

Repatriation of Rohingyas

Myanmar looking for excuses

THE communiqué issued by Aung San Suu Kyi in response to a UN Security Council statement is disappointing. It is yet another reminder that Myanmar's government is looking for excuses to delay the resolution of the crisis.

Suu Kyi emphasises on solving the crisis 'bilaterally, in an amicable manner' with Bangladesh. That the US secretary of state and Bangladesh's foreign minister are poised to visit Myanmar soon seemed to match the statement.

However, it is hardly surprising that the Myanmar government caught the very first opportunity to lash out at the international community instead of reining in military operations in Rakhine State that have pushed hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas to Bangladesh.

The State Counsellor's statement argues that the UNSC statement, despite being watered down, hampers the bilateral efforts to repatriate Rohingyas from Bangladesh. In fact, it is Myanmar, whose acts threaten to derail efforts to reach a comprehensive settlement of Rohingya crisis.

Since Aung Sun Syu Kyi first expressed her willingness to repatriate Rohingyas in September, Myanmar government has raised different conditions during repatriation talks with Bangladesh, rather than agreeing to the categorical return of Rohingyas. Last week, Myanmar even ridiculously accused Bangladesh of delaying repatriation process. This betrays the actual intention of the Myanmar government and its lack of commitment to resolve the crisis.

Naypyidaw must refrain from using dubious tactics to avoid its responsibility of taking Rohingyas back. At the same time, it must create the conditions where Rohingyas will feel safe to return.

Teacher's disappearance

Halt the trend

THE recent disappearance of a university teacher and the circumstances under which it occurred have once again thrust into the limelight the administration's inability to provide security to the citizens. Mubashar Hasan, an assistant professor at the North South University, went missing on Tuesday and remains untraceable although police say they are trying their best to locate him as soon as possible. That's hardly reassuring, given their past record on the recovery of the victims of disappearances. Hasan is reportedly the ninth to have disappeared since the last week of August.

The regularity with which such incidents are taking place is disturbing. Earlier this year, the United Nations' working group on enforced and involuntary disappearances called on Bangladesh government to act immediately to halt the increasing number of disappearances and abductions in the country. Usually, there can be any number of reasons behind a disappearance, and while the urge to point fingers at the security forces may be instinctive, given their past records, it's not wise to jump to any conclusion without proof. But it's the response from officials that sometimes makes us uncomfortable.

The home minister, after Hasan's disappearance, has reportedly suggested that some people are disappearing of their own volition to embarrass the government. The rationale behind such remarks eludes us. Providing security to the citizens is the responsibility of the government. You can't sweet-talk your way out of it. The public needs assurance that they are safe, and the administration needs to show strong resolve, through concrete action, to halt the culture of disappearances and recover the victims—both for the sake of public safety and police's credibility.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Is Dina Wadia “Pakistan's daughter”?

This refers to an article titled “Dina Wadia: Passing away of Jinnah's only child” published by *The Daily Star*. There is a Parsi connection in the lives of both the daughter and the father. Dina married a Parsi man against her father's will, whereas Jinnah's second wife was Parsi.

Many don't know that Jinnah's descendants live in India. Therefore, it is debatable whether the late Dina Wadia should be called “Pakistan's daughter”. She wanted to visit her father when he was in critical condition but was denied a visa. She visited Pakistan only twice. Jinnah, like Nehru, had Parsi son-in-laws. There are many Parsis living in Pakistan.

With Dina Wadia's death, however, Pakistan's tenuous link with its founder is gone. It is also surprising that successive Pakistani governments never persuaded Dina to live in Pakistan. May her soul rest in peace.

Deendayal M Lulla, Mumbai

Women and online business

Online business is booming in Bangladesh. Online shopping enables the buyer to order a product or service through the Internet. Google Trends shows that “online shopping” is the fourth most-searched phrase in Bangladesh.

Aside from popular online shops, there are a few hundred little-known online shops in Dhaka and other big cities. Small-sized online vendors are using different techniques to increase their reach on Facebook.

It is noticeable that women are particularly interested in online business because it is hassle-free and does not require large capital or physical stores. E-commerce is surely an area of women empowerment in our country that deserves due credit.

Sadia Tarannum, By email

One step forward, two steps back!

