

The ball is now in MYANMAR'S COURT

A school student's fatal lesson

Schools must nurture, not humiliate

THE tragedy of a ninth grade student of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College taking her own life after being rebuked by her school teachers is a wakeup call for us regarding the responsibility of school authorities to ensure that a child is treated with dignity and sensitivity no matter what the offence he or she has committed. In this case, the girl, a student of one of the most well-reputed schools of the country, was allegedly caught copying notes from her phone while taking an exam. The child was severely reprimanded and threatened with expulsion from the school. The teenager was so distraught by this that she went home and took her life. This is not the first time that a child or young person has resorted to suicide because of the apathy or cruelty of teachers or authorities of the institution. Recently, a university student of BRAC University who had mental health issues took his life on a residential campus. There have been other cases where students have committed suicide because of bullying or after being humiliated by their teachers. It is clear that immediate steps have to be taken to address possible mental health issues of students. This includes having student counselling facilities that are easily accessible to students in trouble. School authorities and teachers, in particular, must be extra vigilant and sensitive about students who appear vulnerable. In the case of the ninth grader who was so humiliated that she thought the only recourse was death, it is obvious that the teachers were completely insensitive to the psyche of a person of such an impressionable age. We are heartened to know that the education ministry and the school authorities have formed probe bodies to investigate this case which shows their seriousness in wanting to prevent such tragedies in the future. Hopefully, these findings will raise awareness among teachers and authorities of these institutions regarding how they should behave with students even when they have broken the rules. It is high time that educational institutions considered the mental health of students as a serious issue.

Find the missing

Families in despair as cases of disappearance remain unsolved

WE can empathise with Shabnam Zaman's despair at the apparent lack of movement by law enforcers in investigating how her father, former ambassador Maroof Hossain, went missing under dubious circumstances on December 4, 2017. His family members are in the dark as to who picked him up and where he is now. The one common thread that unites the families of the disappeared in our country is their loved ones' hope that they be returned unharmed. It is difficult to imagine why no law enforcement agency has any clue as to what happened to Mr Hossain. The facts are very clear. The gentleman in question left in his car to pick up his daughter from the airport. Some time later, he called the residence and asked family members to hand over his laptop to someone who'd be going to the house. The footage of these people is there and yet, after a year of knocking on every conceivable door, the family is nowhere near finding the truth as to who took him and why, and whether Mr Hossain is alive or dead. Human rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra's data tells us that as many as 544 people have fallen victim to alleged enforced disappearance between 2010 and July 2018. And that over 300 of them are still missing. The calls for forming an empowered independent commission to investigate these disappearances have all but fallen on deaf ears and year after year, families like that of Mr Hossain live with the knowledge of not knowing what happened to their loved ones. Too many of these cases have remained unsolved, which is hardly helpful in increasing faith of the people on the state of law and order in the country. It is time the authorities raised the veil on these unsolved cases and launched vigorous investigations to find the missing people.

PORIMOL PALMA

THE November 15 attempt to repatriate Rohingyas to Myanmar has failed. And that was destined too, despite wholehearted efforts from Bangladesh. Although Myanmar officials were quick to blame their Bangladesh counterparts for the "failure", the ground reality provided a different picture. Not a single Rohingya, listed in the first batch of 2,251 verified refugees supposed to return to their country on November 15, volunteered to go home. On the contrary, many of them staged demonstrations against the move while some tried to flee the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. The fear of brutality they were subjected to by the Myanmar military when they were displaced from their homes in the Rakhine state understandably gripped them. Interviewed, they asked some burning questions, "Why should we return? Do you want us to return to a death camp? Do you want us to commit suicide? Can you guarantee that we would survive once we return?" The Rohingyas also demand that for a voluntary return, the Myanmar government should reinstate them in their original homes, guarantee citizenship, safety and basic rights, including health, education and freedom of movement. Until now, Myanmar has done little to fulfil those demands or made a sincere effort to remove the fears through a reconciliation campaign between people of different faiths. Therefore, the tactic of blaming Bangladesh now is as baseless as it was when the repatriation did not start on January 23 under a bilateral agreement, when there was no arrangement for determining the voluntariness.

