

Rohingyas: Where are the Saudis?

KHADEMUL ISLAM

THE Saudi response to the current Rohingya crisis, in contrast to previous ones, has been noticeably low-key. During past attempts by Myanmar at ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas, Saudi Arabia would be in the lead in providing relief aid and taking up the cause in international forums. It is the only Arab state to have openly supported the Rohingyas; in 2013, in a rare move for the kingdom, it publicly condemned Myanmar at a UN meet. Much earlier, King Faisal had offered stateless Rohingyas safe haven; later King Abdullah extended them residency permits and access to free education, healthcare and employment. Today there are about 250,000 Myanmar Muslims in Saudi Arabia. Westerners have levelled broadsides at the Saudis for segregating them in slums, but with zero other options that criticism is neither here nor there. In the present crisis younger Arabs have been vocal on social media in supporting the Rohingyas and condemning Myanmar, but official Arab reactions have been routine and laggard. The lead this time was taken by Turkey and Indonesia, with an angered President Erdogan dispatching his wife on a high-profile visit to Bangladesh and the Indonesian foreign minister jetting in to Bangladesh and Myanmar to try and resolve matters.



new crown prince who was gung-ho about them. The latest fiasco is the split with Qatar over its relationship with Iran, with the Qataris refusing to kow-tow and causing a crack in the Saudi-designed coalition of Sunni states. Though the Saudis portray the long-running conflict with Iran as a sectarian Sunni-Shia one, it is also rooted and energised by antagonistic ideologies that offer competing models of state and government for Muslims worldwide. Iran is deeply anti-monarchical, a modified theocracy armed with anti-colonial rhetoric and continuing hostilities with the USA. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, is an absolute monarchy, tied umbilically to the USA and governed by a family currently numbering 7,000 members in a fished partnership with extremely orthodox Wahabi clerics.

This is not a fight destined to end soon. Which brings it right back to aid for the Rohingyas. While the UAE has given tents, Saudis have provided emergency relief and the Qataris have dispatched a medical team, Arab posts on WhatsApp noted that Qatar donated USD 30 million for Hurricane Harvey while giving, over the years, a grand total of USD 100,000 to the Rohingyas. Equally, the Saudis, who recently hosted Trump, aside from the USD 110 billion arms deal also, as reported in the American press, presented him with 83 gifts including a wool robe lined with white tiger fur and a jazzy collection of swords, daggers and holsters.

On reflection, perhaps Qatar could have shaved a million dollars off the Harvey relief cash and redirected them to the Rohingyas shivering under sheets of monsoon rain? And the Saudis could have presented 82 gifts, minus one jewel-encrusted sword whose cost no doubt could feed a thousand starving Rohingya families for a month? Surely, the Americans were not going to miss a mere million bucks, or Trump threaten to nuke Riyadh over one fancy scimitar?

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It may be that the kingdom is distracted by its own set of crises. Saudi Arabia has long been known to be opaque and enigmatic, but signs of disquiet can be discerned through the veil. One was the way the present King Salman rode roughshod over the traditional rules of succession to place his 31-year-old son Prince Muhammad bin Salman unassailably on the path to the throne. The concentration of the posts and powers of general secretary to the court, defence minister and crown prince in him, and an ailing 81-year-old king, means that the prince is effectively the ruler of the

land. Potential dissenters to the new dispensation—such as three prominent clerics not on the royal payroll—have been silenced. Saudi Arabia is a wealthy nation yet is also a welfare state where, as Malise Ruthven recently wrote in the *London Review of Books*, “40 per cent of people between the ages of 20 and 24 are unemployed, where 40 per cent of Saudis live in relative poverty and at least 60 per cent can't afford to buy homes”. Its economy urgently needs to be diversified. It is critically dependent on both foreign technical expertise at the top and manual labour at the bottom. The younger generation is net savvy

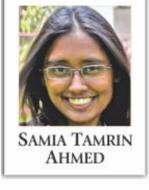
and restless, hungry for change and wanting a more equal distribution of the riches. The gerontocracy of the ruling house of Al Saud has signalled that its time is up, and that fresh blood and youthful energy are required to tackle these problems. So for the first time a grandson, and not a son, of the state's founder King Abd al-Aziz is poised to ascend to the throne. Appearances to the contrary, the Saudi ship is setting sail into uncharted waters and nobody can tell what turbulences lie ahead. The 2011 Arab Spring was a shock to the Saudi monarchy, which tended to view it

through the prism of its conflict with Iran, more as Shia uprisings instigated by Iran instead of a popular movement for democracy. It was especially alarmed by the Shia-led (that the Shias were also poor and marginalised seemed incidental to the Saudis) protests that seriously threatened the ruling royals of Bahrain, until Saudi troops dealt with the revolt. Uneasy, ever since, have been the heads that have worn the Saudi crown. The conflict has sharpened, with merciless proxy wars between Iran and Saudi Arabia fought in Syria and Yemen. These wars are currently stalemated, frustrating the Saudis and the

WORLD TOURISM DAY

Global goals and greener travel

“Who lives sees, but who travels sees more.” — Ibn Battuta



SAMIA TAMRIN AHMED

THE option for discovery and exploration of nature and cultural diversity captivates many of us. As we celebrate World Tourism Day today, we can rehash the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Global Code of Ethics for Tourism—to honour common heritage, protect our planet, support the local economy and be an informed and respectful traveller. In this regard, 2017 is special, being the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, as affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly.

