

## Call for UNSC meet

*Rohingya crisis demands quick solution*

SEVEN countries including the US, UK and France have called on the UN Security Council to meet next week to discuss the ongoing violence in Myanmar. We welcome their concerns and call for discussion, keeping in mind the urgent need to end all violence in Myanmar, and would like to reemphasise our position on the need for dialogue, to find a political and humanitarian solution to the crisis which alone can ensure the long-term peace and stability of Myanmar and the region as a whole.

It is also encouraging to see the international community recognise the need for its involvement in the matter, to force the Myanmar government to stop persecuting the Rohingyas. And in keeping with that objective, finally moving forward diplomatically. Given the severity of the crisis, however, and the continuing onrush of refugees from Myanmar into Bangladesh—leading to an overwhelming humanitarian disaster—we feel that the international community must move quicker to avoid an even bigger crisis.

Despite calls to end the violence, the Myanmar government, unfortunately, has remained adamant on the use of force. Villages continue to be set on fire, even now, according to reports, while the placing of landmines across border areas by the Myanmar army is, shockingly, still ongoing.

What is obvious is that peace and reconciliation will remain a far cry, under such circumstances. The international community should, therefore, urgently get the Myanmar government and army to stop the rights violation and work towards resolving the crisis immediately. Until a peaceful settlement is formulated, however, we must again call on the international community and particularly our friends, to lend their increased support to Bangladesh, so that it too can continue providing its humanitarian support to those seeking shelter in its territories.

## Child labour in quarries

*Establish a mechanism to enforce child laws*

A photo of a group of children working at a quarry in Bholanath, Sylhet published in this newspaper yesterday paints a sordid picture of child labour in our country. More than 500 children—some as young as 10—are engaged in hazardous tasks in dangerous conditions.

The children are, unsurprisingly, out of school. It is a shame that whereas we take enormous pride in the progress we have made in the area of social development, a right as basic as education is an unaffordable luxury to these child workers.

Bangladesh has signed a number of international instruments and updated domestic laws that seek to protect child rights. However, given that more than 90 percent of child workers are employed in informal sectors, it is impossible for the government to implement the laws, according to experts. But the open employment of children, as in the Bholanath quarry, which severely hampers a child's attendance in school and interferes with his or her mental and physical development, can and must be prevented.

Such prevalence of child labour despite the existence of domestic laws consistent with international standards points to what many experts say the lack of mechanisms to enforce the law. In order to protect the rights of our children, one of the most vulnerable segments of society, we urge the Bangladesh government to establish a proper enforcement apparatus to eradicate the practice of child labour.

# Suu Kyi's shocking fall from grace

PETER ANDRE GLOBENSKY and IQBALUR RAHMAN

Last week, French President Emmanuel Macron strongly condemned the attacks on the Rohingya minority by the Myanmar army, calling it "genocide". Earlier, UN Secretary-General António Guterres had admonished Aung San Suu Kyi, saying it was her last chance to stop the Myanmar military offensive against the Rohingyas in Myanmar. "Otherwise," he suggested, "the tragedy will be horrible." Other leaders have stated she is encouraging ethnic cleansing.

How power changes people! How things have changed for this once brave, guiding light of democracy in the tuggery that Myanmar had become.

When Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy, was elected to form the government by an overwhelming majority of the people of Myanmar in 1988, she was prevented from doing so by a de facto military coup. The resulting crackdown by the junta resulted in a fractious civil war which went on for years. She and many of her compatriots were subjected to house arrest and many Myanmar democracy activists died in prison. For over 25 years, she was a brave rallying point, a beacon during a very dark time. Her persistence and courage under repression inspired an international movement and among other awards, she was given the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

A year prior to that, the Parliament of Canada created the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD), an agency whose purpose was to use financial assistance and citizen diplomacy to work with NGOs and governments to further its namesake objectives. Suu Kyi's release from house arrest and the restoration of rights and democracy to her beleaguered country became a prime objective.

The Centre funded and worked with elected representatives in exile who had formed the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, her government-in-exile at the time of her incarceration. The Centre urged governments around the world to secure her release. The Centre's staff, at great risk to their personal safety and health,



In her speech on September 19, Aung San Suu Kyi did not address the atrocities against the Rohingya, insisting that Myanmar "does not fear international scrutiny".

PHOTO: SOE ZEYA TUN/REUTERS

travelled to conflict-ridden Myanmar, meeting with members of her party and the military leaders of the ethnic communities in Myanmar who were repelling the attacks of the military junta.

In 1993, the Centre organised the Mission of the Nobel Peace Laureates in Bangkok. The mission was led by Ed Broadbent, the former leader of the opposition in the Parliament of Canada and then President of the Centre. It included the participation of eight Nobel laureates including the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Oscar Arias, the former president of Costa Rica. The purpose of the mission was to travel to Yangon to seek the immediate release of their fellow laureate.

