petitions with the High Court.

We would like to know why it took the new management one and a half years to identify the main culprits and why the former chairman of the bank, who is known to have violated rules while granting loans, is not being held accountable. If this is going to be the result of the probe where influential defaulters get to keep their names off the list of accused and where the principal alleged culprit is not investigated, then the matter is effectively being swept under the carpet and we are in effect, giving a green light to future scams.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Expect no help from Trump

I was moved by Prime Minsiter Seikh Hasna's comment "Bangladesh is not a rich country ... but if we can feed 160 million people, another 500 or 700,000 people, we can do it." (Expect no help from Trump, *The Daily Star*, September 10, 2017)

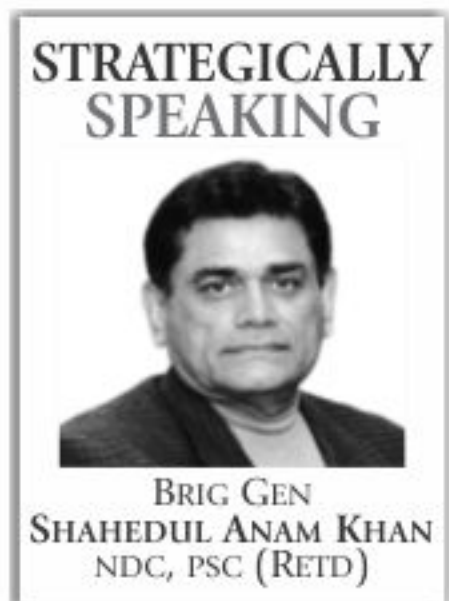
In this simple statement I see optimism, hope and generosity—which we hardly see from our current president in USA—the most powerful nation of the world. Bangladesh does need better management to handle the refugee crisis, and the influx of Rohingya is causing a severe strain on local communities and environment. Yet, it is praiseworthy how the PM expressed her confidence and compassion; confidence, like any other positive aspect of leadership is contagious and a lot of people today need that in this dire situation. I hope her government gets all the help necessary to tackle this crisis—diplomatic, material or otherwise.

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PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

"We never lose friends, we simply learn who the real ones are"



have gone. Hardly have we faced such a crisis situation encompassing the bilateral as well as the international domain. And hardly have we been left so high and dry by those whom we thought we could count on during a crisis such as this. While our diplomatic capacity has been put to the extreme test, and we could have fared better in this regard, our capability to deal with a humanitarian catastrophe of a magnitude never experienced in the past, is being severely stretched.

It is time to ponder deeply on the long-term implications of the Rohingya issue. It is not merely a question of more than half a million refugees taking shelter in Bangladesh. The recent influx of a huge number of refugees from Myanmar and the enormous socio-economic problems they pose should not blind us to the other associated fallout of the issue; the eventual political profile and the likely security tenor of the region cannot be lost on our foreign policy planners, if there is any such group, and the foreign office mandarins.

An ethnic minority—more than seventy-five percent of them—has been uprooted from their ancestral homes and forced to flee Myanmar to Bangladesh. For Myanmar it is the final solution as far as the Rohingyas are concerned. About that we should never have been in doubt, more so after the exodus from Rakhine in 2012. The question is: how long can Bangladesh host these people without suffering the inevitable consequences? The essential point that international public opinion, particularly the regional countries, must be made aware of is, should the military junta presiding over a sham democracy be allowed to get away with what has been recognised by the UN as ethnic cleansing? The Rohingya issue has the recipe for increased discord within that country and outside it, which will be exploited by groups with ulterior motives. And this is why we must employ all our diplomatic efforts to persuade Myanmar to take its people back and create conditions to ensure the safety and security of the Rohingyas.

The Rohingya issue is a shocking

reminder that there are no permanent friends or foes, only permanent interests. And all the three of our good friends—Russia, China and India—have acted on their own national interests. The blood of the Rohingyas has little to do in shaping their policy when juxtaposed to the strategic and economic benefits of supporting Myanmar on this question.

Since the commencement of the recent violence on the Rohingyas, Suu Kyi and her government have been dispensing one lie after another. And it was a continuation of that in her shamefaced brazen speech on Tuesday. She wants the world to believe that she does not know what is causing the Rohingyas (she prefers to call them

ethnic cleansing, it is geopolitical and economic expediency that is talking, not principles of justice or human rights.

It is also time for us to ponder why a state that has been until recently a pariah has succeeded in garnering support for its genocidal acts from the most important international and regional powers. Why is it that the military leaders of this pariah state have been given red carpet treatment in major capitals of the West, and Suu Kyi, warmly welcomed at Buckingham Palace and the White House, while they were presiding over the persecution of an ethnic minority? Perhaps the one word answer to this is realpolitik. All ideological and moral considerations have been completely cast aside for the sake of their

"internal affair" of a country. China must be made to realise that their short-sighted support for Myanmar for economic considerations alone will only create a fertile ground for extremists to exploit, and that would not leave China's sensitive regions unaffected. And India must be persuaded to understand that blowing hot and cold in the same breath only compounds problems. While it has merely voiced concerns "over violence resulting in the outflow of a large number of people from that state", its use of the "extremist" card as a handy tool to prepare grounds for expelling the Rohingyas from its territory has very serious implications for Bangladesh. Expel them to which country we ask?



Wearied and wounded Rohingya arriving in Bangladesh.

PHOTO: AFP PHOTO/MUNIR UZ ZAMAN

Muslims, although a large number of Hindu Rohingya families have been made victims of the state persecution) to leave the country, and needs more time to find out the "real causes".

Although the speech has drawn, justifiably, the criticism it deserves from around the world, three of Myanmar's staunch supporters have demonstrated approbation of Suu Kyi's narrative through their comments on her speech. When after all the killings and the violence perpetrated on the Rohingyas India feels "encouraged" by her speech and China reiterates its support for the Myanmar government's action in Rakhine, and Russia doesn't find any "evidence to justify" the accusation of

own national interests.

Given that we are virtually isolated on this issue, a robust diplomatic offensive must be launched, but we see no sign of it. We understand that an Awami League delegation will be in Beijing shortly to meet CPC leaders in Beijing. But one would much like to see government delegations also visit the capitals of some of the countries that can have influence on the Myanmar regime. We need to drive home to the Russians that what is happening in Myanmar is not its "internal affair", as opposed to what the Russians think it is. After all, a situation that forces nearly half a million of its people to seek shelter across the border cannot be an

And Bangladesh, for one, must realise that realpolitik is still as relevant today as it was when first enunciated in the 1520s. That to use your strategic leverage is not only pragmatic, not doing so is foolish. That asking for a just price from your neighbours for their use of your resources is not only not uncivil but a practical proposition too. Regrettably, the policy of friendship towards all does not necessarily beget the same reciprocity. And it is only in times of your need that you discover who your real friends are, as we have done to our great shock this time.

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Golden Hour in the lives of accident victims

SADRUL HASAN MAZUMDER

IN emergency medicine, "Golden Hour" refers to the immediate one-hour time period following a traumatic injury, during which, chances of preventing death by way of prompt medical treatment are the highest. The phrase was first introduced when soldiers were being provided with emergency medical aid at the close of World War II and the Korean conflict.

When it comes to providing emergency medical services to road crash victims, there is a similar connotation as indicated by countless studies. They indicate that the single most prevalent cause of death for road crash victims is blood loss, mainly from failing to provide life saving treatment immediately to the victim, which illustrates the vital need for institutional preparedness supported by an emergency response mechanism.

The first death from road crash was recorded in 1896. It was said at the time that "this must never happen again." But more than a century later, the World Health Organisation's (WHO) data shows that 1.25 million people are killed from road accidents every year and as many as 50 million are injured. Road accident ranked the 11th leading cause of death, accounting for 2.1 percent of all deaths globally and the second leading cause among people aged 5-29.

Without coordinated and sustained measures, WHO predicts that road accidents will become the 7th leading cause of death by 2030. WHO data also showed that road accidents cost most countries 3 percent of their annual GDP and are increasingly straining their healthcare budgets. In Bangladesh, there are debates over the number of death from road accidents where media reports suggest higher numbers of casualties compared to government figures. SDG 11 calls for providing "access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons" by 2030.

But challenges for managing the "Golden Hour" are enormous, starting from getting timely information about the crash itself to responding quickly and

properly. Unfortunately, both private and public hospitals in South Asia, including in Bangladesh, are negligent in providing emergency services to road crash victims. Additionally, bystanders who could render help to survivors fear legal consequences, harassments and repeated police interrogation which makes them reluctant to act as Good Samaritans. Worldwide, there is legislation to protect the Good Samaritan which we are yet to adopt.

Responding to a Writ Petition of BLAST, on February 10, 2016, the Bangladesh High Court also issued "Rule Nisi," asking the Director General of Health Services & Secretary of Ministry of Health, Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges and Bangladesh Medical and

evident from a BRAC study that road crash fatalities can be minimised through judicious and timely actions. The proposed Road Transport (draft) Act 2017 has made the owner, company, driver or any other representatives of the vehicle involved in an accident accountable for the transportation of the injured to a nearby hospital and for paying the necessary treatment costs. In addition, Article 48 (3) of the said (draft) Act states that "Bangladesh Police will introduce toll free phone number to inform about any road crash seeking emergency rescue and medical services."

Representatives of transport owners and workers have opposed the proposal arguing that in the event of most road accidents, it is the drivers, conductors



Dental Council to come up with the necessary guidelines that would make it mandatory for public and private hospitals to provide emergency medical services to survivors of any road accidents. The High Court directive observed that the "failure of the said agencies to ensure emergency medical services by hospitals and doctors for patients in a life threatening situation particularly following a road crash is in violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed under the Article 27, 31 and 32 of the Constitution, read with Articles 15(a) and 18 and 21."

Though the responding parties were supposed to act within four weeks, the concerned authorities are yet to finalise any of the required guidelines. It is

and helpers who become the victims, as owners are, more often than not, missing from the spot. But road safety experts have suggested that transport owners should set up central mechanisms to monitor road accidents around the clock to inform the concerned authorities—a prerequisite for managing the "Golden Hour."

Social attitudes also play a big role in influencing the behaviour of drivers. Often it has been observed that drivers try to flee the spot to save themselves from the public's anger. The habit of immediately accusing drivers, according to research, has been identified as the primary obstacle to conducting proper investigations, etc. Professor Shamsul Hoque, Department of Civil Engineering,

Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, who is also an expert on road safety, has carried out some eye opening research related to a few cases of road accidents in Bangladesh, which shows that in some cases, neither party involved in a crash were responsible, rather that it was the circumstances that had been the main cause.

So to truly hold drivers accountable when it comes to providing the mandatory support following an accident, social attitudes must change. This requires a nationwide campaign involving all the stakeholders. In addition, the Road Transport and Traffic (draft) Act 2012 proposed earlier made it mandatory for any vehicle passing by an accident to transport the injured to a nearby hospital, which the current draft excludes. This should be reincorporated and, most importantly, once they are brought to hospitals, the capacity to render emergency medical services becomes crucial and hence, must be assured.

Thus, to make the best use of the "Golden Hour", an institutional framework is required, which should include, among others, these issues: i) Emergency medical service providing agencies and institutions should not only be made accountable to respond during crisis moments, but should also take suitable measures to enhance their skill and capacity; ii) Community based response mechanism needs to be developed including adequate training of the members of road safety committees who will be working as part of a "designated trusted team" member to find out the facts and facilitate producing the first report within fifteen minutes; iii) Analysing the extent of the road crash "designated trusted team" should be capacitated for taking critical decisions at the shortest possible time; iv) Transport owners, agencies or authorities should develop a mechanism to monitor road accidents across the country around the clock; v) Separate legislation should be enacted to protect "Good Samaritans"; and vi) A national database should be developed and maintained to record deaths and injuries from road accidents.

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