

From Cambodia, with love



KNOT SO TRUE
RUBANA HUQ

E DUCATION indeed. Getting to Phnom Penh took me to yet another learning curve. Not being able to fly out of Dhaka for almost close to 18 hours is a story to share, but getting de-planed and watching passengers reacting to the situation is another narrative altogether. Re-fuelling had failed as the pump wasn't working and more than three flights were stuck and couldn't take off and passengers had to be transported to hotels after midnight. After midnight, this Dhaka that I breathe in, looked different. The driver of the microbus from a pre-dinosaur era was in a hurry to pick up the other batch from the airport. The transport had the smell of a burnt cigarette, with a real-life smoker up at the front huffing and puffing about having missed his flight. In no time, I decided not to give up on this adventure and stuck to the general plan instead of opting for my chauffeur. He drove at 160 miles an hour, braving export-laden trucks, and cheering every time he saved us from getting hit by any one of them. Speed is what we needed, he said, and I hastily and unhesitatingly agreed. Meanwhile, a Dutchman, in all his glory, lashed out at the airport staff, immigration authorities and anyone who crossed his path. For him, what mattered was speed and efficiency. The rest could wait. For

the members of their movement had "realised their mistakes" and thus, Prime Minister Hun Sen could seek pardon for them from King Norodom Sihamoni. As for the readymade garment exporters' scene, quite interestingly, the cases of the six trade union leaders, who were protesting the wage scene in Veng Sreng Boulevard, way back in 2013, are still being heard. The defendants face charges of "international act of violence with aggravating circumstances" and jail term of five years, in spite of the Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia having withdrawn its complaint. The last time I was here was in 2013 for mentoring a young Cambodian girl, a scavenger who was rescued from the dumps and was given shelter in an NGO founded and run by an ex-president of 20th Century Fox International, Scott Neeson. Neeson had discovered Phnom Penh as a shooting location, fell in love with it and then returned to Cambodia to settle. The top boss of Hollywood left behind a million-dollar salary, sold his cars, yacht, dumped his doubts and started helping children going through and burning piles of garbage, getting affected by methane. Now his meetings are typically at dump sites, where he encourages families to keep their children in school. When I met Neeson, he sounded like a regular man trying to do his best for a community that needed him. For Scott, the definitions of power, profit and wealth were all different. Like they ought to be. Scott's project, the Cambodian Children's Fund (CCF), has 64



A Phnom Penh street scene. PHOTO: JONAS HANSEL/FLICKR

him, human errors past midnight were unpardonable, technical failures were unacceptable and the list could go on. Pretty amazingly, the rest of our own clan seemed content and a few like me enjoyed watching the flame and the fury of the disgruntled... Finally, after landing in Phnom Penh the night before, I felt overwhelmed by the "look" and feel of development. The airport is managed by the French, where arrival felt super smooth, and I got into the car with my luggage in less than 15 minutes. The hint of western food chains loomed large and it was obvious that Cambodia was trying to mimic the West, enticing investments to a place which was still stung by conflicting values. It's also an NGO land. Cambodia has close to 4,000 NGOs in place. The NGO boom here started in the early 1990s after the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements, marking the start of an era of development and democracy after 50 years of political turmoil. There is at least one active NGO for every 10,000 Cambodians. After Rwanda, it has the second highest number of NGOs per capita in the world. Like almost anywhere else, it is a land ridden by paradoxes. While the march for development is on, the graduation to a tolerant landscape is still a far cry. The first headline of the day was all about Phnom Penh banning a march on Human Rights Day from the old Freedom Park to its new site. The gathering was allowed but the march was banned on account of concerns about "security, safety and public order." The other news was on the Khmer National Liberation Front receiving the "green light" from the "authorities." I gathered from the papers that

