


NOBEL LAUREATES' VISIT

Of hopes, half-measures, and the hell that awaits Rohingyas



BADIUZZAMAN BAY

As the Rohingya crisis enters its seventh month, chances of it ending in a peaceful manner are quickly evaporating. Even staunch believers in what the UN Secretary General António Guterres offered as a solution—"a safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of refugees to their areas of origin or choice"—are not so sure this will be the case in the end. In the past six months, things have gone from bad to worse. The Rohingyas continue to trickle into Bangladesh, haunted by their memories of violence, rape, torture, and forced starvation. According to the latest estimate, the number of Rohingyas now living in Bangladesh is 11,12,895, which is close to the population of Trinidad and Tobago combined.

As the Rohingyas grapple with the sheer irony of ongoing efforts for repatriation amidst continued influx of new batches of refugees, the question that is being asked in some quarters is: does Bangladesh really have a say in what is going on? Phrased differently, does Bangladesh stand a chance against a foe with such powerful friends?

The Nobel trio—Shirin Ebadi from Iran, Mairead Maguire from Northern Ireland, and Tawakkol Karman from Yemen—came as beacons of hope who want us to believe that Bangladesh is not alone in this fight. After visiting refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, the trio looked visibly shaken. They addressed fellow Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's de facto leader, as "our sister"—bringing a personal touch into a fight that found them at cross-purposes—before imploring her to "wake up" to the reality and stop the genocide. They also called for the prosecution of those responsible for it at the International Criminal Court.

Mairead Maguire, speaking to a packed



Nobel Peace Laureate Mairead Maguire talks to Rohingya refugees during her visit to Kutupalong refugee camp in Ukhia.

PHOTO: AFP

audience in Dhaka on February 28, also shed light on the bigger picture. With so much hate and anger resulting in meaningless conflicts around, "is there any hope in the world today?" She praised Bangladesh for being an inspiration in this regard, opening its doors to the helpless Rohingyas and providing them with shelter, food and water.

The zeal and sincerity with which these great luminaries of global human rights activism are campaigning for the cause of Rohingyas are heartening to watch. In the coming days, with the number of press trips likely thinning and the international community finding more pressing issues to deal with, these are the voices we will need to keep the issue alive. Bangladesh has sought and obtained support from quite a number of countries, world leaders and powerful rights campaigners, but as developments on the ground show, their cumulative effect

didn't amount to more than funds for the refugees which, while hugely important, do not help the end game. Myanmar continues to be in denial, and as emboldened as the first day when it launched its latest campaign. Which, again, begs the question: what can Bangladesh do in the face of such reckless hate and against a country backed by powerful regional players?

Mairead Maguire has a simple solution: one phone call from the right party can stop the massacre and create the right conditions for the return of refugees. But in all likelihood, the right parties aren't going to do that. Charles Santiago, chair, ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR), posits that "investment opportunities" that Myanmar today offers, thanks to easing of trade and other economic sanctions following the (marginal) reinstatement of democracy in the country, will make doing

anything contrary to its interests very difficult.

"A lot of countries see Myanmar as an investment opportunity," said Charles Santiago in an interview with Al Jazeera, adding "they do not want to rock the boat at the international level," call the Myanmar army to account for their action, or even question or criticise Aung San Suu Kyi. As a result, apart from perfunctory lamentations and routine talks about military sanctions by some countries and blocs, there has been no real action in these six months. No one, not even Bangladesh, is talking about economic sanctions, which could play a key role in making Myanmar backpedal on its hate campaign. The country's deployment of troops on Thursday near the Bangladesh border is another indication of just how emboldened it has become.

On the contrary, Bangladesh, despite having a few geostrategic advantages of its own, has either failed to exploit them or those were simply dwarfed by the enormous trade and investment benefits that Myanmar is offering in exchange for silence regarding its activities. Either way, for Bangladesh, there are bigger things at stake here than the Rohingya issue. The country is involved with China, India, and Russia (viewed as key players in the Rohingya issue)—and even Myanmar, to some extent—in a number of ways including trade, security and infrastructure. Cutting ties or putting any kind of restriction on them to get more mileage in this particular issue is not an option for Bangladesh. What complicates the situation is that the revenues and privileges that Myanmar obtain from its trade relations and aid and other services from pro-democracy quarters eventually benefit its military. Even in democracy, Myanmar cannot be seen in isolation from its military apparatus.

As heart-wrenching as the Rohingya case may be, Bangladesh needs to understand that no one is going to hand it a solution on a

silver platter. It needs to work for it and work double time considering the huge socioeconomic cost of having an extra million people on its soil. The priority, therefore, is to strengthen diplomatic ties while aggressively advancing its geopolitical interests through greater regional and international collaboration to make its voice heard, and its legitimate demands fulfilled. This, however, is not an easy task but as Maguire stressed, "militarism and paramilitarism do not work as a solution." The lasting solution, she said, lies in dialogue, negotiation and cooperation.

Speaking of dialogue, even Bangladesh has some listening to do. The repatriation deal that the country signed with Myanmar on November 23, 2017 was reached without prior consultation with the Rohingya refugees, who have a right to engage in negotiations over their fate. As I pointed out in a column on January 1, "details [of the deal] remain vague on several key aspects such as the rights that would be granted to the Rohingyas, how their safety will be ensured in a country with raging anti-Muslim sentiment, and locations for resettlement. Also, what guarantee is there that there will not be another security crackdown or forced exodus to Bangladesh next year, or the year after?" Anything that happens to these people after repatriation will be on Bangladesh's conscience. Bangladesh still has time to consider rescinding this deal in favour of a more inclusive solution with greater international involvement.


One thing is clear, this deal is not a response to Myanmar's policy of making Rakhine uninhabitable for the Rohingya community, which has been identified as the central motive behind its decades-long anti-Rohingya campaign. We need to work on that for our own benefit, rather than expecting a miraculous solution.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Education in the Digital Age

THE ASIAN CONVERGENCE



KOICHI HAMADA

THE Fourth Industrial Revolution stands out from its predecessors in a critical way: rather than making it easier for humans to use their surroundings more effectively for their own benefit, technology is displacing humans in the workplace. The question is who will benefit now.

Automated or otherwise technology-enabled services can increase profit margins for companies, while representing for users cheaper, more convenient, or more reliable options than those produced exclusively by humans. But, of course, this comes at a high cost for the humans who previously filled those roles.

People all over the world have embraced ridesharing and transportation services like Uber, to the detriment of traditional taxi drivers. When artificial intelligence-enabled driverless cars become cost-effective and reliable, Uber and taxi drivers alike will become obsolete.

In stock trading, 79 percent of market transactions are now performed by software, according to Frank Zhang of the Yale School of Management, reflecting the hope that machines will be able to identify patterns more effectively than a human could—a hope that may have contributed to the recent stock-market correction. In any case, this doesn't bode well for human traders.

I myself have saved on translation costs since realising that, with some edits by me, Google Translate can work just fine, though

this means lost income for the graduate students whom I used to hire for the task. While simultaneous interpreters—who occupy a high-paid profession—may scoff at the notion that machines will threaten their positions any time soon, the success of machine learning in highly complex strategic games like Go suggests that machines' ability to learn should not be underestimated.

In short, the AI-driven revolution will have its winners and losers. To win, it is vital not just to avoid being displaced by new technologies, but also to capitalise on the new opportunities they present. This might mean investing in cutting-edge businesses like Uber, as the Japanese-Korean industrialist Masayoshi Son has done. Or it might mean acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to secure a job that takes advantage of this new economy.

Such responses are good not just for individuals, but also for economies as a whole. In Japan, for example, human-capital development is crucial to support growth as the population ages and shrinks. And that process begins early: as the Nobel laureate economist James Heckman has shown, education of young children has a significant impact on productivity. That is why Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has announced that half of the extra revenues raised from the consumption-tax hike that will go into effect in 2019 will be invested in pre-school education.

To give young people the tools they will need to thrive in the changing digital economy, such investment must focus on improving the quality of education. That may mean transforming curricula to focus less on rote learning or straightforward calculation



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PHOTO: SHANNON STAPLETON/REUTERS

and more on skills like critical thinking, communication, and leadership.

Education in Japan today, and perhaps also in South Korea, is something like the game "Jeopardy": the one who knows the most facts is the winner. The best-known means by which Japanese students are ranked is *hensachi*—literally translated as "standard deviation"—which reflects how far from the statistical mean a typical student admitted to a given institution scores on a test focused on memorised formulas and facts.

Students with higher positive *hensachi* scores are admitted to more rigorous high

schools and colleges, where they are often encouraged to study medicine, simply because the entrance exam is difficult, even if they have no interest in a medical career. Otherwise, they compete to become bureaucrats at the most influential ministries—for example, finance, economy, or foreign affairs—or they try to get on the fast track to the top of elite firms like Toyota or Sony.

Hensachi scores thus determine people's entire career trajectories. High scores mean a comfortable life, all the way through retirement. Given this, Japanese students feel pressured to memorise information from a

very young age. Parents will go so far as to move to a district where the kindergarten is linked to a renowned university.

This system did not begin in Japan. On the contrary, it is an outgrowth of the system for assessing and promoting Chinese bureaucrats that prevailed until the early twentieth century. While it is a form of meritocracy, and thus superior to nepotism, it fails to take into account the reality that a capacity for rote learning does not necessarily imply an aptitude for creativity or ingenuity.

Even if it did, we might not find out, because memorising enough information to secure high scores on assessments leaves little time to learn to think—to develop skills or foster talents that could amount to a real contribution to one's community and country. In fact, a system based on *hensachi* actively discourages those who do have valuable talents from developing them into useful skills. Yet, in the age of AI, those talents and skills are more valuable than ever.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution will amount to a major test for a Japanese education system focused on reciting facts and performing formulaic calculations—precisely the areas where humans cannot compete with intelligent machines. With all of our technological developments, human ingenuity and creativity remain unmatched. We should make the most of that, and give our young people the opportunity to use their innate advantages as effectively as possible.

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(Exclusive to The Daily Star)

A WORD

A DAY



COMITY

NOUN

A state or atmosphere of harmony or mutual civility

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

34 Topper
35 Ring great
6 Flower part
11 Photo collection
12 Last letter
13 Rashness
14 Less civil
15 Lowly laborer
16 Deli bread
18 Powerful people
19 Fish eggs
20 Tire fill
21 Commotion
22 Flower part
24 Comic Laurel
25 European grazer
27 Do some laps
29 High jinks
32 Nervous motion
33 Easter find

34 Topper
35 Ring great
36 Brooks of film
37 "— Believer"
38 China piece
40 Site of "bombs bursting"
42 Batter's low hit
43 Good judgment
44 School paper
45 Fire-fighting needs

DOWN

1 Much of Niger
2 Anticipate
3 Prenatal docs
4 Tire track
5 Came into view
6 Tender spots
7 Aussie runner

8 Postnatal docs
9 Meeting slate
10 "The Far Side" cartoonist
17 Running back's gain
23 Dress line
24 Determined
26 School subject
27 Basic need
28 "Die Hard" star
30 Loose shirt
31 Some tires
33 Abrasive powder
39 Brit's brew
41 "The Matrix" hero

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

JAWED MALTA

AGAVE AXIOM

BORES NIPPY

PRIMES

GAS RID USA

APPLES OPEC

SPEEDSKATER

PLED INTONE

SYD HOE SOS

LINEUP



LUNAR CLEFT

AMAZE ANEAR

PAGED PADRE

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