This time the UN Refugee Agency, through individual interviews, concluded that the refugees are not volunteering to return. It is an essential procedure for refugee repatriation. The agency, which is also assessing the situation in Rakhine state, said the conditions there were not conducive for the return of the refugees. Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, after a meeting with foreign diplomats in Dhaka on November 15, confirmed that Bangladesh in no way wants forced repatriation. Japan, meanwhile, proposed that a group of Rohingya be allowed to visit the arrangements in Rakhine—a proposal that goes in line

with that of UNHCR—to see for themselves the conditions there and decide if they would return. Bangladesh is likely to take up the issue with Myanmar soon.

But how fruitful that attempt from Bangladesh—sincere in all its efforts for voluntary, sustainable and dignified Rohingya repatriation—would be with a country in complete denial is a big question.

The world has lauded Bangladesh's efforts in accommodating over a million

problems—communal tension between the Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine and low level of development works in Rakhine state. It left the population there in sheer poverty. If militancy grows out of that deprivation, it is the Myanmar government that has to take the responsibility for that.

UN investigators and other independent researchers have concluded that citizenship, basic rights, including education, health and movement of freedom, recognising the Muslims there

Rohingyas displaced in a communal violence in 2012 are still living in the camps. They too would be put in similar camps if they return to Rakhine under present conditions.

The Rohingya crisis has become a major global issue, which prompted big powers including the US, EU, and Australia, to impose sanctions against several high-ranking army officials. They are also weighing trade sanctions. The International Criminal Court has issued ruling that it can prosecute Myanmar for



A Rohingya refugee child reacts as people queue for aid in a camp in Cox's Bazar, Sept 22, 2017.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Rohingya refugees. Bangladesh is also braving immense socio-economic, environmental and diplomatic challenges because of a problem created by Myanmar since 1982 when it curtailed citizenship of the Rohingya and many basic rights though they have been living there for generations.

Myanmar argues that the Rohingya militant attack triggered the military campaign in August last year, but its argument is weak as there is a greater question why Myanmar's military junta curtailed Rohingya citizenship in 1982. That's the root of all the subsequent

as Rohingya, repatriating them in their original places of homes and returning their properties are the fundamentals for a sustainable repatriation.

Myanmar, however, is only assuring them of providing national verification cards (NVC), which it says, is a pathway to citizenship. It says the refugees would be sheltered in transit camps and eventually taken to their original homes. Rohingyas, however, disbelieve the proposition.

They say accepting NVCs means they are migrants from Bangladesh. Rohingyas also argue that the 124,000

its "genocidal intent".

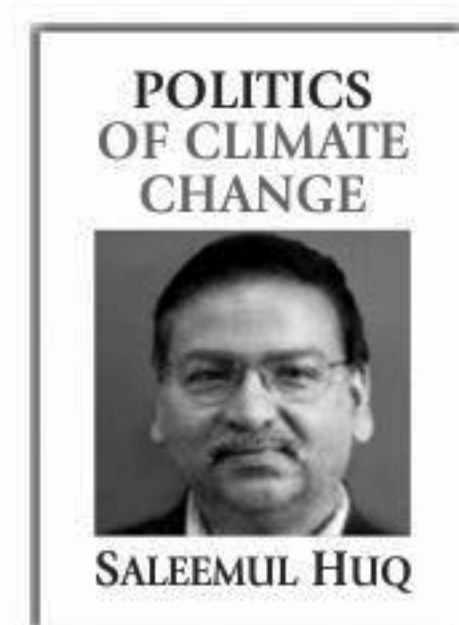
These actions mean Myanmar is being isolated in the global arena. Also, the Association of South East Asian Nations, which maintains the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs, is speaking louder against Myanmar now.

Myanmar now has only one option—accept the demands of the Rohingyas and take them back to their homes where they can live a life without any discrimination.

The ball is now in Myanmar's court.

Porimol Palma is senior reporter, *The Daily Star*.

Understanding the art of negotiation at COP24



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
SALEEMUL HUQ

UNDER the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) all the countries meet each year at the annual Conference of

Parties (COP) held in December—moving from continent to continent each year to review progress and agree on any new decisions. It is a two-week-long event with the first week dedicated to technical negotiations and the second week to high-level negotiations usually involving ministers and sometimes heads of state.

