WOMEN AND GIRLS

The hardest hit Rohingya refugees

PAOLO LUBRANO

The majority of Rohingya refugees are women and children. Initial assessments suggest that 53 percent are female, 58 percent are under the age of 18, and 10 percent are either pregnant or lactating mothers.

OF the nearly half a million Rohingya refugees who've fled across the border and have sought refuge in Bangladesh, women and girls are the most at risk, sleeping under open skies, roadsides, and forest areas with little or no protection.

More than two-thirds have no shelter, half have no drinking water, and with the existing camps and host communities underequipped to deal with such a large influx, the ground situation is chaotic and volatile. We at Oxfam are seriously concerned about abuse and exploitation of women and children.

The majority of Rohingya refugees are women and children. Initial assessments suggest that 53 percent are female, 58 percent are under the age of 18, and 10 percent are either pregnant or lactating mothers. Many have lost their families, communities, and all their possessions, and after an emotionally and physically gruelling journey across the border, they are left with little hope.

They are greeted with overburdened camps and impoverished communities. The already appalling ground conditions have only been made worse by the recent torrential downpours which have also slowed delivery of aid and construction of facilities like wells, toilets, and shelter. There are reports of outbreaks of fevers, respiratory infections, dysentery, and diarrhoea.

The scale of the needs is enormous with a majority struggling for life-saving essentials like clean drinking water, food, medical supplies and essential facilities. In early September, the humanitarian partners estimated that 58 million litters of water is needed daily, 1.5 million kilos of rice is needed every month, and that 60,000 shelters, 20,000 toilets, and identifying land for more camps are among the most pressing needs. As the influx grows, so do the needs, and those of women, girls, and young children must be more carefully assessed and elaborated.

As of September 25, 2017, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), identified 180 cases of sexual violence against women and girls. Given the lack of safe spaces and reporting mechanisms, this figure can only be seen as the tip of the iceberg. Further, as William Lacy Swing, the Director General of the UN Migration Agency rightly puts it in his media statement, it is impossible to understand the scale of violence just by the number of reported cases.

The forms of violence include, and is not limited to, rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, and emotional abuse. A significant number of teenage girls are married, many are with children and pregnant, which makes the challenge of supporting them even more urgent.

Oxfam has so far supported nearly 140,000 people by providing clean drinking water and emergency food supplies, and by building facilities like tube wells and toilets in camps. Our dignity kits will include hygiene items for women, girls, and children.

We are also supporting local government and partners to design and build camps that are better equipped to meet the needs of the refugee population, especially women and girls. We advocate for adequate facilities to ensure that their safety and wellbeing are protected. For example, separate toilets, bathing areas, social spaces, and well-lit and safe access paths are essential to ensure protection of women and children. When there is a lack of child and women-friendly spaces, the risk of exploitation and violence is much higher.

Prevention of and support to the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence must be increased significantly. We underline the need for psycho-social support for all women, girls, and children, and especially those who've survived acts of violence.

We commend the efforts of the Bangladesh government, humanitarian partners, and local communities in providing life-saving assistance for the nearly half a million refugees. However, less than half the funding for the USD 77 million appeal launched by the humanitarian community a month ago has been committed so far.

Since then, the number of refugees has nearly doubled, the influx continues, and the needs of the more vulnerable populations such as women, girls, and children are yet to be fully responded to. Oxfam asks the governments, donors, and individuals to act now so that we can provide life-saving support immediately.

CREDIT: AURÉLIE MARRIER D'UNIENVILLE/OXFAM

A group of young Rohingya girls collect drinking water for their families from a local pump in Balhukali settlement, Bangladesh.

Paolo Lubrano is Oxfam's Regional Humanitarian Manager for Asia.

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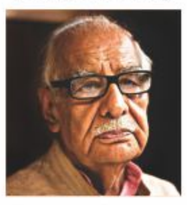
A part-time chief minister

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

UTTTAR Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath has said that he would be taking five days off in a month to attend to his duties as head priest of the Gorakhnath Temple. Television networks ran this part of his speech only once. Either the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) forced the channels to take the story off or the chief minister himself felt so embarrassed that he withdrew his statement. That could be the reason why the speech did not see the light of the day in print.

What Yogo had said was that he would continue to be the head priest and attend to the religious duties along with his callings as chief minister of the state. But this is only for the consumption of the people. Otherwise, he is continuing as head priest of the temple and also in his post as chief minister.

However, one disturbing thing which is obvious is that the gulf between Hindus and Muslims is increasing further. There is an atmosphere of communal tension. More than half of UP is under the gaze of police because there is a riot-like situation in most places. So much so, the centre, despite being ruled by the BJP, has expressed anxiety over the situation.

Unfortunately, Chief Minister Yogi is openly attending to the duties as *mahant* and also carries out what he considers is his task as chief minister. The situation is whimsical and the opposition parties have rightly criticised the Yogi for saffronising the office of chief minister. Apparently, the RSS backing is so strong that the chief minister could get away with what is parochial and partisan.

