

US veto is not backed by anyone

Peace process in serious jeopardy

THE veto in the Security Council does not surprise us. Trump administration's blatant pro-Israeli tilt made a veto inevitable. It needs to be pointed out that the vetoed Security Council resolution was nothing but a reiteration of the old position, that Jerusalem, must be settled as a part of the overall peace process – a position to which US has been an integral part. No wonder the split in the Security Council vote was 14 to 1, with all US allies voting against it.

The US decision on Jerusalem has significantly pushed back the peace prospect as it has seriously harmed the US position as an honest broker. With each passing day, the Jerusalem decision appears more a faulty decision than a helpful one. As has been urged by the international community the US should seriously re-think its decision.

President Trump's cavalier manner of deciding on domestic issues has already created many problems at home. To apply the same attitudes on an issue that can easily be termed as perhaps the most complex of all international issues speaks neither of wisdom nor of any long term strategy of peace.

Tragic deaths at a qulkhwani

Why was there no crowd control mechanism in place?

WE are shocked at the death of 10 people in a stampede during the qulkhwani of former Chittagong mayor ABM Mohammad Chowdhury on December 18. According to our report, 40 other people were also injured in the incident. The tragedy occurred as several hundred people scrambled for food at the entrance to Rima Convention Centre in the port city's Askar Dighar Par area. It has been alleged that while the convention centre has the capacity to feed 4,000 people, the organisers were planning to feed around 10,000 people. If that is so, why were no precautionary measures taken to control the crowds?

Deaths in stampedes are nothing new in our country. In July 2015, 27 people died in a similar stampede during zakaat distribution at a businessman's house in Mymensingh. Repeatedly such incidents only bring to the fore the lapses in the system in managing big crowds. In this specific case, what we know of so far is that the crowd was huge, the entrance to the convention centre was narrow, and there was also a slope at the entry. Enough reasons for such a tragedy to occur. However, as a case has already been filed and a probe committee formed by the district administration to investigate the incident, we hope to know the exact reasons behind this incident once the committee as well as the police submit their reports. As for now, the authorities must initiate a crowd control mechanism in place while arranging such big scale events involving thousands of people.

Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to the families who lost their near ones, and we wish early recovery of those injured in the incident. This terrible incident should be a lesson for all of us to make sure such tragedies are prevented in the future.

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

AS this month of December is both the end of the calendar year as well as the month when we commemorate the 47th year of Bangladesh's existence as an independent country, I am going to write this column with a look into the future where Bangladesh can go over next few decades. These thoughts may sound visionary or perhaps even unrealistic, but they are not impossible and well within the realm of the achievable.

The first opportunity I will focus on is the ability to adapt to the projected, as well as, real adverse impacts of anthropogenic climate change over the coming decades. As the world heads towards a global temperature rise of over 2 Degrees Centigrade (which will also require heroic global efforts at mitigation of greenhouse gases) the adverse impacts will be felt in every country of the world.

As Bangladesh is already well ahead of most other countries in developing adaption plans, actions, research and knowledge we can, in fact, harness that knowledge and export it to other developing countries (and even to developed countries). In order to do so we need to develop a climate change adaptation corps that would provide knowledge and technical assistance to other countries. The way to do this most effectively is to invite people from those countries to come to Bangladesh to learn from our farmers, fisher folk, communities, scientists and policymakers.

Bangladesh has already had experience of teaching the world about microfinance through the pioneering Grameen Bank and others over the last few decades. We now have the basis for teaching the world how to adapt to climate change.

The second area to focus on is



COURTESY: WHO

investing in our youth and children with high quality education, training and knowledge not just enabling them to get jobs but make them into entrepreneurs and problem solvers. Again, we have already reaped the benefits of investing in educating girls over the last decades so that they have become highly productive workers in the garments sector and even more importantly, to exercise their right to family planning.