projects in six core programme areas: education, community outreach, leadership, career and life skills, healthcare and childcare. CCF touches the lives of more than 2,500 children and has targeted academic programmes through the Neeson Cripps Academy (NCA), providing impoverished Cambodian children with quality education opportunities through conducive learning spaces and digital technologies, with a special focus on STEM education (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). All this so that the children have a better understanding of the universe they live in. For a man who dropped out of school at 17, education looks different than what it appears to be in a typical world. While I am racing to the end of the column, I can hear the school bells and the children of Phnom Penh chanting their vows. Dressed in blue and white, they are no different than ours. They have the same look and the same potential. As for ourselves, for the world that we are leaving behind, are we teaching them to rise above intolerance and greed? With Asia taking off at its best speed, are we ringing our own periodic bells and reminding the millennial generation that instead of the race to the next best home, car or balance sheet, "empathy" still tops the list as the most critical asset and in place of greed or grudge, the world still needs to pass on to the next generation the knowledge of generosity of gesture? Are we? Dr Rubana Huq is the managing director of Mohammadi Group. Her Twitter handle is @Rubanah.

Myanmar's irrational denial of citizenship to Rohingyas



The minority Muslim Rohingya community has long been subjected to discrimination in Buddhist Myanmar, which denies them citizenship PHOTO: MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/AFP

SULTANA YESMIN
THE exodus of Rohingyas, one of the most persecuted minorities in the world, from Myanmar to neighbouring countries is not a new phenomenon. Historically, Rohingyas have been fleeing to Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, and other neighbouring countries to escape serious repressions in Myanmar. One of the key issues of contention regarding the Rohingya crisis is the question over their citizenship. Denial of citizenship poses serious obstacles in achieving a durable solution to the Rohingya refugee flows.

There are two schools of thought that analyse the controversy related to the existence of Rohingyas in Myanmar. One of these perspectives comes from the proponents of the government of Myanmar and its Buddhist-led population. They consider Rohingyas as "outsiders" and "foreign residents of Myanmar". According to this perspective, Rohingyas are the direct descendants of immigrants from Chittagong of East Bengal, present-day south-eastern region of Bangladesh. Rohingyas are, thereby, referred to as "Bengali" in Myanmar's state media, official policy documents, and school textbooks as well. They are also portrayed as a threat to Myanmar's national security.

The "1982 Citizenship Law" enacted by Myanmar's military government refer to "Nationals such as the Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Burman, Mon, Rakhine or Shan and ethnic groups as have settled in any of the territories included within the State as their permanent home from a period prior to 1185 B.E., 1823 A.D. are Burma citizens". It clearly denotes that Myanmar's citizens are those persons whose ancestors settled in the country before 1823, the beginning of British occupation of Arakan, present-day northern Rakhine State. Myanmar authorities claim that Rohingyas settled in Arakan after its annexation by the British in 1824.

On the other hand, the stance of Myanmar's Buddhist majority and its authority is strongly contested by the government of Bangladesh, the Rohingya themselves, foreign governments, international organisations and scholars. Bangladesh claims that Rohingyas are Myanmar nationals and they have reportedly entered the territory of Bangladesh through illegal means. Rohingyas are the Muslims of Myanmar who have lived in Arakan for a long period of time.

As far as the debate is concerned, there is a question that needs to be answered: whether Rohingyas are illegal immigrants

from Bangladesh or not. How plausible are the arguments proposed by the government of Myanmar? In this regard, it is important to re-examine the history of Rohingyas' settlement in Arakan. If we look at the first claim projected by Myanmar's military junta about the "illegal immigrants from Bangladesh", the evidences accumulated from historical facts and scholarly documents do not comply with this proposition. The clarification of this non-compliance can be reiterated from in-depth observation. Historical evidence show that Rohingyas are Muslims whose settlements in Arakan date back to the 7th century C.E., long before the British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent. Some schol-