The laureates were refused entry by the military junta. Unbowed, they travelled to a number of Myanmar refugee camps in Thailand, met with the Thai foreign affairs officials and representatives of ASEAN. They then travelled to Geneva and reported their findings to the UN Commission on Human Rights, following which they travelled to Washington to debrief President Clinton, Vice-President Gore and senior US state officials. The mission brought worldwide attention to

Suu Kyi's plight and her cause. We would argue that in no small way, the mission and the international publicity it garnered contributed to her eventual release and her election as the de facto leader of her country.

But now, we all question if that work was for naught.

Not only is she doing nothing to stop the policy of persecution and harassment of the Rohingya minority in her own country, but her inability to stem the tide of violence also suggests that she may be actually encouraging it. We can understand why the persecution perpetrated by the Myanmar military forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas to flee Myanmar and seek refuge and asylum in neighbouring Bangladesh, but for her to purposely or even benignly promote this mass injustice and violation of human rights by her inaction is unconscionable and betrays her own promises, not to mention the supportive efforts of all who believed in her and the restoration of democracy to Myanmar.

It is tempting to believe the words of British politician Lord Acton when he said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Before the

ongoing persecution, harassment and massacre of her fellow Rohingya countrymen and women become an indelible stain on her position as the de facto leader of the government, those who worked so hard on her behalf must insist that she immediately instruct the Myanmar military to cease and desist from their murderous actions against the Rohingya minority. Gloss-over speeches at the United Nations will not cut it.

Aung San Suu Kyi must stop kowtowing to her military and move to fully reintegrate the Rohingya into a pluralistic Myanmar society. Until she does, her honorary Canadian citizenship and her Nobel Peace Prize should be placed in suspended animation pending further review.

Peter Andre Globensky was the first director of programmes and advocacy at ICHRDD and is a former senior policy advisor, Office for the Prime Minister of Canada, and chief of staff to the Canadian minister of external relations and international development. Email: basa1@shaw.ca. Iqbalur Rahman FCA is a former project director of various initiatives funded by the Canadian International Development Agency in Bangladesh and was an advisor on Asian affairs to the president of ICHRDD Ed Broadbent. Email: iqbalurrahman@yahoo.com

## Shaping Eurasia's future

*Unintended consequences of abrogating Iran's nuclear deal*



JAMES M DORSEY

Middle East, but also tilt European-Chinese competition for domination of Eurasia's future energy infrastructure in China's favour.

As Trump keeps the world in suspense by declining to disclose how he intends to correct what he calls an embarrassment, Iranian leaders are betting against the odds that European signatories of the nuclear agreement will persuade him to stop short of pulling out of the nuclear deal and avoid steps that would effectively undo the accord.

In doing so, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is relying on common interests with Europe: a desire to keep the deal in place, prevent Iranian hardliners from getting the upper hand in his country's power struggles, avoid a nuclear arms race, and ensure a European role in shaping the future architecture of Eurasian energy.

However, if Trump's record is anything to go by, he is unlikely to heed European calls for keeping the nuclear deal in place, much like he ignored pressure from Europe and others not to pull out of the Paris climate accord.

A more likely scenario is that Trump will refuse to certify Iranian compliance with the deal by October 15, a quarterly requirement mandated by Congress. That would open the door to Congress re-imposing secondary sanctions lifted as part of the nuclear deal.

Renewed secondary sanctions would put Europe in an impossible position. They would not only put European companies and banks at risk of running afoul of US law if they continued to do business with Iran, but also unleash consequences that could significantly increase tension in the Middle East and ripple across Eurasia.

De facto European compliance would significantly weaken the agreement's value to Iran, boost pro-Chinese Iranian hardliners opposed to the deal and eager to free Iran from restrictions on its nuclear programme, risk a nuclear arms race in an environment in which the US is losing out in the Middle East's quest for nuclear energy that contains tacit building blocks for programmes to develop nuclear weapons, and potentially tilt Iran towards China in determining the

flow of its natural gas—a key factor in the quest to shape the future architecture of Eurasian energy.

"If the United States leaves the treaty and Europe follows, then this deal will certainly collapse and Iran will go back to what it was before and, technically speaking, to a much higher level," said Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization.

The United States may be unprepared for the fallout of Iran pursuing an unfettered nuclear programme, beyond its ability to tighten the economic screws, wield military power, and support potential efforts to destabilise Iran in a bid to achieve regime change.

A group of former senior US government and military officials recently warned that the United States in the absence of a strategy to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy was lagging behind China and Russia in helping Middle Eastern states develop programmes of their own. The officials

cautioned that Trump's failure to articulate a policy undermined "Washington's ability to shape the highest standards of non-proliferation safeguards, safety, and security."

Noting that "the Middle East is in the process of going nuclear," the officials went on to say that "the big question is whether the nuclearisation of the region will be dominated by Russia and China, or by the host countries in partnership with the United States and its allies under a proven programme that ensures absolute safety, security and standardisation throughout the nuclear fuel cycle."

