

Rohingyas need protection, not relocation to Bashan Char



MOHAMMAD ZAMAN

Ultimately, it should not surprise anyone if Myanmar refuses to take all refugees and/or it takes years to resolve this crisis. Therefore, the repatriation arrangements must be accompanied and monitored carefully by the UNHCR.

MY recent op-eds in *The Daily Star* on Rohingya repatriation and resettlement sparked many responses from readers in Bangladesh as well as expatriate Bangladeshis. While most readers seemed to have liked my views and analysis of this complex issue and the stake involved in any hasty repatriation, others expressed mixed reactions to my proposal for third-country resettlement as an option and my remarks that relocation of refugees to Bashan Char would be a great mistake. It is difficult to fathom how the victims of genocide and ethnic cleansing can return to Myanmar anytime soon if the root causes of this carnage against humanity by the Myanmar military are not addressed in the first place.

According to all available reports, conditions are far from congenial for the return of Rohingya refugees due to the ongoing violence and wholesale destruction of villages. Despite this, a repatriation agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar was signed on November 23, 2017 and the first batch of 450 refugees will return to Myanmar on January 22, 2018.

The returnees will live in camps like others—an estimated 120,000—who are living in squalid camps in Myanmar. There are no other details regarding the repatriation programme; for instance, whether they will be allowed to return to their original villages, when and how they will build their houses, when and how they will get back their lands/livelihoods, and whether their citizenship and basic rights are guaranteed under the repatriation agreement. For the returnee, this may drag out for generations.

It goes without saying that Bangladesh has shown to the world an unparalleled humanitarian gesture by stepping up and taking on such a huge burden. It was a major challenge and a real test for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who has been lauded internationally for her support to the Rohingya refugees.

However, the repatriation of close to a million refugees on a fast track without creating the requisite conditions and building confidence among the returnees raises serious doubts about the road ahead. It is very likely that the repatriation scheme will face many roadblocks on the way. Indeed, there are plenty

of reasons for skepticism.

The announcement on December 28, 2017 by Myanmar of the 450 refugees' repatriation allegedly without consultation with Bangladesh was not cause for celebration; on the contrary, the Bangladesh officials were caught off guard with the announcement. For Myanmar, the rush for repatriation is more symbolic to ward off international pressure on the country.

The details of the arrangement for repatriation are to be finalised in the first meeting of the Bangladesh-Myanmar Joint Working Group (JWG) in Naypyitaw around mid-January 2018. According to an official of the Rohingya Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC), Bangladesh

parallel the root causes of the crisis, and push for full implementation of the findings of the Annan Commission, including measures for reconciliation between the largely Buddhist and Rohingya communities. Bob Rae, the Canadian Rohingya envoy, has already raised the issues in his interim report to the Government of Canada.

In view of the above, it appears that there are many challenging tasks ahead, perhaps dating back to the first wave of Rohingyas (1978-1990) in Bangladesh. Many issues are very old and sensitive, and largely geo-political and economic in nature for countries in the region (China, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and the Philippines). This reality was truly reflected when these

safely return to their homeland anytime soon and rebuild their future. Meanwhile, the Rohingyas need protection and support in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. The government, instead of dumping USD 280 million for infrastructure development on an offshore and uninhabited island named Bashan Char for refugee relocation, can invest the money for improving the precarious conditions of the existing camps. The refugees need better shelter (instead of tarpaulin and bamboo shacks), drinking water, sanitation, roads, schools, and more support and services in those rough makeshift camps.

Relocation to Bashan Char of 100,000 Rohingya refugees, which is one-tenth of the total refugee population, is not going to help resolve issues like lack of space for resettlement, or minimise conflicts between Bangladeshis and Rohingyas, as claimed by the government. Relocation of refugees to this isolated island, I am afraid, would eventually lead to a situation resembling a detention camp for refugees. Many UN agencies as well as Human Rights Watch have already condemned this proposal as it would deprive the refugees of their rights to freedom of movement; this will also constitute violation of Bangladesh's obligations under international human rights laws. Relocation to Bashan Char is a terrible idea and should be abandoned altogether.

Finally, despite all good intentions and efforts, Myanmar will likely not accept all refugees for one or more reasons. This is very clear even today. Therefore, the government should take a three-fold approach to refugee repatriation and resettlement. The first approach is voluntary repatriation to Myanmar with full rights of citizenship. The second is third-country resettlement of refugees who are unable to return and/or refused re-entry by the Myanmar government. This will require harnessing sympathy from countries such as Australia, Canada, and other European countries for resettlement of refugees on humanitarian grounds. Other potential countries for Rohingya resettlement may include Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Third, the government should seek help from donor countries in helping Bangladesh cope with the many Rohingyas who are likely to remain in camps in Bangladesh over the next several years.



Rohingya refugees arriving by boat in Bangladesh in September last year.