Arakan, and who call themselves 'Rooinga', or natives of Arakan." At that time it was not only the Bengalis who entered into Arakan for better livelihood opportunities; the Arakanese arrived in Chittagong, the then Chittagong, as well. When the Burmese invaded and conquered Arakan in 1784, Rohingyas were conquered and incorporated into the majority Buddhist kingdom of Burma. As a result, considerable numbers of Rohingyas sought refuge in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar. Some Rohingyas assimilated into the Bengali community because of their cultural and linguistic similarities with the people living in Chittagong. It is also important to note that during the British rule of the Indian subcontinent and Burma, movement of people was considered as "internal movement", from one district to another within the same political entity. Chittagong came under the British rule in 1760, while after the end of three Anglo-Burmese Wars (1824-1826, 1852-1853, and 1885), Burma became a part of British India (1886-1937). The borders of the British Indian Empire were extremely porous prior to the colonial period and during its initial phases. Consequently, people could easily move across the region without permission or legal documents. In addition, it was British policy to move populations between the then East Bengal and Burma to suit their labour needs that triggered intra-regional labour flows. As a result, a considerable level of movement occurred across the region during that period, mostly for economic purpose which was considered as normal seasonal migration. It is, therefore, meaningless to term people's movement as well as their settlements at that time between the two parts—Arakan of Burma and the then Chittagong Division of Bengal in British India—as illegal. The question of illegal immigration only comes after the demarcation of borders among independent states.

The Human Rights Watch traces the well-established presence of Rohingyas in the Mrauk-U (Mrohaung) kingdom in Arakan, now Rakhine State. It has also been mentioned that Rohingyas Muslims had ruled over Arakan for more than 250 years until Burmese invasion and occupation of Arakan in 1784 C.E.

arly documents mention that Rohingyas have been living in the Rakhine State since the 8th century. The Human Rights Watch traces the well-established presence of Rohingyas in the Mrauk-U (Mrohaung) kingdom in Arakan, now Rakhine State. It has also been mentioned that Rohingya Muslims had ruled over Arakan for more than 250 years until Burmese invasion and occupation of Arakan in 1784 C.E. Such evidence can also be found from the records of Francis Buchanan. He wrote, "I shall now add three dialects, spoken in the Burma Empire, but evidently derived from the language of the Hindu nation. The first is that spoken by the Mohammedans, who have long settled in

Given this above-mentioned analyses, it is no longer rational or reasonable to claim Rohingyas as "Bengalis" or "illegal immigrants from Bangladesh". Rather they have historically been living in Arakan. Unless their status of ethnicity is recognised or resolved, the long-term solution of the Rohingya crisis will remain questionable.

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ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

DECEMBER 12, 1901
RECEPTION OF TRANSATLANTIC RADIO SIGNALS, 1901

Guglielmo Marconi and his assistant, George Kemp, confirmed the reception of the first transatlantic radio signals, from Poldhu in Cornwall to Newfoundland, Canada.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Work the fields
- 5 Not at home
- 9 Hag
- 10 Grown girl
- 12 Tests the weight of
- 13 Bonkers
- 14 Ritzy home
- 16 Hawaiian instrument
- 17 Dance unit
- 18 Fridge stick-on
- 21 Turf
- 22 Become obsessed
- 23 Eiffel Tower setting
- 24 City squares
- 26 Hosp. workers
- 29 Spectrum color

DOWN

- 1 Magic word
- 2 Threw into the air
- 3 Like draft beer
- 4 Sunset site
- 5 Cobbler's tool
- 6 Court
- 7 Quantity

30 Barking beast

31 Ailing

32 Consider comparable

34 Suspect's defense

37 Not called for

38 Caesar's language

39 Like xenon

40 Army level

41 Combustible heap

8 New York player

9 Game with bishops

11 Russian refusal

15 Dubai, for one

19 Line of symmertry

20 Xenon, for one

22 Disconcert

23 Buddy

24 Temple support

25 Nabokov book

26 Library patron

27 Temperament

28 Wintry weather

29 Lab bottle

30 Bright

33 Witty remark

35 Storage site

36 Ballpoint fill

Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to dsopinion@gmail.com.

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

HI, I'M MISS BUXLEY'S PERSONAL TRAINER

HOW CAN SHE AFFORD A PERSONAL TRAINER?

HE PAYS HER!

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

OOPS.

RIP! RIP! RIP!

CHEW! CHEW! CHEW!

ANOTHER MATH WORKSHEET ACCIDENT?

HONEST, MOM, I THINK THEY'RE CURSED!

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S H E D D I A L S
C A S E S A N V I L
O N T A P I N A N E
U S A L P S T E E
R E T O O L C A N T
L E F T O V E R S
A C T E D
R I G H T H E R E
C O N E E I D E R S
E N D A R C G A P
A A R O N L E A S E
S L A N T E L L E N
E D G E S L E S T