The next phase of our investment in youth again needs to emphasise investments in educating and training more girls than boys (as this will give us better social returns on our investment). An important aspect of this investment in enhancing our human resources as the excellent raw material that we have in the hundreds of thousands of university students studying in over a hundred public and private universities all over the country. We need to invest in making them entrepreneurs and problem solvers and not just white collar job seekers. These young people are second to none

in their levels of intelligence and enthusiasm and we can enable them to not only help solve Bangladesh's problems but global problems like climate change.

The third issue I will focus on is related to both the above in focusing on the opportunity of leapfrogging our knowledge and use of technology, in particular web based technology. The Prime Minister has already prioritised this idea in wanting to bring about digital Bangladesh and it needs to start with empowering our children through these new opportunities. As any parent with a child having a smart phone is aware, children absorb how to use them so quickly that it becomes second nature to them (something that adults find harder to do).

The fourth and final area where we can and should aim to make transformational change is in the investments made by the national and foreign private sectors. These need to be channelled into clean and

green industries and services rather than in ones that destroy and pollute the environment. While government policies and regulations have a major role to play here, I feel that the onus is more on the more honest, progressive and farsighted members of the private sector themselves to take the lead and to crowd out the polluting and corrupt members of the business community.

The above four areas of targeted future investment needs to be prioritised policy-wise in order for Bangladesh to leapfrog and transform itself into becoming climate resilient with a healthy growth based on green and clean technologies as well as with the smartest and most productive human resources. This is achievable within a generation. It is achievable within their part.

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ROHINGYA CRISIS

Is Third-Country Resettlement an Option?



MOHAMMAD ZAMAN

MY recent op-ed in *The Daily Star* (December 11 2017) was on the Rohingya repatriation and resettlement issue. This is slowly brewing into a contentious issue given the fairly vague but speedy repatriation proposal by the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and the concurrent

announcement by the Myanmar government to relocate the Rohingya returnees to temporary camps in Rakhine state. This means that those to be repatriated would not be allowed to return to their original homes, thus raising enormous fear and tensions among the refugees in makeshift camps in Ukhia and Teknaf in Cox's Bazar.

Many Rohingyas refugees have reported appalling violation of human rights, atrocities and many forms of abuses, including homes and villages being burned down, parents and relatives being killed in

forces tortured them and their families.

It is reported that the PM recalled the experiences of the Bangladeshi refugees, who fled to India in 1971 in the face of military crackdowns by the Pakistan army. The PM assured the Rohingyas refugees of food and shelter on humanitarian grounds. She, however, asserted that the Rohingyas refugees are Myanmar nationals and that "Myanmar must take its citizens back" and urged the international community to exert pressure on Myanmar to repatriate the refugees.

For repatriation to take place, the Myanmar regime must demonstrate to the international community that peace and stability has been restored and rule of law established in Rakhine state. Furthermore, as a first step, full humanitarian access must be granted, including broader UN and NGO consent. Also, the returnees must be allowed to return home with full support and assistance for rebuilding their homes and livelihoods. Their rights to self-identification as Rohingyas and full rights as citizens, which have been systematically denied and/or restricted by the regime, must be

maintain peace, foster reconciliation and offer a sense of hope to the hard-pressed Rohingyas population.

The repatriation agreement signed by GOB and the Myanmar government can at best be viewed as an "entry point" to address this humanitarian crisis. Given the situations in Rakhine state, and lack of readiness by the Myanmar regime, it may take years or even decades to resolve the refugee crisis. As of December 7, 2017, close to 800,000 Rohingyas refugees have been registered from 12 makeshift camps of this, 36,000 have been identified as orphan boys and girls. Ultimately, it may so happen that many refugees will be made ineligible to return as Myanmar has the upper hand, as per the agreement, on who can return after being properly verified. Therefore, in addition to refugee repatriation, the government should consider all possible options for refugee resettlement.

