

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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UN role in repatriation

Get int'l community on board too

DHAKA'S call to involve the United Nations in the negotiations on Rohingya repatriation is a well-judged one. Bangladesh must also insist that Myanmar agrees to a multilateral agreement. Myanmar had earlier opted for a bilateral solution. It has also, reportedly, proposed to take back only those who fled to Bangladesh after October 9 last year, which cannot be acceptable to Bangladesh. There are over 900,000 forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals that now reside in Bangladesh who must all be taken back. Under these circumstances, a UN involvement would certainly lend weight to any agreement and improve chances of resolving the problem.

As the two countries work out the details of repatriation, it's disturbing to know that the Myanmar army has reinvigorated its campaign against the Rohingyas in Rakhine State, triggering a fresh exodus and further aggravating the security situation in Bangladesh. We need to convince our neighbours, especially India, of the gravity of the situation. The Indian finance minister's comment that stability in Bangladesh is in India's own interest is reassuring but we would like manifest action on its part to ensure that our stability is not hampered by a situation created by Myanmar and outside our control.

There is no other solution to the immediate problem other than a quick repatriation of the Rohingyas. Along with bilateral negotiations, Bangladesh must mobilise international support through vigorous diplomatic efforts for a peaceful solution to the crisis, which includes an immediate end to the violence and creating an environment for a safe return of the displaced people. Myanmar must end its rhetoric as a stable Rohingya situation would also be in its own interest.

Pulling rank, violating law

Shameful display of power

JUST last month the police took strict action against individuals, who, despite being aware of the law, think it is completely justified to use their rank to drive on the wrong side of the road. On September 24, 57 drivers were fined for taking the wrong side on Hare Road in Dhaka. And even though the cars stopped and fined included those of a state minister, a lawmaker, several bureaucrats, police officials and media personnel, it seems we are completely incapable of learning to follow the law and will return to flouting it the moment we can.

On October 4, barely a week since the drive, a car with a flag pole had to be stopped again on the very same road. And, it comes as no surprise that the driver of the car thought himself to be completely justified in his actions as his "sir" had allegedly asked him to "go quickly". When the police refused to budge, he even tried to scare them off by calling his "sir".

The root of the problem goes beyond any individual example: we have become accustomed to the idea that those who have power or influence can be above the law. The malady goes so far as to affect their employees, who think they can exercise that power in the name of their employers.

In a previous editorial we pointed out how flagrant traffic violations have collapsed our traffic system causing chaos, jam, accidents and disruptions in public life and safety. We congratulated the police saying that in a culture where power breeds impunity, VIPs were being held accountable. We congratulate them again for their perseverance. It is refreshing to see that even if the influentials don't learn fast, the police are determined to put an end to this culture. We are hopeful that the drive, which has gained momentum, will continue.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Stop traffic rule violations

Violating traffic rules has become a common practice due to the lack of traffic law enforcement. This does not only make our roads unsafe but also worsens traffic congestion. The number of road accidents is increasing day by day, many of which occur due to the violation of traffic rules.

It was reported by *The Daily Star* that 57 cases were filed against traffic rule violators in a single spot alone, leaving us to wonder how many violations are committed daily in the entire city of Dhaka.

The traffic police department has always cited the lack of manpower as the main reason why they are unable to enforce traffic rules. The government must address this issue. It should also consider providing more financial support to the traffic police department to acquire tools and technology to catch the offenders.

Abul Khaer, *By email*

Mass shooters, one of the biggest threats to US

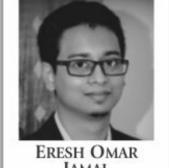
American gun lobbyists' claim that "Guns don't kill people, people kill people," is all too familiar. But the truth is only with guns can a single person kill so many people. And, only with an automatic rifle, and not just an ordinary shotgun, can a person kill 59 and injure over 500 people—which is what happened in Las Vegas on October 1.

With mass shooters armed with automatic weapons and slaughtering fellow Americans, the greatest threat to American security is internal, not external. It's not Kim Jong-un. Jong-un can be deterred by the threat of retaliation, but how do you stop these domestic psychopaths, most of whom are suicidal?

Mahmood Elahi, *Ottawa*

A road map to ending the Rohingya crisis

THE OVERTON WINDOW



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

IN her address to the 72nd United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said, "I have come here with a heavy heart...after seeing the hungry, distressed and desperate Rohingyas from Myanmar, who took shelter in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh." With those words, the PM wasn't just expressing her own disappointment to the UNGA, but rather, one that is shared by most Bangladeshis in respect to the tragic plight of the Rohingyas and the inaction of the international community in the face of it.

This is because unlike the rest of the world, Bangladesh isn't only just beginning to take notice of their misery now, but has had to bear witness to it for much longer. Its citizens, having suffered unspeakable brutality at the hands of the Pakistani army, are themselves no strangers to the level of cruelty that forces people to flee their homes in fear of being killed, or of having to suffer much worse. And they can, thus, imagine more easily the true extent of helplessness that the Rohingyas are experiencing, which the international community had largely remained oblivious to until recently.