But this should not raise eyebrows. We all know that the appointment of the Yogi as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh came as a surprise to political observers. During the UP campaign, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the main campaigner, largely concentrated on the agenda of development. This was true despite his attempts, halfway through the election, to consolidate the Hindu vote through the use of communal speeches and words. Nor was there any major communal incident or riot, as happened prior to the 2014 national elections. But then what had become clear was that even if the BJP were to bring in development in UP as promised, the path to winning the 2019 general elections will be through communal polarisation.

This is where Adityanath, a familiar face in national politics due to his communal remarks from time to time, including those prior to the voting in western UP in an attempt to gain the Hindu and particularly the OBC vote in the face of Jat opposition, fitted it. A five-time MP from Gorakhpur since 1998, he was appointed the *mahant* in 2014 and the Gorakhnath *mutt* has been involved in political matters for decades.

What may not be as well known is the manner in which the Yogi rose to prominence in the late 1990s, gradually replacing the upper-caste mafia of the 1980s that dominated the politics of the region. This mafia had vast patronage and solid connections with political parties, but still had no communal linkages. The decline of this mafia provided space to Yogi, leading to a shift from caste-centric mafiadom to religious criminalisation. Adityanath also had the advantage of being a Rajput with good connection in the dominant upper-caste besides forging successfully an alliance with the OBCs and dalits to maintain a balance. That is how he, as a 26-year-old, was fielded as the BJP candidate from the Gorakhpur Lok Sabha constituency and, as they say, the rest is history.

Emerging as a leading force and communalising the politics of the region, there could not have been a better option than Adityanath to help the BJP win elections in 2019 as UP, with 80 Lok Sabha seats, would be vital in the party's scheme of things to capture power at the centre. Yet, there was much speculation as both Modi and party president Amit Shah wanted a person with a developmental image to lead the state. But the RSS had its way and persuaded Modi and Shah to accept Adityanath as the chief minister.

There are a number of reasons why the BJP-RSS has selected him to head the state. First, the 2000s have witnessed the attempt by the BJP to create a strong non-Brahmin Hindutva, not only in UP but in many states in the country. While in the 1980s and early 1990s the BJP was viewed as largely an upper-caste Hindu party, since at least the mid-1990s in UP there has been an attempt to consciously mobilise and bring into the ambit of the party non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav dalits, who constitute the large majority, in order to meet the challenge posed by the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party.

The chief minister should be attending to the immediate problems facing the state like the deaths at the Gorakhpur hospital and the burning issue of the Banaras Hindu University where the students have been agitating. The recent issue about the Taj Mahal, which is our heritage, having been removed from the list of UP Tourism attractions has added to the chapter of controversies.

We have the bitter experience of having part-time Prime Ministers. They embarrassed the party or a combination of parties and did little work when so many problems were awaiting solutions. This is what the BJP and chief minister Adityanath should remember because the party won the assembly polls on the promise of development. The greatest harm to the office of chief minister is that it is seen something like a temporary arrangement.

The UP chief minister staying away from his Lucknow office with all security to perform the rituals as the head priest for the five days is a violation of the Supreme Court order stating that public money cannot be used for religious purposes. A PIL should be filed to protest against the loss it has caused to the concept of democracy. Even otherwise, the larger question that needs an answer is whether Adityanath is a *mahant* first or the CM.

Yogi Adityanath (c) with Narendra Modi.

PHOTO: AFP

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

QUOTABLE *Quote*

KAZUO ISHIGURO

BRITISH NOVELIST, SHORT STORY WRITER AND WINNER OF THE 2017 NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE

As a writer, I'm more interested in what people tell themselves happened rather than what actually happened.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Herring's kin
5 Rat's home
10 Bea Arthur series
12 Laughable
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14 In a way, informally
15 Place to park
16 Tornado Alley event
18 Germ fighter Joseph
20 Refiner's supply
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23 Cardinal
24 Minimal money
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29 Eats in the evening
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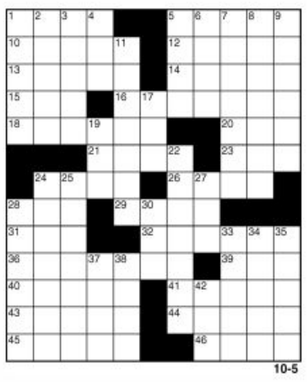
4 HST follower
5 Emphatic assent, in Spain
6 Adam's grandson
7 Devastated by fighting
8 Came in
9 Brought up
11 Ranges
17 Sardonic
19 Shoe colour
22 Ache battler
24 Cut-and-paste art
25 Finishes
27 Wagon puller
28 "Whether 'tis — ..."
30 Try out
33 Refinement
34 Turn outward
35 Billing info
37 Paisley person
38 Addition column
42 — de plume



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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT