

Rohingya Windrush?

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

ALL hell broke loose over the British government! It found itself in the eye of a storm following a self-inflicted controversy raging over what is called the "Windrush generation". "Windrush" is the name of a ship that had brought thousands of Caribbean people to Great Britain in 1948 to help rebuild the war-ravaged country. They are estimated to be 50,000 spanning two generations now. But the once welcomed Caribbean migrants who lived in Britain and worked since the country's "stern" hour of need (to slightly rephrase a post-War Churchillian expression) are in thrall to the host asking them to prove their bona fides after seven decades of residence! Haven't they overstayed their hospitality? Or else why would something put away on the shelf as a closed matter be reopened as a bolt from the blue!

Indeed the Caribbean immigrants who had come to suit a British need should have been naturalised citizens as a matter of course, pursuant to international norms, let alone in grateful acknowledgement of their post-war service to Britain. But in an unkind twist to the tale, they were asked to provide documentary evidence of their residence since their arrival in the UK. The documentation required submission of school or educational certificates, work place details, tax returns—just anything evidentiary to prove their continuous residence. On the face of it, this may look innocuous except for the very long time intervening. The difficulty of procuring the documents lies in the long



Rohingya refugees walk through a shallow canal after crossing the Naf River as they flee violence in Myanmar to reach Bangladesh in Palongkhali near Ukhia on October 16, 2017.

chronology of seven decades interspersed with visits to Caribbean homes, apart from changes in their personal circumstances from time to time.

It is put down by the Opposition and the liberals generally to the hostile environment at the Home Office under the restrictive immigration policy of Theresa May's government.

The bubble-burst couldn't have happened at a more embarrassing time for the British government. The exposure may have ruffled the feathers of a host spreading its wings over the 50 Commonwealth Heads of State and Government Meeting that was in session in London.

As if that was not enough, it had a knock-

on effect on EU citizens in UK who were already worried about their future in Britain after Brexit. The nettling of the Caribbean migrants with a fresh documentation requirement etches a frown on the EU residents' forehead.

Actually, the episode has been going on for two years before it blew up on the face of the authorities—top ministers are having to hold down their heads in shame because of the absurd levels to which the demand for documentation was foisted on the individuals. Apologies are being offered but are not considered enough to assuage the rather hurt British sensibilities.

Self-evidently, there can't be any parallels between the British handling of the Caribbean

and Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingyas. The former is a belated consular issue, at worst with a step-motherly racist tinge to it involving maybe deportation of some out of Britain. Even that would be an unacceptably cruel act. And, it has already touched British sensibilities raising a hope for a mellowing policy towards the Caribbean community.

By sharp contrast, the Rohingya crisis in terms of calibration, intensity, escalation and newer ramifications constitutes the vilest form of wholesale ethnic cleansing to-date. And, the continuing disdainful defiance of world opinion, international law and standard inter-state code of conduct by the Myanmar regime makes a mockery of the powers that have the levers with Myanmar to din good sense into its ears.

Even after six months of signing a repatriation accord with Myanmar not a single family has been repatriated from Bangladesh. This is noted with serious concern by the EU, especially in view of the onset of the rainy season fraught with the dangers of landslides,

let alone the muddled and lethally disease-harboured living conditions.

The arbitrary drawing up of a list of the so-called ethnic nationalities leaving out the Rohingyas altogether whose ancestors had lived in Arakan, the present-day Rakhine state for centuries may be taken up at the appropriate international level for an authentic determination of the truth. This can be a precursor to taking up the dual issue of genocide and ethnic cleansing by the Myanmar regime before the International Court of Justice or to the International Criminal Court. So what if they are not signatories to the institutions, does it indemnify them against prosecution for crimes against humanity by the most lenient of interpretations?

A reading of history tells you in unmistakable terms that as late as the 10th Century the ethnic Burmese didn't set their foot on the Rakhine, meaning that other ethnic groups had been pre-existing in the area. This is corroborated by a book titled, "A Comprehensive Vocabulary of the Languages Spoken in Burma Empire," written by Scottish Physician Francis Buchanan in 1799. He referred to "a proof of the term 'Roinga' being in use in the area well before the British consolidated their rule" in 1823 through the Anglo-Burmese war. Buchannan further asserts that the first dialect spoken in the Burman empire was derived from an Indian language spoken by Mohammedans who have long settled in Arakan and are known as "Roonga" or the nation of Arakan.

How long then will Myanmar hoodwink the world with its prevarications and bland lies?

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Can India and China find a new template for their ties?