But that and humanitarian reasons aside, pragmatic reasons too force Bangladesh to seek a quick end to the violence and, most importantly, ensure that it does not escalate any further. The economic and administrative costs associated with handling such a large-scale crisis (nearly singlehandedly) have already taken a toll on Bangladesh (showing no signs of subsiding anytime soon). Then there are socioeconomic costs that must be considered, along with various other security concerns.

Some of these were mentioned by the PM's political adviser, HT Imam, in an interview with WION's Saad Hammadi, where he mentioned the increased likelihood of "safe" havens "for arms, ammunition, drugs...and also human trafficking" popping up, amidst the chaotic movement of people across border areas. Additionally, wherever there is the movement of drugs and armaments, the one major concern that always comes along, which Bangladesh must remain most vigilant about, is that of terror financing and extremism.

Even HT Imam mentioned this, when he explained how the Rohingya Liberation Front and the Rohingya Liberation Army were created a long time ago, with the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) being "deeply involved and with funding from abroad". This view, it is important to mention, was even confirmed by former Pakistani

Ambassador to Myanmar, Kamruddin Ahmad, in his diplomatic memoir.

It is a concern not restricted to Bangladesh alone, however, but applies to the region as a whole. Which is what makes India and China's lack of action and involvement on the matter all the more surprising. China, to the surprise of some, had even vetoed a UN Security Council statement condemning the Myanmar government and its actions, along with Russia. Their reasoning being that it is an internal issue of Myanmar and that they have not seen any evidence to suggest that Myanmar is carrying out an ethnic cleansing campaign against the Rohingyas. Such a stance has been a major disappointment for Bangladesh. One, because although it is quite often

have been made against the Myanmar government, why not conduct their own independent investigations? In regards to Syria, which has been the victim of the worst conflict of the 21st century, Russia had constantly asked for investigations and political dialogue in the past. And that has actually worked. Instead of escalating the violence (when it could have a number of times) in Syria, the Russian initiative has now helped to nearly end that conflict, allowing for hundreds of thousands of Syrians to return to their homeland.

China too has done the same in regards to North Korea where, instead of increasing tensions, China has repeatedly called for dialogue and restraint. Thus, why not do the same in Myanmar, after

economic corridor and poses a real threat of increased extremism and destabilisation in the region should be enough for India to take the matter seriously.

And this is where Bangladesh should focus its diplomatic efforts—to bring China and Russia on board in trying to convince the Myanmar government to end all violence as soon as possible, and with the help of regional players like India and China, to try to find an immediate political settlement to the crisis. Keeping in mind PM Sheikh Hasina's five proposals to the UNGA, which were: i) "Myanmar must unconditionally stop the violence and the practice of ethnic cleansing in the Rakhine State immediately and forever";



China and Russia's veto on a UN Security Council statement condemning the Myanmar government and its actions has been a big disappointment for Bangladesh.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

the case that countries nowadays unjustifiably interfere in the internal affairs of others, causing major blowbacks that make things worse, it is difficult to justify, in this case, how this is only an internal affair of Myanmar.

This is because the violence that is forcing refugees to flee to Bangladesh is having a major effect on it as well. Isn't Myanmar supposed to take any responsibility for that? And what about the cost being inflicted upon Bangladesh? Why should Bangladesh have to foot the bill when it is the Myanmar government that has failed to maintain peace on its own territory and is forcing its own citizens to flee here?

If Russia and China have doubts as to the authenticity of the accusations that

conducting their own independent investigations? Of course, let us not forget that the Myanmar government had vehemently opposed investigations on its territory in the past.

Given, however, the amount of economic leverage China has over Myanmar, there is no reason why China cannot negotiate with Myanmar on this front, especially because it has very large investments in Rakhine, which would surely be badly affected, should things deteriorate any further.

India too should have the same concerns. Granted that it does not have as much investment in Myanmar as China; the mere fact that any form of violence in Myanmar threatens the Bangladesh-China-Myanmar-India

ii) The "Secretary General of the UN should send a 'fact-finding' mission to Myanmar"; iii) "All civilians, irrespective of religion and ethnicity must be protected in Myanmar"; iv) All sides will "ensure sustainable return of all forcibly displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh to their homes in Myanmar"; and v) "The recommendations of the Kofi Annan Commission Report must be immediately implemented, unconditionally and in its entirety."

These are all reasonable demands which the Myanmar government, if it is indeed sincere in regards to ending the violence, can and should, agree to.

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

Of Americans' deadly love affair with guns

TANBIR UDDIN ARMAN

GUN violence in the US has reached a horrifying level so much so that you will see records of it virtually every day if you visit the website of Gun Violence Archive (GVA)—a non-profit organisation that collects data on gun-related violence in the US. Data compiled by the GVA reveals a shocking human toll: there is a mass shooting—defined as four or more people shot in one incident, not including the shooter—every nine out of 10 days on average.

The deadliest ever took place just a couple of days ago when a gunman, Stephen Craig Paddock, opened fire on a crowd at a concert from the 32nd floor of Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, leaving at least 59 people dead and countless more injured. In another major incident in June last year, 53 people were killed by a shooter, apparently inspired by Islamic State, at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

It is projected that at the current rate, 339,000 people will die by guns by the early 2020s, which is roughly equivalent to the current population of Florida's Tampa. Ironically, despite a worrying spike in shooting deaths, gun control is neither acceptable nor desirable to the arms-loving Americans.

