

VIOLENCE-FREE CAMPUS

# Universities must get back control of their halls



NAZNIN TITHI

IN the aftermath of Abrar Fahad's murder in a BCL "torture cell" at the Sher-e-Bangla Hall of Buet, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina directed all the educational

institutions to look into their student dormitories to find out if there are similar torture cells there as well. Following the PM's directives, the education ministry asked all the heads of the educational institutions to form anti-ragging cells. Reportedly, Chittagong University's acting VC has already declared that such cells will be formed at the university. Not only that, the CU authorities have also decided to form a vigilance team in an attempt to monitor the halls regularly to avert what they called "unwanted incidents".

While forming vigilance teams and cells to stop ragging and torture of students seems like a good idea, one wonders why such cells are needed when there are hall administrations and proctorial teams whose job responsibility includes taking steps against such practices.

If the issue here is to make the dormitories safe for students, the discussion should essentially be on how the hall administrations and the proctorial teams can be empowered to look after the students' wellbeing, without any outside interference. Moreover, it is not clear how such cells will succeed in monitoring the halls and stop ragging and torture when the administrative bodies entrusted with these responsibilities have so far failed to do so.

What's more, for any such bodies to work independently, it must be ensured that these are formed with people who are not aligned with any particular political party and also that



Student protesters at Dhaka University demand the punishment of Abrar Fahad's killers.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

the BCL does not obstruct them in performing their duties. The question is, can our universities ensure all this?

The Dhaka University and Jahangirnagar University authorities have also taken a number of measures, such as setting up CCTV cameras in the *Gonorooms*, identifying the non-students living in the halls, etc. All the measures being taken by the universities after Abrar's death to ensure security of the students are just ad-hoc measures while the real problems are not getting much attention.

The real problem is far too complex and Abrar's murder has exposed this very well. In most public universities, the administration has completely lost control over the halls. In many cases, the hall administration has literally become non-existent. For example, in Dhaka University halls, the BCL practically plays the role of the administration when it comes to

allotting seats to the newly enrolled students. In many cases, when freshers go to the hall provosts to apply for seats, they send them directly to the BCL leaders to look into the matter, as alleged by many DU students.

The question that naturally arises is, why do the hall administrations give in to the BCL when it comes to matters of running the student halls? Clearly, the BCL has terrorised not only the students, but also the teachers as well as the university authorities. Secondly, in order to fulfil their political ambitions, a section of teachers are allegedly assisting the BCL in carrying out their nefarious activities on campus. Lastly, being recruited on political considerations and sharing the same ideologies, many teachers are unwilling to take action against the BCL.

Thus, it makes complete sense that the director of Buet's Directorate

of Students' Welfare (DSW) did not take any action against the errant BCL activists who had been torturing and harassing the general students for years. Reportedly, Buet's DSW director was a former BCL leader and was selected for the position on political grounds. And, we were not at all surprised when we came to learn that no action was taken against the BCL man who, reportedly, beat up a first-year student at DU's Bijoy Ekattor Hall last month.

In Dhaka University, there are around 12,000 seats in the student halls for about 43,000 students. The huge gap between the number of seats available in the dorms and the number of students enrolled every year creates an unhealthy competition among the students to get a seat in the halls. Except for Jahangirnagar University, which is a residential university, this is the case in most of our public universities.

Against this backdrop, making the residential halls as well as the university campuses safe for the students and education-friendly will need much more than just forming anti-ragging cells and vigilance teams. Since residential halls are where the torture and harassment of students mostly take place and the students become victims because of their desperation to keep the seats in the halls, if the hall administration can take control of the seat distribution process and decide to allot seats to students based on merit, many of the problems would be solved. The hall administrations and the proctorial teams should be empowered so that they can take decisions on their own on matters involving the students' wellbeing and they can be held to account for failing to take action against any bad practices inside the dormitories as well as on the campus.

Furthermore, an example should be set by bringing the killers of Abrar to justice and by expelling them from Buet for life. Furthermore, those responsible for killing so many students in different university campuses in the past should also be brought to justice. In other words, the culture of impunity that the pro-ruling party student organisations—currently the BCL—enjoy on campus should end. All these steps together can make campus safe for students again.