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

ONE of the most enduring images from the first-ever meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping less than four years ago was that of the two leaders sitting together on a swing on the riverfront of Sabarmati river in Ahmedabad city of Gujarat. That was Modi's way of welcoming Xi who had begun his maiden tour of India with a visit to Modi's home state. On April 27 and 28 this year, the two leaders would again come together—this time at a sprawling villa by the Yangtze river in the picturesque Chinese city of Wuhan.

This will not be the first summit meeting between Modi and Xi—they had met a number of times in the last four years. Nor will this be the last because the two leaders are meeting once again in June in China on the sidelines of the multilateral Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit. But will the long journey from the Sabarmati river front to the Yangtze river bank for an informal meeting help reduce the chasm between Asia's two nuclear-armed giants? The two summits in two months are being seen as a major breakthrough in Sino-Indian relations, irrespective of their outcomes.

According to Alka Acharya, a teacher at the Centre for East Asian Studies at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, "the bilateral tete-a-tete may well prove a game-changer." She is not alone in being upbeat about the forthcoming Modi-Xi meeting. Much of the Indian media and the strategic community are too. Not that one informal summit between the two leaders will solve the major bilateral problems, including the unresolved

border dispute, between India and China. And almost everyone you talk to in Delhi will acknowledge this. The main questions being discussed is: one, can Modi and Xi set a new paradigm of Sino-Indian relations, and two, can the two leaders set in motion the building of a new template of bilateral cooperation shedding the historical bitterness, mutual suspicion and baggage of sharp differences on a range of issues?

The most recent acrimony between India and China was the standoff between their militaries on the Doklam plateau, a narrow strip of land high up on the eastern Himalayas claimed by both China and India's ally Bhutan. The standoff was in sharp contrast to the Modi-Xi bonhomie witnessed on the Sabarmati river front in September, 2014. The Doklam faceoff saw the two militaries in an eyeball-to-eyeball situation for two and half months since June last year, before they stepped back as their diplomats worked overtime to resolve the worst crisis in Sino-India ties in a very long time.

For a better part of last year, even before Doklam, Sino-India ties had been strained following Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama's visit to the north-eastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh (a region China claims). China had cancelled a visit by its Foreign Minister Wang Yi to India last year in April for a trilateral meeting and stopped sharing the hydrological data of the Brahmaputra river from the middle of May last.

Many experts believe it is a sign of maturity that India and China resolved the Doklam standoff diplomatically and not a single shot was fired by either side. Also, they managed to retain a working

relationship and within a month of the end of the confrontation, Modi had travelled to China to attend the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China South Africa) Summit.

It is not just the dispute over the 3,488 km border running through the Himalayas that has bedevilled Sino-India relations for decades. India's providing shelter to Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama and hosting the Tibetan-government-in-exile (though not recognised by the Indian government), which China consider separatist, India's reservations against China's helping Pakistan in the latter's nuclear and military programmes, and China's growing economic footprints through infrastructure projects in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region are among the other major irritants between the two countries. China's construction of an economic corridor

that traverses through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and opposition to India's joining the high table of the Nuclear Suppliers Group have also riled India.

Given the divergences on a host of issues, the fact Modi and Xi are meeting again is viewed in New Delhi and Beijing as reflective of resilience in bilateral ties.

As Modi and Xi prepare to meet in an informal setting in Wuhan, the

Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Chinese Communist Party politburo member Yang Jiechi and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou were in India last year and this April respectively. The main purpose behind the flurry of high-level visits was to do the spadework for Modi-Xi interaction. The signs of thaw are already visible. After talks with Wang last Sunday, Swaraj announced China would resume sharing hydrological data of the Brahmaputra and the Sutlej river flowing through certain states of India including Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir.

What is the basis for optimism of a turnaround in Sino-India ties and what will be the outcome of the Modi-Xi meeting? Some years ago, the then Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said there is enough space for India and China in Asia to grow together, suggesting the competition between them as rising global powers need not run counter to cooperation between them. In Beijing, a couple of days ago, Swaraj and Wang spoke in similar veins when they agreed that India and China have commonalities that outweigh divergences. The question is: what could be the glue to Sino-India cooperation?

Experts believe it is the search for a new international economic order following US President Donald Trump's threat of a trade and tariff war against both China and India. India and China share a common stand on the problem of climate change, though both are seen as among the biggest emitters of greenhouse gas. They do not want to be pressurised into scaling down their developmental programmes in the name of reducing greenhouse gas. On the issue of Trump's trade war also,

India and China find themselves on the same side of the hike in US tariffs on imports from them because it would hit their exports in varying degrees.