PHOTO: AFP

would hand over a list of one lakh (100,000) refugees to the Myanmar representative at the JWG at the mid-January meeting. The returnees would be randomly picked without discrimination by religion, sex or age. The repatriation process may cause more tensions and dispute with regards to the returnees, i.e. who can return and/or considered ineligible as per the agreed verification procedures by Myanmar.

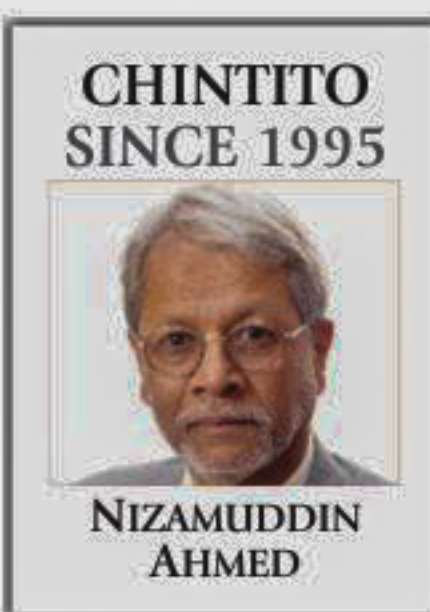
Ultimately, it should not surprise anyone if Myanmar refuses to take all refugees and/or it takes years to resolve this crisis. Therefore, the repatriation arrangements must be accompanied and monitored carefully by the UNHCR. The international community must also address in

countries, including Russia, joined Myanmar in voting against the UN resolution calling Myanmar to allow access to aid workers, ensure the return of all refugees, grant full citizenship rights to Rohingyas, and appointment of a UN special envoy for Myanmar. Since the UN system appears to have failed to resolve the crisis, Bangladesh must engage in serious diplomacy and dialogue with China, India and other East Asian countries to solve the problem.

For Bangladesh, the repatriation of the Rohingya refugees with dignity and full citizenship rights remains the only viable solution, but the circumstances surrounding the Rohingya crisis do not look promising for them to

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The world has changed



CHINTITO SINCE 1995

NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

THE UN General Assembly not long ago (December 20, 2017) witnessed a spectacle, unparalleled in the realm of international diplomacy since the days of the Third Reich, and that's more than 50 years ago. The earlier threat by

President Trump after the US was singled out in the UN Security Council (reference Jerusalem) was not surprising because that is how the business tycoon has been running (or not) his administration—tactics unapproved by most of his countrymen, and perhaps voters.

What left the world baffled was no-knuckles covered intimidation by the country's ambassador Nikki Haley. Till that moment, I was under the impression that North Korea's so-called "old lunatic, mean trickster and human reject" was alone in his diatribe against anyone who did not see eye to eye with him. We were so wrong. There are many more trumpets out there.

Just before the house went to vote condemning Trump's proclamation on December 6 recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, Nikki warned the countries of the world, allies or otherwise, that should they disapprove Trump's decision they could be short-funded. Said the US ambassador to the UN, "The United States will remember this day in which it was singled out for attack

in this assembly. We will remember it when we are called upon to once again make the world's largest contribution" to the UN, and when other member nations ask Washington "to pay even more and to use our influence for their benefit." Ouch! That sort of language is not apt against even downright beggars since Adolf Hitler begged for tragic Eva Braun's hand in marriage.

Children are loved for such behaviour. Said the five-year-old, "If you do not share your candy with me, I shall not let you play with my bat." At another kindergarten, a toddler managed to utter, "Because you pinched my doll, you are not invited to my birthday party." Surely diplomats are trained to do better.

Nikki's lonely voice reverberated in the hall, as she included the whole of America on Trump's side, "That is what the American people want us to do." For Melania's sake! At 35 percent (CNN poll, December 19) DJT has the worst approval rating in a December of any elected president's first year in the White House.

Haley's remarks followed a threat from Trump himself, who reflected on the forthcoming UN vote at a Cabinet meeting. "We're watching those votes," the President said. "Let them vote against us, we'll save a lot. We don't care." Saving is obvious, but money in the coffer is useless when the world does not care, and one becomes friendless.

Trump and Nikki, and hopefully not the rest of the US, went down 9-128. The eight countries that voted in favour of Trump's

Jerusalem move do not include (no surprises) UK, Canada, South Americans, EU, ASEAN, the Arab world...; they are Guatemala (population 1.71 crore), Honduras (93 lakh), Israel (84 lakh), Marshall Islands (53,000), Micronesia (530,000), Nauru (10,000), Palau (22,000) and Togo (8 lakh), mostly islands in the Pacific Ocean.

Donald Trump's brawny declaration is akin to recognising the Holy City as the legitimate abode of only the Jews, seeing that the State of Israel is built around the Abrahamic religion of Judaism, which grants all Jews and people of Jewish descent the right to citizenship. However, like in any other country there will be the active presence of fragments of other religions. Overwhelmingly, nearly 20 percent of the population is Muslim and they practise Islam despite "the restrictions, intimidation as well as methodical destruction of Islamic religious sites by the Israeli military."