By putting the blame for Abrar's death squarely on student politics and advocating for banning student politics in the university campuses, we are ignoring the fact that only through ensuring justice for Abrar and other victims of violent student politics, and by holding the hall administrations accountable for the present situation in the student halls, can some sanity in the university campuses be restored.

Naznin Tithi is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

# The roots of Myanmar's Rohingya crisis



JOHN QUINLEY III

THE UN General Assembly in New York just ended recently, and while there was much talk of the Rohingya crisis—including important discussions on

ongoing efforts to hold perpetrators of genocide accountable—the root of the crisis in Myanmar continues to receive inadequate attention: the denial of citizenship rights of Rohingya in Myanmar.

Myanmar has denied Rohingya Muslims citizenship for decades, and unsurprisingly, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh who fled genocidal violence in Myanmar in 2016 and 2017 say they will not return to their homeland in Rakhine State without restored citizenship.

"I won't jump back into the fire," said a Rohingya refugee man in his makeshift shelter earlier this year on a hill in one of the world's largest refugee camps in Bangladesh. "Until the Myanmar government provides us with citizenship rights and justice, we will not go back."

Genocidal regimes often use legal and administrative tools to facilitate the destruction of a targeted group "in whole or in part," and that is the situation my colleagues and I at Fortify Rights have documented with regard to

Myanmar's National Verification Card (NVC) process. Based on hundreds of interviews with affected Rohingya, our latest report shows how the Myanmar government is trying to use the NVC to erase Rohingya identity and rights by requiring Rohingya to identify as "foreigners," effectively stripping them of access to full citizenship rights in their own country.

Our new report not only documents restrictions on the right to nationality but also how Myanmar authorities have threatened, beaten, and even forced Rohingya to accept NVCs at gunpoint.

Our findings confirm conclusions reached last month by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (IFFM) on Myanmar. As summarised by Marzuki Darusman, the Chair of the IFFM, "The threat of genocide continues for the remaining Rohingya."

The NVC is sadly nothing new. The government of Myanmar has been pushing it for years. Under Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), the government has been branding the NVC as a so-called "pathway" to citizenship, but nothing could be further from the truth.

The NVCs effectively require Rohingya to identify as foreigners, making them ineligible for full citizenship under Myanmar law. Our findings parallel those of the UN IFFM—that "the NVC process is as an integral part of the Government's protracted attempts to deny the Rohingya their identity and



Rohingya refugee children fly improvised kites at Kutupalong refugee camp near Cox's Bazar.

PHOTO: REUTERS

citizenship."

We also documented how Myanmar authorities' ramped up their efforts to coerce or force Rohingya to accept NVCs just prior to widespread and systematic Myanmar army-led attacks on Rohingya civilians in 2016 and 2017, providing evidence of a correlation between Myanmar authorities' efforts to force Rohingya to accept NVCs and their efforts to destroy the Rohingya as a group.

The IFFM recommends the government "restore" citizenship rights to the Rohingya and "suspend the NVC process." Fortify Rights and the entire

Rohingya community stand behind these recommendations.

But the NLD government and members of the international community have done little to support these recommendations. Rather, some UN officials and diplomats, including those based in embassies in Yangon, support the NVC process.

UN Special Envoy to Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener reportedly continues to support the process. On January 29, 2019 she issued a statement in which she failed to use the term "Rohingya" and "encouraged the internally displaced people she

met to consider applying for [NVC] registration." The statement parroted government rhetoric that NVCs are "a first step towards citizenship."

Furthermore, the Asean Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) showed in a leaked report that the NVC will be a definitive part of the Rohingya refugee return process without addressing ongoing human rights violations taking place in Rakhine State. It, too, failed to condemn the NVC process.

In late July, when a delegation of Myanmar and officials from neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia visited Rohingya refugee camps in southern Bangladesh—where over a million Rohingya now live—to distribute pamphlets encouraging Rohingya to apply for the NVC as part of a return process, Rohingya refugees burned the pamphlets to demonstrate their opposition to the process.