However, India and China are also in race with their respective great power ambitions on the military and economic fronts. Can the two countries then work to ensure that their aspirations for increasingly greater say in international affairs do not retard their cooperation in areas of common interest. If India is apprehensive of being encircled by China's one belt one road programme, China is suspicious about India, the US, Australia and Japan trying to form quadrilateral for an alternative to that, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

It is fallacious to think India and China will join hands to counterbalance US unilateralism. The US is the number one choice of both India and China in economic relations. For at least now, India and China have realised that there is a need for a greater interaction between their top leaders in a world staring at increasing uncertainties in the wake of the strained relations between Russia and the US. But can this quest for reshaping the world order be strong enough to reorient Sino-Indian relations for the better?

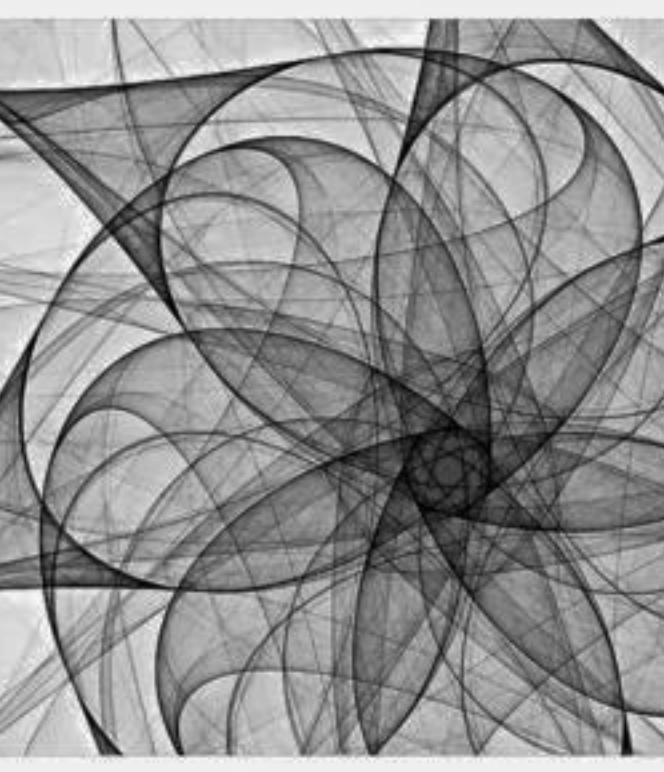
In March this year, the Chinese Foreign Minister had remarked that the Chinese dragon and the Indian elephant must not fight but dance with each other and that if the two countries are united then one plus one will not add up to two but eleven. Such a grandiose vision is more rhetoric than pragmatic.

Pallab Bhattacharya is a special correspondent to The Daily Star.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on a swing at the Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad, Gujarat in 2014.

A WORD A DAY



DIAPHANOUS
ADJECTIVE

(Especially of fabric) light, delicate, and translucent

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**

 - 1 Sub spot
 - 5 Game of hands
 - 10 Corundum, for one
 - 12 -- acids
 - 13 "Graceland" singer
 - 14 Spirited attack
 - 15 Yale student
 - 16 Pistons' place
 - 18 Redirected route
 - 20 Low digit
 - 21 Greek group
 - 23 -- "Town"
 - 24 Staff symbol
 - 26 Coop group
 - 28 Negative link
 - 29 TV explorer
 - 31 Future
- embryos**

 - 32 Hate
 - 36 Force down
 - 40 Inventor Howe
 - 41 -- Island
 - 43 Singly
 - 44 Wheel minder
 - 45 Touches down
 - 46 Plops down
- DOWN**

 - 1 Gave medicine
 - 2 Banish
 - 3 Put a cap on
 - 4 Ceremony
 - 5 Days gone by
 - 6 Poet Khayyam
 - 7 Bomb unit
- 8 Green, in a way**

 - 9 Fan
 - 11 Lasted
 - 17 Geological period
 - 19 Many a time
 - 22 Elementary learning
 - 24 Short book
 - 25 Speech
 - 27 "Dig in!"
 - 28 "Forget it!"
 - 30 Peculiar
 - 33 Text
 - 34 Egypt's Anwar
 - 35 Hard journeys
 - 37 Cap Town
 - 38 Calls on
 - 42 Holds

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BEETLE IS STUPID! HE PAINTED HIMSELF INTO A CORNER

HE'S NOT STUPID. HE DID IT ON PURPOSE

GREG + MORT WALKER

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BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

HOW COME I ALWAYS FIND LINT IN MY POCKETS?

THE LINT FAIRY.

SHE COMES IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND LEAVES LINT IN THE POCKETS OF THE UGGEST KID IN THE FAMILY.

I GUESS THAT EXPLAINS WHY I FOUND MY PANTS IN YOUR ROOM.

MOM! HAMMIE'S BEING MEAN TO ME!