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

IT is a supreme irony that victimhood and villainy sometimes get weighed on the same scale with material stake getting the better of the moral imperative.

Manifestly therefore, the concerns over the Rohingya crisis that most of the world shares with Bangladesh—with the exception of Myanmar—in which they are rooted, have remained at the focal point of global attention, but not of action as such.

The establishment in Naypyidaw may have been rattled by mounting international pressure to end the collusive violence between the military and the Buddhist vigilantes that has all but emptied Rakhine State of minority Muslims, but the ruling junta is working overtime towards three agendas: One, looking to dictate the size and frequency of repatriation instalments; two, curtail the number of returnees so as not to outnumber the Buddhists in Rakhine State; and three, engage them in hamlets to flush them out at intervals as they have done over the years.

In such a context, their return with dignity, honour, livelihood and security can only be guaranteed by relocating them to IOM/UN-supervised safe zones leading to the restoration of their full citizenship rights.

It is in the interest of all concerned—the sending country, the host country, and inter- and intra-regional countries—that a sustainable solution is found to prevent textbook ethnic cleansing episodes against the weak and vulnerable from erupting time and again.

Lately, we have had unanimous condemnatory statements from the United Nations Security Council and the 63rd General Assembly of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association held in Dhaka. Both the statements fell short of “resolutions” obviously for varying reasons, not to mention the difference in the calibration and clout of the respective platforms.

Incidentally, Myanmar, which was called Burma when it was offered the membership of the Commonwealth in 1948, refused to join it in a huff, true to its predilection to comfort in corralled cocoon, so to speak.

So forgetful of the Arakanese ancestry the country's historians have been, that it reads bizarrely amnesic! This is illustrated by the lyricist, singer, poet and translator (of Padmavati) Alaol, a son of



A Rohingya woman carries a child through Kutupalong refugee camp in Ukhia on September 28, 2017.

PHOTO: AFP

Faridpur who had come under the wings of Magan Thakur, the chief minister of Rosang, the old name of Arakan province. The minister became the music disciple of Alaol who had mastered many languages—around the middle of the seventeenth century—to wield considerable influence in the now-troubled Rakhine State.

A likely veto from China stood in the way of passing a directional resolution by the UN Security Council. On the other hand, the CPA, a platform of 52 countries, could not adopt a resolution because of legal and time constraints.

Myanmar's State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi has reacted strongly to the UNSC's unanimous statement—softer than a resolution she should be happy about—urging the Myanmar government “to end the excessive military force and inter-communal violence” that has devastated the Rohingya community in Rakhine State.

What betrays a sad lack of gumption on her part is the statement that the UNSC's remarks may obstruct the process of bilateral negotiations that, according to her, were about to get underway.

The UNSC statement, at any rate, has been forward-looking in some aspects.

For instance, it has categorically emphasised on the UN refugee agency and other relevant international organisations like IOM to fully participate in a joint working group. This can ensure safe and voluntary return of all Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.

The UNSC is “determined” to continue to closely follow the situation in Myanmar. It has requested the Secretary General to brief the council on the developments in Rakhine 30 days after the adoption of the statement.

The first hurdle is Naypyidaw's insistence on a strict bilateral formation of the joint working group. But the sticking point for Bangladesh is involvement of an UN agency in the repatriation process.

The second point of discord is fundamental in nature: Myanmar's Union Minister for Office of the State Counsellor Kyaw Tint Swe, during his visit to Dhaka, referred to the April 28, 1992 agreement as the basis to take back the refugees who could establish their bona fide residency in Myanmar prior to their departure from Bangladesh. In contrast, Bangladesh Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali did not agree to

Naypyidaw's proposal of adhering to the

criterion of 1992.

The context in 2017 is different with huge numbers being involved. Many of the refugees had left their abodes and rushed to Bangladesh in fear of being killed without any papers whatsoever. Thus, verification will have to be based on a three-tier system: registration of Bangladesh authorities and cards issued by them; verification from Myanmar's side and the UNCHR's inputs from both the Myanmar and Bangladesh sides.

The Myanmar government's commitment, to ensure that the humanitarian assistance and development work undertaken by the Union Enterprise Mechanism, is provided for the benefit of all communities, may be taken with a pinch of salt. Remember, Aung San Suu Kyi's spearheading speech after a long silence: it made a point about multiple priorities on her hand implying, one may infer, that she has to distinguish between the major and the minor, an apology for not keeping abreast of happenings in Rakhine, one would have thought.

