

“So we beat on...”



KNOT SO TRUE
RUBANA HUQ

I spent eight hours on the road, trying to go to and return from Banglabazar in Gazipur. A few months back, Bashir, our ever-smart driver, took 40 minutes to reach Banglabazar. Yesterday he took 3.5 hours to reach the place, and another four hours to return. For both the trips, he deserves to be placed in the Guinness book of records. However, after I reached our factory, while I apologetically greeted my customer at the door, quite unexpectedly, he stood up with a smile and said: “In spite of the time that it took us to get here, we are here now and there’s nothing like an in-factory experience.” In response, when I again stressed the time issue and offered to do a real-time virtual tour next time, he again looked at me and said, “But no! We like being here!” Thus, Hope returned to base and I smiled in absolute ease.

There are about a thousand reasons why we don’t give up Hope in our part of the land. There are about a thousand other reasons for despair. But at the end, it’s just smarter to be an optimist. So even when I am behind a hundred trucks on the Gazipur Chourasta, and while I spend time reading the ridiculous messages on the trucks and buses like, “*Ami choto, amakey marbenna*” (I am small, so please don’t hit me), all hanging above the number plates, I laugh and see the humour in our transport logistics. You see, at the end, we all choose to see what we opt to see. And at the end, most of us opt for hope.

The past couple of days have been insane. It’s been difficult to keep pace with what’s happening. After all, how many newspapers can one read? How many online subscriptions can one skim through? How many channels can one surf? After all, the base message has been the same. It’s a world filled with “bully pulpits.”

With so many international smoke screens popping up as our daily reality checks, where is Hope in it for all of us? Shall we look upon Hope as bane rather than boon like the Greeks did?



SOURCE: MEDIUM.COM

While the US and China are weighing the costs of a looming trade war, the US Treasury Secretary is out there announcing the suspension of tariffs on USD 150 billion imports from China, yet adding that they can be imposed at anytime. While the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo threatens Iran to halt all uranium enrichment and its ballistic missile programme, Iran has not lost any time rejecting the same. And while the “will they” or “will they not” bets continue about the Singapore meet between Trump and Kim Jong-un, little Layla Ghandour, the eight-month-old green-eyed girl has died choking from a cloud of tear gas in Gaza. For Hamas, she has immediately become the symbol of revolution, for the other side she was a child with a heart condition who needn’t have been exposed to the hazards of a protest...

While the US embassy shifted to

Jerusalem instead of Trump using it for leverage to advance the peace process, balanced critics like Thomas Friedman called it a “diplomatic pornography” relating to “two bald men fighting over a comb.”

Meantime, Nicolás Maduro, the Venezuelan president used access to food and money as a weapon in Sunday’s election and “won” it. In a country where only 10 out of every 100 can afford to eat, and where a minimum-wage worker buys just three bags of rice with the salary, state television cameras had cheering voters, eager to be seen by the government officials in order to ensure their next box of meal. In the land of the hungry, votes don’t count and truth doesn’t matter.

Talk about the vigilante murders over cows in India. The latest victim, Siraj Khan, a 45-year-old tailor, died from an attack in the Satna district of Madhya Pradesh state last Friday.

Where has the vision of Gandhi from 1942 urging Banaras Hindu University to collaborate with Aligarh Muslim University vanished? Why has the 2014 election in India changed the basic tenets of co-existence?

I almost sound like an onscreen news presenter without visuals. But that’s exactly what we have been reduced to. We watch news, stomach it with distaste, and dwell on the atrocious universal uncertainty of peace.

But there are moments when the screen also provides us with comic relief. The latest came from the Royally Unexpected Wedding, with the most entertaining bit coming from Most Rev. Curry from the US breaking the stiff audience steeped in protocol. But to have Curry rambling about how the “controlled harnessed fire” made his plane fly and how he didn’t have to walk across the Atlantic Ocean (like Jesus did) to get there, and his further a

references to Fire making it possible for us to text and tweet and email and Instagram and Facebook and “socially be dysfunctional with each other” evoked a new sense of perverse freedom in many of us to say whatever, wherever.

Wow. One can actually say whatever one wishes to say if only one has the authority. One can actually threaten if one holds an importance office or a title. One can actually threaten to annihilate an entire nation if one has the power. The Voice of Many doesn’t matter anymore. The “many” is utterly powerless while One is Supreme. So, in case you have the chance to bully, seize the moment, ignite wars, poverty, harassment and in the process, use it as a link to the welfare of the people.

Just like Trump. And as for free speech, just follow Curry and pick an element like Fire and link it to the energy of love or whatever and justify your content.

With so many international smoke screens popping up as our daily reality checks, where is Hope in it for all of us? Shall we look upon Hope as bane rather than boon like the Greeks did? Shall we follow Euripides and call it a curse on humanity? Shall we see it as a Byronian “hollow-cheeked harlot”?

Or like Kierkegaard, shall we too consider Hope to be a charming maid that slips through one’s fingers? In reality, in spite of a world which was probably created by God in one of his dyspeptic moods on one of his off days, where we continue to suffer from dire consequences of his creation and end up suffering from pains of an occasional eight-hour travel time in a day, perhaps it still makes sense to hang on to Hope. After all...in the range and scale of insanity that goes around our globe, it’s perhaps wise to look for the “green light” within our own borders with the hope that “tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther.... one fine morning—So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.” (F Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*).