The annual COP usually brings together 10,000 to 20,000 people from all over the world for two weeks and it consists of several types of participants. The main group constitutes of government representatives who are the actual negotiators and have to arrive at decisions through consensus. They probably account for no more than 5,000 participants. The others are from civil society, private sector, media, youth and other groups who hold many different side events to share their knowledge and experiences and also hold public demonstrations to get the official negotiators to make bold decisions.

One of the problems with decision-making by consensus is that it effectively gives each country a veto and hence does not allow for "bold" decisions as there is always one or two countries that don't agree. Hence a lot of time is spent in trying to build consensus.

The role of the United States is very important here as President Trump has formally informed the UNFCCC Secretariat that the US will withdraw from the Paris Agreement. Parties to the UNFCCC had reached this landmark agreement at COP21 in Paris in December 2015. However, the US is not withdrawing from the UNFCCC itself. Hence the US delegation is in Katowice and will be part of the decision-making

process. This will indeed present a major challenge to achieve consensus over the next two weeks.

A second important aspect of the official negotiations is that they can often be extremely tedious and time-consuming, often going on all night until the negotiators get totally exhausted. This is because every word, and sometimes even a comma, matters and is argued over. This requires negotiators to be good lawyers and diplomats as well as climate change experts.

A third important point to note about these global negotiations is that with the exception of the US, no country negotiates as a "single" country. Even China belongs to the group of

At this point, I should perhaps explain my role in the COP as I am not an official negotiator but rather an observer from civil society and am involved in organising side events. However, I have also been, for many years, an official adviser to the LDC chair and group on the topics of adaptation as well as loss and damage. I participate in pre-COP strategy sessions for the LDC negotiators and continually advise them over the course of the negotiations.

At the same time, I have been organising a major two-day side event called Development and Climate Days at COP that takes place in the middle weekend of the two-week COP. It attracts several hundred participants, many of whom come to attend this event alone

We are now in the process of changing the narrative of Bangladesh from being the most vulnerable to being the most resilient and adaptive country to climate change.



A participant's silhouette is seen during the COP24 UN Climate Change Conference 2018 in Katowice, Poland this week.

PHOTO: REUTERS

developing countries called the G77+China. Similarly, countries like Germany, France and the UK belong to the European Union (EU) group.

Bangladesh belongs to the Least Developed Countries (LDC) group and plays a very important role in the leadership of the group which is currently chaired by Ethiopia. This group consists of 48 developing countries, mostly from Africa and Asia.

Over the years, the LDC group has become very strong and nowadays no major decision can be made without its approval.

and not for the official negotiations.

There are many such events taking place all over the city which will be attended by many thousands of non-negotiators who attend the COP each year.

Finally, with regard to the role of Bangladesh in these negotiations each year, I will start by saying that quite often I feel the media coverage of Bangladesh's performance can be unnecessarily harsh. One reason is that the media wants to know what our delegation gets out of the negotiations for Bangladesh. This is a question that fundamentally

misunderstands the purpose of the COP. The Bangladesh delegation is not there to get something out of the negotiations for ourselves only, but to make a contribution towards solving the major global problem that is climate change.

Over the years, the Bangladesh delegation has indeed played a significant role within the LDC group and several individuals hold important roles as LDC coordinators on important topics such as loss and damage.

In addition to the government delegation members, there are usually several dozen civil society representatives from Bangladesh as well as media at the COP each year and there is usually very good cooperation between the government delegates and civil society representatives on conveying our views.

Bangladesh has an almost unique position in the climate change negotiations as everyone recognises that we are one of the most vulnerable countries to the adverse impacts of climate change. Thus they recognise the importance of listening to us. We are now in the process of changing the narrative of Bangladesh from being the most vulnerable to being the most resilient and adaptive country to climate change.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Tabligh Jamaat's infighting

The recent violent clash between two factions of Tabligh Jamaat, a non-violent movement to preach Islam, was totally unexpected. The fight left one dead and more than 200 wounded.

The entire nation has witnessed how the revered Tongi Ijtema Maydan, the venue of the second largest annual gathering of Muslims in the world, was turned into a battlefield. Due to the feud between two contesting groups, the government has decided to not allow the gathering to take place this year.

The leaders of the Tabligh Jamaat should ask themselves what kind of message the general people will get from this violent incident. If the groups have a disagreement, they should sit together and resolve it in a peaceful manner. We urge all religious leaders to make sure that such incidents never reoccur in the future.

Sayek Ahmed Sajib, Gazipur