

Stop the Rohingya influx

Vigorous diplomatic efforts needed

SOME 30,000 Rohingyas have streamed into Bangladesh in the latest outflow of people from Myanmar into Bangladesh. As the numbers increase exponentially, so do the casualties. A dozen people or so drowned and many more gone missing when a boat headed for Bangladesh capsized in the Naf River. With more than half a million Rohingyas now uprooted from their homes in Myanmar, we need to do something different on the diplomatic front to stem this tide of humanity headed towards Bangladesh.

The prime minister's five-point plan deserves to be considered seriously by the UN. It involves the immediate cessation of ethnic conflict that has been raging in the Rakhine State since August. The Myanmar government should refrain from halting of a UN fact-finding mission to that country to assess the gravity of the situation and of course the implementation of the Kofi Annan Commission's recommendations made earlier.

The world community appears to be divided on the plight of Rohingyas. With two of the five permanent members in the UN Security Council refusing any motion to take decisive action against Myanmar's deliberate and forceful eviction of the Rohingyas, Bangladesh must take a more robust diplomatic move to convince world leaders to change their stance on the Myanmar government's actions. The plight of more than 500,000 people who have been forced from their homes cannot be ignored by the world community and the UN must speak with one voice that such atrocities will not be tolerated.

BCL infighting

Rein in the unruly elements

WE are worried to know that a BCL member, a student of the law department at Leading University in Sylhet, was stabbed to death allegedly by his rival group members in Sylhet; and six other Chhatra League activists and two policemen were injured in another clash between the two factions of BCL in Chittagong Government College on October 16. As this daily has reported, the reason for both the incidents was due to the turf war in the college campuses.

Clashes between the various factions of BCL, the pro-Awami League student body, in public universities and colleges have become a regular phenomenon. The members of this student body often engage in fighting over petty issues which eventually end up in death and injury of their fellow students. In the Chittagong Government College incident, the altercation broke out over hanging banners on the college premises.

In most cases, the university or college authorities play the role of silent spectators and hardly take any disciplinary action against these so-called students. And regrettably, we barely see any action taken by the ruling party against the rowdy students of its student wing. The ruling party must not overlook these incidents and should take stern action against the unruly elements of its affiliated student body or risk tarnishing of image.

Needless to say, such violence by the BCL members ruins the academic environment of the campuses. Also, the safety and security of the general students are under threat. Unless punitive action is taken against those responsible for these incidents, such clashes will continue to happen and many more precious lives may be lost.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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DU should hold entrance test first

Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) delayed the date of its admission test until the result of Dhaka University's (DU) entrance test is released, meaning, SUST will have fewer candidates sitting for its entrance examination. On the other hand, Jahangirnagar University (JU) held its entrance test before DU.

Many of whom were accepted into JU will eventually choose DU because it is often the university they prefer. The only reason why they also attended the JU admission test is in case they are not accepted into DU.

This leads to the suffering of a huge number of candidates and their guardians and is one of the main reasons why they prefer a combined university entrance test. If universities cannot agree to that, they should at least hold their admission tests after DU's entrance examination result is published.

Md Tofazzel Hossain, *By email*

Our indifference towards research

Universities across the world are supposed to produce new ideas and conduct research but ours are entirely different. Our teachers go abroad for their higher studies and come back only to give classroom lectures. They hardly ever get involved with research work afterwards.

Students, in turn, aim at getting employed rather than to become a potential researcher. One could argue that very little fund is being allocated for research. But even with its limited capacity, Dhaka University was involved with quite a bit of research in the past. A lack of willingness on the part of university authorities may be a drawback that we should focus on.

Md Sumon Talukder
University of Dhaka

The realities of Rohingya refugees

What do we do next?

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

IN the last few days I had the opportunity to visit the Rohingya camps in Ukha near the Myanmar border to observe the conditions of the refugees as well as the environment of the area. I will

share some very preliminary observations on the situation.

The first is of course the overwhelming destitution of the refugees who have been forced to cross the border from Myanmar into Bangladesh with nothing but the clothes on their backs (and sometimes not even that).

Although the initial influx into Bangladesh of hundreds of thousands of these refugees caught everyone unawares and there was an element of chaos on our side of the border, since then the army has been deployed and there is now a semblance of order, with a number of camps being set up to house, feed and provide medical assistance to them. The circumstances are still dire, but at least there is some order.

It is certainly to the credit of the government and the people of Bangladesh that we have responded to this humanitarian crisis with humanity and a sense of solidarity with the incoming refugees. The support of the various UN agencies and other international allies and NGOs should also be acknowledged as a crisis of such magnitude cannot be shouldered by the government alone.

My second observation was the demographic make-up of the refugee population, somewhat unprecedented in that they consist overwhelmingly of small children, sometimes with their mothers but many being orphans. The number of pregnant young women was large and there were relatively few young men.

This fact presents a particular challenge for us: To cater to both the medical and educational needs of these babies, children and young women.

The third observation is the effect that the refugees and their camps are having on the environment of the area. Already, the forest department has allocated several thousand acres of forest land to set up the many camps (which are still



Shunsun Nahar, a 20-year-old Rohingya refugee, sits outside her makeshift tent at a refugee camp near Cox's Bazar.

PHOTO: REUTERS

being set up). The trees in that area have been totally decimated and even some wildlife has been affected as there are elephant trails in the vicinity (several refugees have been trampled by elephants).

While the immediate humanitarian assistance is paramount, some attention needs to be given to the environmental impact as the demand for dwellings and firewood for cooking will put a lot of pressure on the surrounding forest area.

Hence, we need to start thinking about how to deal with the problem in the longer term.

