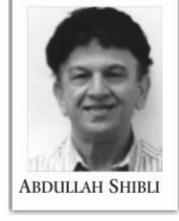


World must speak up for Rohingyas



ABDULLAH SHIBLI

AS I watched President Trump deliver his speech to the UN General Assembly in New York on the morning of September 19, I couldn't help but be dismayed by

the fact that he did not consider the current round of ethnic cleansing carried out by the Myanmar military rulers egregious enough to mention it even once during his speech. Trump did not fail to call North Korean President Kim Jong-un the "Rocket Man", single out the Iranian regime as "a corrupt dictatorship", or label the Venezuelan regime of Nicolás Maduro as a "socialist dictatorship"! This act of omission on the part of an American president to raise the brutal persecution of Rohingyas in Myanmar is a matter of great concern, not only for Bangladesh, but also for many other countries that have voiced their concerns over evicting hundreds of thousands of people from their homes on the basis of false allegations of religion and ethnicity. It is yet another example of the double standards that have bedevilled recent US foreign policy.

Last year, during a visit to Cox's Bazar, I, along with my family, visited the border area of Bangladesh and Burma near the Naf River. It was winter, the river crossings were nearly empty, and the entire area looked peaceful and scenic. Little did I imagine that this bucolic setting would be turned into a veritable killing field by the semi-autocratic rulers of Myanmar so soon. The excuse they offered to perpetrate this act of inhumanity is the attack by the militants of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on August 25. However, there can be no tolerable excuse to kill innocent human beings, torch their huts, drive children and women from their homes and imperilling their lives.

Myanmar until recently was shunned by the international community for its lack of democracy and the brutality unleashed by its former military rulers against their own people. However, the US and other governments relaxed the sanctions recently in response to the measures taken by the previous army junta. However, and ironically so, the new government formed by the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, led by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Htin Kyaw, has now reengaged in a slightly different variation of the strong-armed tactics it had used against its people for decades. For the Rohingyas, unfortunately, this latest round of oppression follows the same

book as that of previous governments. Myanmar has persecuted the Rohingyas for ages but more recently the technique has evolved and intensified. Earlier this year in February, Human Rights Watch (HRW), a New York-based organisation, in its report entitled "Burma: Events of 2016" mentioned that it was able to document instances where the government had resorted to using a familiar set of tools in a campaign of "ethnic cleansing" against the Rohingyas: rape, gang rape and other sexual violence against young girls. To quote, "The sexual violence did not appear to be random or opportunistic, but part of a coordinated and systematic attack against Rohingya,

so miserly! However, unlike the other cases, we must note that the cause of the Rohingyas has an urgency. Unlike the others affected by recent disasters, the Rohingyas cannot rebuild their lives without returning to their homestead in Myanmar. It is obvious that there is no possibility of normal existence should they be forced to stay in the cramped quarters of shelters for long periods of time. Conditions in the Rohingya refugee camps are akin to the internment camps inside Myanmar, and barring any hopes of returning to their abandoned, burned or destroyed homes, the Rohingya Diaspora cannot be expected to settle down peacefully in the crowded shelters

immediately exert pressure on the Myanmar government to cease and desist, and we cannot shy away from leaning on the Nobel laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to exercise her influence with the military and to stay away from the prevarications she has been resorting to lately in public. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini said last Friday that Daw Suu Kyi had promised to investigate the UN's allegations. Nevertheless, at a press conference on September 19, she used subterfuges to avoid admitting any knowledge of the military operations against the Rohingyas, according to the BBC.



A view of the temporary shelters at a Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar.

PHOTO: DANISH SIDDIQUI/REUTERS

in part because of their ethnicity and religion." It is sad that the current crisis comes at a bad time for both the refugees and Bangladesh. Rains during the months of August and September multiply the hardships for the destitute and vulnerable refugees. In recent weeks, we have seen hurricanes and storms in the western hemisphere, flooding in Bangladesh and the US, and earthquakes in Mexico. As a result, the plight of the Rohingyas is competing for world attention against victims of natural calamities, and vying for limited aid resources. I am not sure if that is the main reason why help and support from the international community has been

without looking for outlets to vent their frustrations. Fortunately, world attention has now gradually been turning to this issue. And Bangladesh should ask the international community to provide greater assistance for two reasons. First, even if we are a generous people, we have limited resources. Rohingyas, who have been characterised as one of the world's most persecuted minorities, and subjected to a campaign of marginalisation and dehumanisation, need a champion to advocate their case. Bangladesh, as a nation, faced similar conditions during our struggle against Pakistan, and we cannot turn our backs on the Rohingyas. In partnership with our allies, we should

Some good news is also coming in. Professor Amartya Sen has offered to sign an open letter along with other Nobel laureates. The Secretary-General of the UN has reiterated al-Husseini's concerns in condemning the actions of the Myanmar military as ethnic cleansing. It now appears that the tide of international opinion is finally turning. We need to act forcefully and the world needs to utter in unison to the powers that be in Myanmar that the situation is completely unacceptable, and that the world cannot simply stand by and watch.

Dr Abdullah Shibli is a Senior Research Fellow at International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI), a think tank based in Boston, USA.