Jerusalem is a sacred city for the Muslims because within its Old City, on the raised Haram esh-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary), rests the Dome of the Rock monument and the Al-Aqsa Mosque built in the Umayyad period. The Dome, constructed in 692 AD, remains one of the oldest surviving Islamic structures in the world, and marks the place from where Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) ascended to heaven. The al-Aqsa Mosque was completed in 705 AD.

Haram esh-Sharif of the Muslims is revered as the Temple Mount by Jews and Christians alike. According to Jewish scrip-

ture, the first Temple was built on the Mount by King Solomon, son of King David, 957 BC, but was destroyed by the Babylonians. The second was constructed under the auspices of Zerubbabel in 516 BCE and destroyed by the Roman Empire in 70 AD. The location is the holiest site in Judaism, associated with Jewish biblical prophets, who are also respected in Islam. It is the place Jews turn towards during prayer.

The city is also venerated by Christians because most of them believe that Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre is where Jesus (pbuh) was crucified.

Then there is the dual claim on the historic Western Wall. Muslims believe Prophet Muhammad, on his night journey to Jerusalem before ascending to paradise, tied his steed, al-Buraq, to this wall. From Jewish point of view, because entry to Temple Mount was restricted, the Wall is the holiest place where Jews are permitted to pray and wail, hence the nomenclature, Wailing Wall (for the destroyed temples).

The site is managed as a Waqf by the Muslim community of Jerusalem since the 13th Century without interruption. But, because Israel, or more pointedly its Army, controls the Old City since 1967, both Israel and Palestine claim sovereignty over it. In the midst of this longstanding apple of discord between Israel and the Muslim world, Donald Trump pops up from political anonymity to US presidency to declare the city as the capital of one of the two countries.

Even before Trump knew how to tweet,

Israel had unilaterally and provocatively declared Jerusalem its capital, which standpoint is disputed internationally and had always been rejected by the United Nations, including the USA, that is, up until the Grand Old Party failed to find a candidate other than Trump.

The world has changed since Donald inherited the "T" empire from daddy... More countries can today rely on its own resources with a little help from allies other than the traditional biggies. In other words, there are now newer hubs in the world, and our planet today is divided along more than two axes (pun not intended); the USA-Israel+7 being the latest kid on the block.


Intimidations today no longer work as effectively as in the past because there is greater prosperity among countries as well as greater conflict. People too are working harder, getting educated, more connected via social network, thinking differently, and finding newer ambitions to achieve. Information Technology has been a revolution and the effects are showing.

If one aggrieved block cuts off oil supply, any other country is ready to surmount oceans to deliver it to the "victim's" doorstep. If one country's food supply is blockaded, counter measures will see to it that the barricade is made meaningless. Money is the dominating force. Some call it economic sense because politics has taken second spot to trade, internationally as well as locally.

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A WORD

A DAY



[X] ENOPHILIA

NOUN

An affection for unknown/foreign objects or people.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	34 Discoverer's cry	8 Fold
1 Lose freshness	35 Hydrocarbon ending	9 Prynne in "The Scarlet Letter"
5 White-barked tree	36 Asian language	11 Gets serious
10 Baja "Bye!"	37 Warriors star	14 Boreas, to the Greeks
12 Find charming	40 Put up	19 Track lipsters
13 Cavaliers star	41 Biden's successor	20 Louvre setting
15 Put down	42 View anew	24 Slacken
16 Big snake	43 Owner's document	25 Heavy rain
17 Lynx or lion		26 Stick
18 Christian of "Mr. Robot"	DOWN	27 Foliage
20 Do some modelling	1 Room sides	29 New Orleans school
21 Derisive sound	2 Worthy aims	30 Spooky gathering
22 From the US	3 Tripoli resident	33 Acted grand-motherly
23 Theatre worker	4 Craggy hill	35 Poker payment
25 Shaker fill	5 Mexican peninsula	38 Rink surface
28 Is patient	6 Lupino of films	39 Warning color
31 Keats poems	7 "Love Actually," for one	
32 Put out		



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

SCAN	STARS
TAPE	HALOES
AVOW	ANIMAL
GERMANY	AWE
ESTONIA	NEE
ON	DIET
PIANO	GOADS
ONUS	DIG
IFS	BELGIUM
SOT	ANDORRA
ERRATA	NABS
SMILED	ETAT
SALSA	DENS

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



YOU NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT DOG IN THE MESS HALL!

HERE'S A NICE JUICY STEAK FOR YOU, OTTO

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT!

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



I'LL BE IN THE BACK YARD PRACTICING DISCOS.

THAT'S NICE.

OKAY, LET'S SET THE TABLE.

HEY! WHERE ARE THE SALAD PLATES?

STILL NOT CONNECTING THE DOTS, HUH, MOM?

ANOTHER OLYMPIC PEOPLE FOR MATHS!