One possible option in case of such massive displacement by ethnic conflicts is third-country resettlement of displaced refugees. There are many examples of such third-country refugee resettlement from many hotspots globally, caused by ethnic conflicts, wars and other forms of disasters and displacements. For Rohingyas, this was flagged clearly by UNHCR as early as February 2017 with a request to the Bangladesh government to allow negotiating with the United States, Canada, and some European countries to resettle around 1,000 Rohingyas refugees. Under the current political climate in the U.S., it may be a hard sell for UNHCR; however, there are other countries such as Canada, Australia, Germany and other European and Scandinavian countries that still welcome people on humanitarian grounds. The UNHCR has a clear responsibility to pursue this protection-oriented resettlement programme for Rohingyas refugees in Bangladesh.

A successful third-country resettlement of Rohingyas is very much possible. In my view, the UNHCR was very conservative in terms of exploring third-country resettlement potential. For instance, Canada alone took 25,000 Syrians refugees in 2016. In Europe, Germany received over 300,000 asylum seekers. The United Kingdom has pledged to take in 20,000 refugees who are currently living in camps in Syria, Turkey and Jordan. Such a third-country resettlement will lessen the current burden on the Bangladesh government and at the same time provide huge opportunities for a better future for literally hundreds and thousands of Rohingyas refugees. Therefore, the Government of Bangladesh should work with UNHCR and facilitate such resettlement arrangements through establishing a high-powered committee for third-country Rohingyas resettlement involving relevant UN agencies, International Organization of Migration (IOM), NGOs/civil society working with the refugees, and representatives of potential sponsor countries. The UNHCR can play the role of a catalyst in making this happen with the support of the government and in coordination with the sponsoring states by establishing multi-year pledges for refugee resettlement in third countries.



Rohingya refugees walk past the Balukhali Rohingya camp near Ukhia on the Bangladesh border. PHOTO: AFP

front of their children, and women and girls being raped or brutalised. According to a recent estimate by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), at least 6,700 Rohingyas were killed in Myanmar between August 25 and September 24, 2017 after violence broke out in Rakhine state. The Rohingya situation in Myanmar is thus a "textbook" case of genocide.

Can the refugees really be repatriated while the circumstances that led to the current situation continue and remain unresolved? It is obvious that the conditions are not right for repatriation any time soon – not even in years, according to many experts. The United Nations has repeatedly warned against any hasty return of Rohingyas. Even Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, during her visit to Kutupalong refugee camp, demanded an end to the ongoing persecution against the Rohingyas. Many refugees reportedly burst into tears while narrating their sufferings to the PM and how Myanmar security

guaranteed. Returning to camps in Rakhine state should not be an option. There are already over 100,000 displaced Rohingyas in abusive camp life in central Rakhine displaced by the 2012 violence against them. It has to be remembered that Myanmar created the refugee problem and must address it following all international standards and practices.

The Rohingya repatriation, therefore, should not be viewed as desired by Myanmar as a bilateral issue; the international communities and agencies, starting with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) must be involved in the implementation and monitoring of any repatriation arrangements. It is also important that multilateral agencies such as the UN and European Union work together with the Myanmar regime to address the root causes of the crisis and push for the full implementation of the Kofi Annan Commission Report, which recommended urgent and sustained actions to prevent violence,

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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US should reconsider its support for Israel

The fact that all member states of the United Nations Security Council except the United States supported the draft resolution rejecting President Donald Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital should serve as a stark warning to the US to stand as a global leader is currently under threat. I was watching live on television when the president of the council was asking member states to vote on the resolution. What followed was an embarrassing scene.

It is very rare for the US to see itself fully cornered at the Security Council, whose current member states include many US allies.

The time has come for the US to reconsider whether it is worth being cornered like this for the sake of just one of its allies, that too, one which has so little moral standing in the community of nations. The country needs to see what other countries are already seeing. That recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital does not serve the cause of peace whatsoever.

At best, it can only strengthen Donald Trump's political standing among a small group of evangelical Christians. The price for that is too steep, as evident by the rejection to receive the US Vice President Mike Pence by many Middle Eastern religious leaders.

Naem Janan, By mail