Barack Obama during his presidency tried to hammer home the point again and again that other developed countries such as the UK, Australia and Canada do not have gun violence issues that the US does. "We're the only country in the world where this happens, and it happens once a week," a visibly frustrated Obama said after a 2015 school shooting in Oregon.

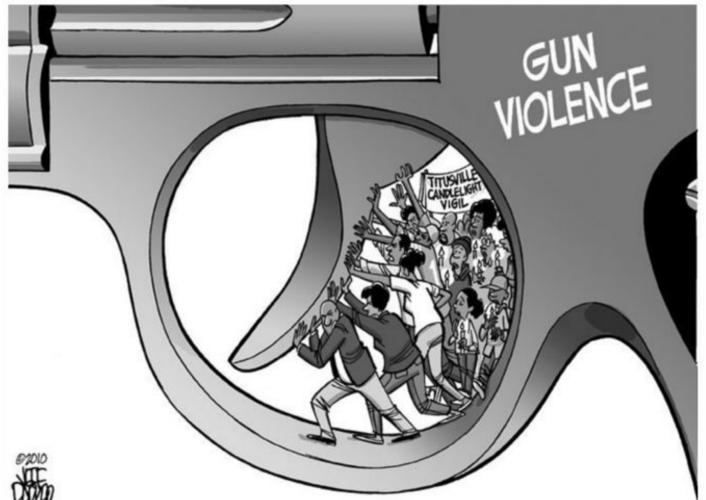
Understanding other countries' gun policy
In the UK, a person needs to get a certificate and proves he or she has a "good" reason to own a rifle or shotgun while a convict is not allowed to touch a gun for five years. Also, any firearm that has a barrel less than 30cm in length is banned outright.
In Canada, one applying for a mandatory licence must take a training course,

notify next-of-kin, have several references, and pass a rigorous background check apart from being on a 60-day waiting period. The results? A major drop in suicides and homicides. There are only 0.07 and 0.5 gun homicides per every 100,000 people in the UK and Canada respectively, whereas nearly four out of the same number of people are killed in the US, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

Australia is a rare example where there's a significant shift towards addi-

with a mark of at least 95 percent. Moreover, touching guns without or prior to obtaining licence may even result in 10 years in prison.

The country's law enforcement agencies rarely make use of firearms, putting much greater emphasis on judo, and the masses do not view gun ownership as a civil liberty either. In other words, there is no clamour in the Japanese society for gun regulations to be relaxed, a lot of which stems from its post-war sentiment of pacifism.



COURTESY: TWITTER

tional gun control measures. Following a 1996 shooting spree that left 35 Australians dead at the Port Arthur tourist spot in Tasmania, the Conservative-led government overhauled its gun laws and instituted a gun-buyback programme, where some 650,000 weapons were voluntarily handed in for USD 360m.

Japan presents yet another model that has all but eradicated gun crimes. If a Japanese citizen wishes to buy a gun, he or she must undergo an exhaustive application process involving several exams including passing a shooting-range test

America's terrible gun thirst
For the Americans, who are apparently so obsessed with guns, the aforementioned measures may seem utterly bizarre as over six in every 10 Americans think having a gun at their home makes it a safer place, including 81 percent of Republicans.

The US has some unique legal provisions for gun rights. The Second Amendment to its constitution itself protects the people's right to carry arms while the federal law says almost anyone can buy a gun, provided they are of age,

the gun is not an assault rifle or machine gun, and they are not a felon, fugitive or non-citizen.

Incidentally, as the debate over gun control gets heated, the sale of firearms shoots up. It is because people think they will not be able to buy guns in the near future which is why they end up going on a buying spree.

There is also a fallacy of a one-sided argument centring the debate. There has never been even a token opposition to such juggernaut gun rights lobbyists as National Rifle Association (NRA) and Second Amendment Foundation (SAF), which influence Congress members on arms policy in exchange for a significant amount of money from weapon industries in the form of donations, contributions, and fundraising assistance. That's not all. NRA reportedly uses its influence to gut research organisations' capacity to conduct research on the impact of firearms on human casualty, deliberately making it harder to conduct any scientific research.

Obama hoped to usher in an era of change whose presidency nonetheless ended not with a bang, but with a whimper as his repeated calls for gun control fell on deaf ears. Now, as the Donald Trump era has already dawned, anti-arms activists with their passionate pleas for arms control will be like a lone voice in the wilderness. President Trump during his electioneering had vowed to bin his predecessor's executive actions to streamline the gun purchase background check system and abolish gun-free zones at schools and on military bases.

Right after Trump's victory in the polls, the SAF, supporters of which rallied to the nth degree to elect a pro-gun president, posted images on social media stating: "Make the Second Amendment great again." In fact, making the Second Amendment great will be of no avail in making America great again. The sooner the Americans as a nation realise this, the better; or else they will continue to die such horrible deaths in their own land.

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