Which leads us to the issue of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism has been defined as one that “meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future” (UNWTO). The challenge is to find a favourable equilibrium between tourism and conservation. Today, ecotourism receives increasing policy attention as countries around the world are gearing up for realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN. A commendable example of successful ecotourism is the Galápagos Islands, one of the first UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The Galápagos Marine Reserve was established in 1986 to encompass conservation and protection of the

underwater biospheres of the Galapagos. Unlike India, Bangladesh is comparatively an off-the-beaten-track destination. Tourists who choose to visit the country are likely to have genuine curiosity about the land and its people, which offers an opportunity to promote responsible and sustainable means of tourism in the country. The government, which is expected to incorporate SDGs in policies and legislation, may give particular attention to goals 8, 12 and 14 which are related to tourism industry and can be examined further in the Bangladesh context.

Goal 8 is about enhancing inclusive and sustainable economic growth and productive employment. Decent work for all is also high on the agenda. The direct contribution of tourism on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country includes spending by residents or non-residents on leisure services and government expenditure on service industries linked to visitors, such as parks, museums and other attractions. New investment in ecotourism can involve local beneficiaries including local craftsmen to focus on conservation as well as empowerment. For example, in the Sundarbans, ecotourism sites have been built in an endeavour to encourage locals to become entrepreneurs and generate alternative income sources. Their involvement in such initiatives allows them to realise the importance of conserving the forest as well as living off a conscientious business model. This sector would offer employment opportunities for properly trained and skilled workers, but ecotourism



Cox's Bazar.

PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

needs to be more affordable for ordinary people rather than being a symbol of a luxurious retreat for the elite. Goal 12 relates to sustainable consumption and production patterns. Research and innovation is required to promote cleaner, recyclable products—in simple aspects such as jute packaging, organic soaps in resorts, etc. In Bangladesh, there is a lack of awareness about sustainable production and consumption. Stories of the weavers/pottery community featured on labels of souvenir products will foster meaningful purchase that can provide economic opportunities. This means, a visitor who picks up a souvenir made with

natural dyes can read about the sustainable cottage industry in short. A name and a story on a label on the product can come with information on the source of the product, and thus one purchase may contribute to the livelihood of an entire community. Goal 14, with its focus on protecting marine ecosystem, is also important for Bangladesh. Sustainable tourism around ecological sites can aim to trickle down funds to protect our rivers, coastlines and communities whose livelihood depends on a healthy marine ecosystem. An example from Panama/Colombia is quite interesting in this regard. The Lost Beach Sustainable Living project—a

part of Buena Onda Water Sports Company—has the objective to nurture a holistic sense of community (on three levels) and set an example of sustainability and cooperation. The communities in question are: owners, investors, partners and staff of the sustainable tourism project (primary), volunteers and people who participate with eco-shares and co-housing units (secondary), and environmental groups and green technology companies which are involved in collaborative efforts (tertiary). Better planning to foster sensible tourism around notable destinations and water resources in Bangladesh and productive linkages with stakeholders of the three layers of community, as

explained above, will be crucial. Partnerships are key to development. Goal 17 of the SDGs encourages partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society. The private sector, including the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), could explore opportunities for investing in the ecotourism value chain to strengthen sustainability and project the country in an environment-friendly manner. They can target travellers who prefer to be “green consumers,” are conscious of social justice concerns, sensitive to local cultures, aware of environmental issues, and wish to leave a positive impact on the places they travel. Green growth in the tourism sector can also help protect our natural resources and local cultures. Our policymakers and government agencies should adopt global best practices and promote innovations. SMEs stand to play a critical role in tapping the ecotourism market that minimises environmental impact of tourism, respects local culture and lifestyles, generates direct financial benefits for conservation and in the process, creates authentic and meaningful experiences to the travellers of today. Tourism can potentially contribute to all the three aspects of sustainable development—economic, social and environmental—and each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This sector can bolster environmental protection, champion diverse cultural heritage, and reinforce peace in the world.

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Sl. No.	ID No. & Ref. No.	Name of works	Last date and time for tender security submission	Tender closing date and time
1.	Tender ID 123297	Supply of Self Propelled Wheelbarrow Sprayer Machine to DNCC.	22/10/2017 2.00pm	22/10/2017 03.00pm

The interested persons/firm may visit the website: www.eprocure.gov.bd to get details of the tender.

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