The immediate political and diplomatic efforts should, quite rightly, focus on persuading Myanmar to repatriate the refugees. However, any realistic assessment will tell us that we may not succeed in sending all of them back even with the most optimistic diplomatic scenario.

Therefore, we need to think of some long-term solutions to deal with this additional population in our country. This is indeed a highly complex problem

with humanitarian, political, law and order, security, development and environmental concerns, all of which need to be taken into account. Nor do these problems have simple solutions.

I do not claim to have any solutions to this mega-problem for Bangladesh, but would like to share a few thoughts.

The first conundrum to tackle is regarding where to house the refugees. In other words, should they be kept in confinement in camps or should they be allowed to disperse in the country? At the moment, the policy of the government seems to favour the former and locations are being made ready to transfer them from the camps they are in now.

However, confining refugees into camps for long periods of time has in the past (all over the world) proved to cause many more problems over time than they are supposed to solve in the short-term. Even though it is politically a very difficult choice for the government, it would be wise to think about allowing them to be resettled in different parts of

Bangladesh.

The second aspect that I feel must be a basis for prioritising our support to them is the fact that so many of them are babies and young children. This means that we need to accept responsibility for their upbringing and make sure that they are educated.

There is genuine fear that they will resort to criminal behaviour and this situation is more likely to come true if they are neglected rather than educated.

Finally, as the prime minister has quite rightly said, if we can feed 160 million Bangladeshis then we can share our food with another million Rohingyas. But we need to extend this pledge beyond simply feeding them to helping them develop over time. It will certainly be a burden for a poor country like Bangladesh, but it would be the right thing for us to do.

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PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Trump is strengthening Iran's radicals



ABBAS MILANI

THE United States and Iran have rarely agreed on how to proceed with nuclear talks or other elements of their bilateral relations. But synergies and similarities between two factions—Iranian hardliners and the hawks of the current US administration—are as counterintuitive as they are profound. Indeed, Donald Trump's new Iran strategy has given radicals in Tehran reason to celebrate, as they have found in the US president an unwitting ally in their quest for political dominance.

For years, Iran's "conservative

This view has led Iran to align more closely with Russia and China. But as crippling nuclear-related sanctions in recent years brought the Iranian economy to the verge of collapse, Iran's conservatives were forced to negotiate in good faith with the international community.

Even without sanctions, the Iranian economy would have been under severe strain. Corruption and mismanagement, along with structural and external challenges—such as falling oil prices, water shortages, and an aging unemployed population—had already weakened economic growth. The fact that China and Russia joined the most recent round of sanctions had made the radicals' position less tenable.

But if Iran's hardliners were frustrated by previous negotiations, their

points that they can use against their opponents at home.

Within Iran, a powerful coalition of moderate forces—ranging from reformists and dissidents to civil-society actors—has long advocated for a more engaged foreign policy. Wary of Russia's influence and uncertain of China's intentions, these forces have supported a continued Western orientation in economic and political ties. Moderates advocated for more responsible foreign policy and caution on the country's nuclear programme. And they sought to deepen ties to the Iranian diaspora, in the hope that closer relationships could help solve some of Iran's most daunting economic challenges.

Iranian moderates understood that the nuclear deal reached with the international community was flawed.



Trump speaks at a rally against the Iran nuclear deal in Washington, DC, on September 9, 2015.

PHOTO: AFP

radicals"—a concept that combines extreme conservatism in matters of faith and philosophy with radical views on violence—have argued that negotiation and rapprochement with the US are foolish and futile. The US, these hardliners believe, is interested only in regime change, and to fight Islam in the region.

disappointment vanished this Friday, on October 13. Trump's move to challenge the 2015 nuclear deal—formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA—has given them an unanticipated victory. While the most effective sanctions had already been lifted, and are unlikely to be re-imposed, Iran's conservatives have gained political

But they supported it nonetheless, hoping to leverage it for more freedom at home. President Hassan Rouhani famously promised a domestic version of the deal to heal Iran's political wounds, and to further address its economic woes. That pledge reflected Rouhani's broader effort to challenge and curtail the power of the Islamic

Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is rooted in the IRGC's control of large swaths of the Iranian economy. Now, with Trump's move, Rouhani's agenda, and that of the entire moderate coalition, is in jeopardy.

Most of those in the US who supported the nuclear deal were also aware of its flaws. But they saw the deal as an opportunity to engage Iranians who oppose the conservative radicals. American supporters believed that the vibrancy of Iranian civil society and social media boded well for the country, and hoped an Iran that was open to global markets would become more liberal politically.

Critics of the deal object that Iran's testing of ballistic missiles has continued unabated after the JCPOA was enacted. But it is folly to think that the US can curb Iran's nuclear and regional activities by unilaterally walking away. In fact, the deal's ultimate goal—to slow enrichment of uranium and halt nuclear testing—appears to have worked. Whatever problem Trump has with the agreement, it is worth remembering that no country can fix what it has rejected. And rejecting the JCPOA would only encourage the Iranian regime to resume the very activities that the deal was meant to contain or curtail.

Trump's challenge to the JCPOA will most likely encourage other egregious behaviour as well. One reason for the radicals' regional shenanigans—such as supporting militias in Yemen, Palestine, and Lebanon—is the belief that confrontation with the US or Israel is inevitable. Proxy forces like Hezbollah are, from this perspective, a tool either for deterring aggression or for deployment when fighting begins.

It is true that Iran's proxies have not holstered their guns as a result of the nuclear agreement. But tensions with the US did diminish. Now, following Trump's about-face, the possibility of confrontation between Iran and the US has returned, which will only embolden the resolve of Iran's proxy forces.

Unilateral US abrogation of the JCPOA is, in short, the worst of all policy options. No matter what Trump says, there are plenty of people in Iran, and the US, who share this view.

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