PM's apt call for OIC unity

Should be acted on

WE support the prime minister's call to the members of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) to move beyond the rhetoric and act as a body to save lives in the Rakhine state of Myanmar. The systematic ethnic cleansing that is taking place in that country and the pouring in of hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas into Bangladesh are the result of the international community's complete lack of empathy for the world's most persecuted minority over the past four decades.

Bangladesh has been doing its best to accommodate these displaced people, and the OIC must do more to bring its weight to bear on the government of Myanmar to stop repressing the Rohingyas and accord them the status that history has accorded them. It is imperative that the OIC work with the international community in not just condemning the atrocities happening in Myanmar but also take steps to bring an end to the crisis, which has wide security ramifications for the entire region.

While OIC leaders have urged the Myanmar government to respect human rights, it is imperative that OIC members step up humanitarian assistance to the government of Bangladesh to help the Rohingyas. It cannot be our burden alone and in that we fully endorse the line taken by the prime minister. The longer this refugee crisis lingers, the greater the possibility of radicalisation of some members of this uprooted and displaced community. It is time for the OIC fraternity to come together and speak in one voice to help end the policy of forced displacement of Rohingyas.

Myanmar VP's mendacious claims

Blatant attempt to disguise the truth

MYANMAR'S Vice-President Henry Van Thio's statement on the ongoing Rohingya crisis at the UNGA can only be described as scandalous. Van Thio made several dubious claims, much like Suu Kyi a day earlier, which include not knowing the reasons for the mass exodus of Rohingyas; the fact that the majority of Muslims had stayed behind; and that there have been no armed clashes since September 5.

First, the repeated failure by the Myanmar government to even acknowledge the fact that the roots of the Rohingya exodus lie, among other things, in the minority's lack of citizenship is astounding. Second, the terms "Muslim" and "Rohingya" are not interchangeable; therefore, the statement that most of the Muslims did not flee says nothing about the percentage of Rohingyas who have fled. And finally, the claim that there have been no armed clashes since September 5 is also misleading because satellite imagery analysed by Amnesty International has revealed that many villages were burnt after that date.

Van Thio's address is reflective of well-designed rhetoric that we are all too familiar with. Now that both the US and France have vehemently condemned the atrocities being committed against the Rohingyas, we hope Myanmar comes out of its state of denial and brings an end to the state-sanctioned violence in Rakhine state. If Myanmar is sincere about resolving the crisis, they must grant full access to the UN so that independent investigations can be carried out and the necessary steps taken to repatriate the Rohingyas back to their homeland where they no longer have to face violence.

The man who saved the world

ERESH OMAR JAMAL

ON September 26, 1983, Stanislav Petrov, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Soviet Air Defence Forces was on duty in charge of an early warning radar system at the Serpukhov-15 bunker near Moscow. Just past midnight, he saw the radar screen showing a single incoming missile from the United States that was headed toward the then Soviet Union (USSR). "When I first saw the alert message, I got up from my chair. All my subordinates were confused, so I started shouting orders at them to avoid panic. I knew my decision would have a lot of consequences," Petrov recalled in an interview with RT in 2010.

Operation RYaN, under which Soviet agents abroad would monitor US service and technical personnel who would implement a nuclear attack, so as to be able to either pre-empt it, or have mutually assured destruction.

Bruce Blair, an expert on Cold War nuclear strategies and former president of the World Security Institute in Washington, DC, said the American-Soviet relationship at that time "had deteriorated to the point where the Soviet Union as a system—not just the Kremlin, not just Soviet leader Yuri Andropov, not just the KGB, but as a system—was geared to expect an attack and to retaliate very quickly to it. It was on hair-trigger alert. It was very nervous and prone to mistakes

more missiles had been launched," said Petrov.

From the moment they had supposedly taken off, there was only half an hour for the Kremlin to decide on whether to push the red button in retaliation and just 15 minutes for Petrov to determine whether the threat was real and to report it to his commanders for them to launch an all-out nuclear war (and possibly Armageddon). "I'll admit it, I was scared. I knew the level of responsibility at my fingertips," said Petrov.

With the fate of the world resting on his shoulders, Petrov had again kept his calm to come to the decision that the computer system must have malfunctioned once more, despite having no

The incident was kept secret as highly classified for more than 10 years. Even Petrov's wife, Raisa, who died in 1997, did not know anything of the role her husband had played in averting nuclear war. A year later, in 1998, it finally came to light when Petrov's superintendent, Colonel General Yury Votintsev, spoke out and a report about the officer's quiet deed appeared in a German tabloid.

Global recognition followed. And in 2006, the Association of World Citizens handed him an award which reads: "To the man who averted nuclear war," in the UN headquarters in New York. In 2012, Petrov was honoured with the German Media Prize which had also been awarded to Nelson Mandela. The year after, he received the Dresden Peace Prize, handed to him by a 25-year-old Dresden resident, who "belongs to the generation that would not have survived had it not been for Stanislav Petrov."

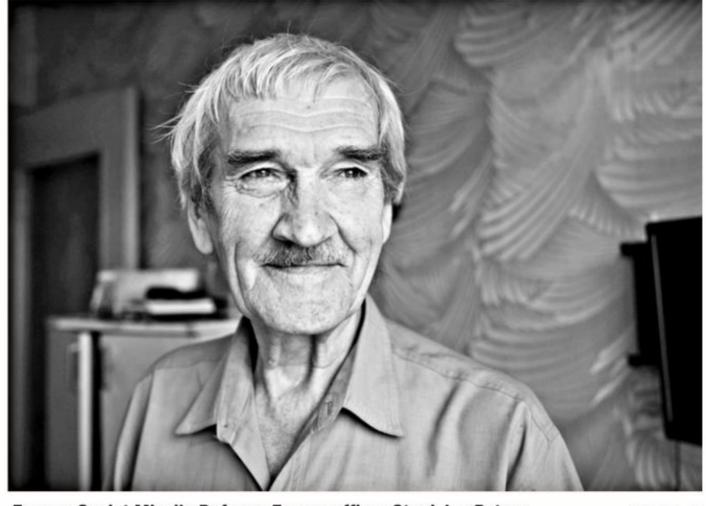
On September 7, 2017, when a German political activist named Karl Schumacher who had befriended Petrov, called him to wish him a happy birthday, he found out from Petrov's son that Petrov had passed away on May 19, in his home, in a small town near Moscow. The man who had saved the world was gone without the world even knowing about it.

When asked about how it felt to be recognised as a hero, Petrov said, "At first when people started telling me that these TV reports had started calling me a hero, I was surprised. I never thought of myself as one—after all, I was literally just doing my job." But the truth is, Petrov did not do his job as an officer of the Soviet Air Defence Forces on that fateful night. After all, he had refused outright to follow his instructions.

The job that he was speaking of was not assigned to him by his superiors, or anyone else for that matter; it was one that he had assigned to himself. That was, to protect that which was dearest to him—his world—which he did, but only by nearly jeopardising his own career and even his own life.

May "the man who saved the world" rest in peace. And may the world that he sought to preserve above all else recognise what it had meant to him, and honour his memory, by refraining from destroying itself—at a time when rhetoric from certain world leaders is threatening exactly that—now that its saviour is no more.

Eresh Omar Jamal is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.



Former Soviet Missile Defence Forces officer Stanislav Petrov.

PHOTO: AP

The incident happened when relations between the US and USSR were at an all-time low. The NATO Double-Track Decision was taken in December 1979, deploying 108 Pershing II nuclear missiles in Western Europe with the capability of hitting targets in eastern Ukraine, Belarus or Lithuania in less than 10 minutes in response to the USSR's deployment of fourteen SS-20/RSD-10 theatre nuclear missiles.

According to later testimonies by CIA and KGB officers, because of the existing situation and following the Reaganite rhetoric, Soviet leaders at the time were convinced that the United States was preparing a secret nuclear first-strike attack on the USSR and initiated

and accidents. The false alarm that happened on Petrov's watch could not have come at a more dangerous, intense phase in US-Soviet relations." And later, that was the "closest" the two countries had ever come to an "accidental nuclear war".

Luckily, it was an accident that was averted singlehandedly by the quick-witted Petrov, who concluded that in case of a real first-strike attack, the US would go on an all-out offensive in order to disable any Soviet means of a counterattack and not just launch a single warhead. Petrov dismissed the warning as a false alarm, only to watch the siren go off moments later, for a second time. "Giant blood-red letters appeared on our main screen, saying START. It said that four

Knowing that a global war was likely to start if he reported a nuclear attack, Petrov decided, against orders, to wait. After a long wait, the missiles finally disappeared from the screens, and the world remained still intact. The incident was kept secret as highly classified for more than 10 years.

direct means of confirming this, as the USSR's land radar was incapable of detecting missiles beyond the horizon. On the flipside, waiting to positively identify the threat would limit the Soviet Union's response time only to a few minutes and so Petrov, according to his instructions, should have, at this point, reported that an American attack had been discovered.

Knowing, however, that a global war was likely to start (wiping out the US, USSR and most of mankind) if he reported a nuclear attack, Petrov decided, against orders, to wait. After a long wait, the missiles finally disappeared from the screens, and the world remained still intact.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Suu Kyi's misleading statement

Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi recently made a public speech about the ongoing Rohingya crisis in her country. However, instead of providing hope, the speech has further frustrated the international community and human rights organisations.

She skilfully overlooked the real problems of the Rohingya crisis and didn't mention the word Rohingya at all. Misleadingly, she merely termed them as "Muslims". Moreover, she didn't even criticise the military whose brutal operations forced more than 400,000 Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh!

Mohammad Zonaed Imran
By e-mail

Ensure security for Puja mandaps

Durga Puja, this year, will be celebrated across 31,000 Puja mandaps in the country.

In general, police and Ansar personnel are deployed in Puja mandaps, but they alone cannot ensure security for the devotees and temples, given the fact that these mandaps were previously attacked. Many devotees do not feel secure enough to perform Puja at mandaps. Therefore, in order for us to observe this important festival with joy and safety, we need special security arrangements.

Ratan Karmakar
By e-mail