Most Middle Eastern states are signatories to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). They have disavowed the pursuit of nuclear weapons and called for a nuclear-free zone in the region in a bid to force Israel to declare its nuclear weapons and join the NPT and at the same time avert a nuclear arms

race with Iran.

Saudi cooperation with nuclear power

Pakistan has nonetheless long been a source of speculation about the kingdom's ambition. Pakistan's former ambassador to the United States, Husain Haqqani, asserted that Saudi Arabia's close ties to the Pakistani military and intelligence during the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s gave the kingdom arm's-length access to his country's nuclear capabilities.

The Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) said earlier this year that it had uncovered evidence that future Pakistani "assistance would not involve Pakistan supplying Saudi Arabia with a full nuclear weapon or weapons; however, Pakistan may assist in other important ways, such as supplying sensitive equipment, materials, and know-how used in enrichment or reprocessing."

The report said it was unclear whether "Pakistan and Saudi Arabia may be



cooperating on sensitive nuclear technologies in Pakistan. In an extreme case, Saudi Arabia may be financing, or will finance, an unsafeguarded uranium enrichment facility in Pakistan for later use, either in a civil or military programme," the institute said.

Rather than embarking on a covert programme, the institute predicted that Saudi Arabia would, for now, focus on building up its civilian nuclear infrastructure as well as a robust nuclear engineering and scientific workforce. This would allow the kingdom to take command of all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle at some point in the future. That process could accelerate if US actions undermine the nuclear agreement with Iran.

Saudi Arabia has in recent years significantly expanded graduate programmes at its five nuclear research centres as part of a USD 100 billion programme to build 16 nuclear reactors

by 2030.

Saudi King Salman earlier this year signed an agreement with China on cooperation on nuclear energy. The agreement is for a feasibility study for the construction of high-temperature gas-cooled (HTGR) nuclear power plants in the kingdom as well as cooperation in intellectual property and the development of a domestic industrial supply chain for HTGRs built in Saudi Arabia.

The agreement was one of a number of nuclear-related understandings concluded with China in recent years. Saudi Arabia has signed similar agreements with France, the United States, Pakistan, Russia, South Korea and Argentina.

Lurking in the background of the battle for the future of the Iranian nuclear agreement is an unrelated but no less important issue: the future of Eurasia's energy architecture. US efforts to undermine the deal and de facto European compliance with US sanctions could push Iran to favour China rather than Europe in allocating its estimated surplus over the next five years of 24.6 billion cubic metres of natural gas. Iran boasts the world's second largest natural gas reserves and its fourth largest oil reserves.

"Not enough to supply all major markets, Tehran will face a crucial geopolitical choice for the destination of its piped exports. Iran will be able to export piped gas to two of the following three markets: European Union (EU)/ Turkey via the Southern Gas Corridor centring on the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), India via an Iran-Oman-India pipeline, or China via either Turkmenistan or Pakistan. The degree to which the system of energy relationships in Eurasia will be more oriented toward the European Union or China will depend on the extent to which each secures Caspian piped gas exports through pipeline infrastructure directed to its respective markets," said energy scholar Michael Tanchum.

The lifting of international sanctions as part of the nuclear agreement gave Iran a vested interest in deploying its energy wealth in ways that would allow it to balance its relations with China and Europe. A Europe incapable of developing economic ties with the Islamic republic, including the expansion of pipeline infrastructure, could undermine Iran's calculus to China's benefit.

Dr James M Dorsey is a senior fellow at Singapore's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, co-director of the University of Wuerzburg's Institute of Fan Culture, and the author of the book *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer*, among others.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### DU should reconsider timing of admission tests

The Dhaka University authorities should reconsider the timing of its admission tests. More than half the candidates do not live in Dhaka city. Those coming from outside usually reach Dhaka a day before their test so that they can attend it the next morning.

But if the exam begins at 2pm, there is a possibility that all the candidates will be able to attend it without much hassle. Those coming from the nearby districts can directly go to the exam venue without having to spend the previous night in the city, which will both reduce hassle and save money. So, I think the authorities should consider adjusting the exam timing so that those students can avoid unnecessary trouble.

Hasan Ul Banna  
Kazi Nazrul Islam University

### Vehicles on the footpaths

A photo recently published in *The Daily Star* showed how the pedestrians were being forced to use the streets because of vehicles parked on the footpaths. Roads are for vehicles and footpaths for pedestrians, but in Dhaka and other cities, the violation of this basic rule is one of the reasons behind the acute traffic congestion that we see every day.

In recent times, motorbikes have turned out to be a real nuisance in this regard. Apparently those driving the bikes do not seem to bother to comply with traffic rules and regulations. Even a high court directive has not been able to keep them off the footpaths. The authorities should take steps to ensure that the rules are properly followed.

Zubair Khaled Huq, By e-mail