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Diversity is strength

IN OTHER WORDS



AMITAVA KAR

way their organisations are run. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appointed a gender-balanced cabinet of 50 percent women and 50 percent men, some of whom are minorities even

proves that diversity is like fresh air. It benefits everyone who experiences it.

Similarly, organisations that create inclusive workplaces and encourage equal opportunities for all employees outperform their competitors. A 2015 McKinsey survey found that those in the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity in management were 35 percent more likely to have returns above the industry average, and those in the top quartile for gender diversity were 15 percent more likely to have returns above the industry average.

Other bodies of research have proven that diverse teams are smarter and more

diverse, an organisation can encourage employees to watch their own potential biases—fixed ways of thinking that can hinder their ability to see important facts and even lead them to make mistakes in decision-making processes. According to Harvard Business School Professor Francesca Gino who teaches a PhD course on behavioural approaches to decision-making, “That our decisions get sidetracked by biases is now well established. While it is hard to change how our brains are wired, it's possible to change the context of decisions by architecting the composition of decision-making teams for more



PHOTO: REUTERS

Navdeep Singh Bains, Canada's Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, with PM Trudeau. Last year, Trudeau told an American audience that he has more Sikhs in his cabinet than his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

among minorities.

Somalia-born Ahmed Hussen is Canada's Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. Harjit Singh Sajjan, born in Punjab, became the first Sikh Minister of Defence and the fourth Sikh to be inducted into the Trudeau cabinet. Known for his witty repartees, Trudeau told an American audience last year that he has more Sikhs in his cabinet than his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi. Today Trudeau's country

creative. A study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* suggests that people from diverse backgrounds can alter the behaviour of a group in ways that lead to sharpened group thinking. Non-homogeneous teams are more likely to re-examine facts and remain objective. They also encourage greater scrutiny of each member's actions, keeping their collective cognitive resources at vigil.

By making the workplace more

By making the workplace more diverse, an organisation can encourage employees to watch their own potential biases—fixed ways of thinking that can hinder their ability to see important facts and even lead them to make mistakes in decision-making processes.

diverse perspectives.”

There is also evidence to support the rational idea that people with different perspectives can boost creativity. Research by the University of Chicago has indicated that people with more diverse sources of information usually generate better ideas. Diverse workforces are often more innovative than others.

Despite all these arguments for diversity, the human tendency is to resist it. Most of us feel more at ease with

those who share our backgrounds. A *Harvard Business Review* paper titled “Why Diverse Teams Are Smarter” published in 2016 cautions us against that. “Don't be fooled by your comfort. Hiring individuals who do not look, talk, or think like you can allow you to dodge the costly pitfalls of conformity, which discourages innovative thinking.”

Adding to the evidence for diversity's benefits, several studies show that companies with more women are more innovative. Women take their jobs beyond box-ticking. A recent report by *The Daily Star* on the eight female UNOs of Kishoreganj District titled “Women take helm of Kishoreganj haors” will support this claim. It is encouraging to see women become deputy commissioners and even secretaries nowadays.

Diversity is strength. It does not, however, produce better results automatically. It does so only when managed well. Experts believe that the biggest challenge has to do with trust. Employees from different backgrounds need to trust each other to produce their best work. And different groups forge trust in different ways.

A second challenge has to do with culture. Too many companies fail to re-strategise their management styles as they hire new groups. They issue one-size-fits-all instructions to everyone hoping that they will get the message. For example, companies should be careful about telling employees to “act like an owner”. To some, it might mean playing golf all day rather than showing up at work.

Some employers are impressed by the ability to “speak up” without realising that some people—women especially, in many cultures—are brought up to be submissive. Research shows that women are shy when it comes to asking for promotions as often as men do, and are reluctant to take jobs for which they feel they are not experienced enough. Organisations should have the cultural intelligence to acknowledge these issues.

In a nutshell, when companies open their doors to members of different genders, races, and ethnicities, they boost their intellectual and financial potential. We live in a universe that is characterised by diversity. It is only natural for organisations to be the same.

Amitava Kar is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.