Rubana Huq is the managing director of Mohammadi Group.

Rohingya crisis: A multilateral approach to forging peace

BAISALI MOHANTY

THE large-scale population displacement from Myanmar has created an unprecedented situation in Bangladesh and highlighted that resilience and mutual trust are embedded values in the state architecture. A country that has the highest population density sits amidst a global crisis, which has been declared as a L3 (highest) level emergency by several UN organisations including UNICEF, WFP and UNHRC. The role of the neighbouring states, especially India and China, remains crucial in finding a long-term inclusive solution to this crisis. As monsoon threatens to aggravate the situation for Rohingya refugees living in camps, the need for external aid continues to rise.

At this juncture, India has been forthcoming with its support for the refugees in terms of food supplies. On the other hand, the question of sending back 40,000 Rohingyas from India still lurks at the Supreme Court in India. Sushma Swaraj, the external affairs minister of India, has however declared maximum support for Bangladesh in tackling the humanitarian crisis. She highlighted the “need for the safe, speedy and sustainable return of displaced persons to Rakhine state”. “The only long-term solution to the situation in Rakhine State is rapid socio-economic



Rohingya refugees queue in the rain to receive food at Kutupalong refugee camp near Cox's Bazar.

and infrastructure development that would have a positive impact on all the communities living in the State,” she said.

In this connection, early this year, China proposed a three-point solution to facilitate safe return of the Rohingyas to Myanmar. But it said it

was opposed to any kind of investigation into the military activities in Myanmar which put considerable light on China’s strategic concerns in the region. This came in response to the UK’s insistence on ensuring a “transparent investigation” by the UN into the human rights

violations. Beijing put forward a statement blatantly ignoring all mention of accountability and transparent investigations. It stressed “the need to address the root cause of the issue” and called for more investment in the Rakhine state to “achieve stability through

development”. The UK, France and the US have rejected these changes and insisted on further negotiation.

It is important that big powers in the region consolidate their presence by extensively advocating for the protection of human rights rather than striving to protect their bilateral partners. As India and China recently commenced renewed engagement with a series of informal talks between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it is crucial for India to lobby with China and other regional/global powers to ensure that favourable conditions are created in Myanmar for the Rohingyas to return safely. Both the countries have agreed on cooperating to undertake economic engagements in Afghanistan—there is an urgent need for this to be replicated in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Despite persistent resistance from Pakistan, China has taken a step forward by joining hands with India in Afghanistan. Similarly, it now needs to take a tougher stance as regards the Rohingya crisis. This would not just consolidate its legitimacy as a regional actor but also ensure its status of a peacemaker in the global platform.

Additionally, Bangladesh needs support from all the actors in the region to ensure that the refugees are insured against the monsoon season.

The UN organisations operating in Cox’s Bazar have reported regular casualties owing to the onset of monsoon and landslides. The present scenario demands cumulative efforts from all fractions to ensure the safety of the over a million refugees residing in the makeshift camps in Bangladesh. The solution to this scale of humanitarian crisis lies in persistent efforts of regional as well as global actors to forge a diplomatic agreement between Myanmar Junta, the civilian government and the refugees. Unless a peaceful resolution is reached, the refugees will continue to suffer, even if they return to Myanmar.

To put it bluntly, Bangladesh faces a gigantic security threat and it will have inevitable consequences on the entire region and beyond, just like the Syria crisis affected the whole Arab region. Bangladesh also remains a vulnerable site with radical groups trying to take advantage of the situation and secure a stronghold in the country. It remains to be seen how the major actors descend to the same page and consolidate their efforts with the aim of forging a peaceful solution to this protracted crisis, with the individual/group rights of the Rohingyas fully protected.

Baisali Mohanty is a senior analyst with the Global Risk Insights, Washington DC, US.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Belfast Telegraph, a Northern Irish newspaper, published a special “late poll” edition to declare the voters had opted in favour of the agreement.
May 23, 1998
THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT ACCEPTED IN NORTHERN IRELAND
The Good Friday Agreement, which brought peace to Northern Ireland, was accepted in a referendum in Northern Ireland with 75 percent voting yes.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

38 Trip around the track

41 Add words into

44 Derisive sound

45 Pago Pago setting

46 HMO fee

47 Midterms and finals

DOWN

1 Mix up

2 Track runner

3 Mandolin's cousin

4 Water cooler

5 Spool stuff

6 Musical group

7 Glutton

8 Notorious czar

9 Baseball's Rose

10 Whole bunch

14 Galloped

18 Wizardry

19 Eiffel Tower setting

20 Friend of Frodo

21 In the past

22 Parking area

24 Mayo buy

25 Op or pop

26 Lock opener

30 Making eyes, perhaps

31 Oust from power

33 Strike caller

34 Brake type

35 -- Domini

36 Organ part

38 Asian monk

39 Wee bit

40 Pod contents

42 History bit

43 Not strict

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

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