Rather than pushing the NVC process, the international community, including China and Southeast Asian states, should be pushing Myanmar to deal with the root causes of the crisis. They should listen to the Rohingya community and insist the NVC process is abolished and that Myanmar amend the 1982 Citizenship Law to provide equal access to full citizenship.

Until these calls are heeded, the Rohingya crisis will remain protracted.

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## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

### ACROSS

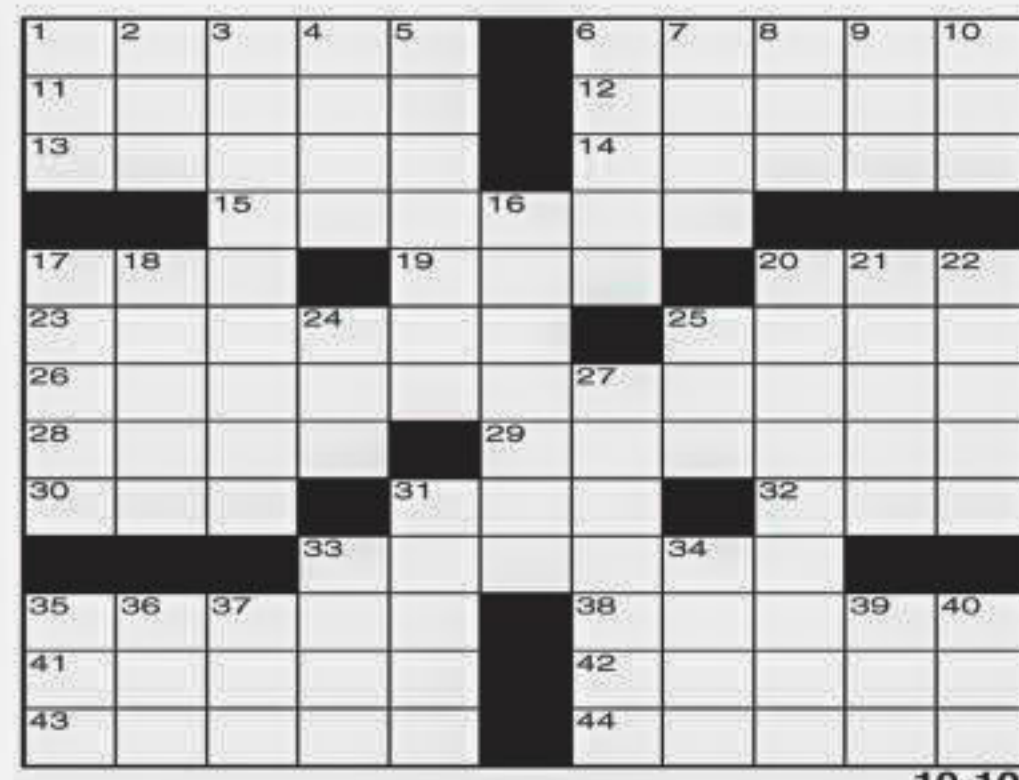
- 1 Egypt's Anwar
- 6 Very unpopular
- 11 Make ashamed
- 12 Scarlett's last name
- 13 Madame Curie
- 14 Stew
- 15 Complex
- 17 Blonde shade
- 19 Mardi Gras city
- 20 Chum
- 23 Selected
- 25 Ernst's art
- 26 "Heed this advice..."
- 28 "Frozen" queen
- 29 Fishing gear
- 30 Take in
- 31 Fragrant tree

### DOWN

- 1 Sleuth Spade
- 2 Lawyers' org.
- 3 Unexpected candidate
- 4 B — boy
- 5 Math statement
- 6 Instructional
- 7 Nautical greeting
- 8 Sailor

### ACROSS

- 9 Go astray
- 10 Calendar box
- 16 Dickens boy
- 17 High points
- 18 Sedimentary rock
- 20 Board-walk's partner
- 21 Mix up
- 22 Surgical tool
- 24 Reggae's kin
- 25 Bashful pal
- 27 Prepares to play
- 31 Disconcerted
- 33 Deck worker
- 34 Writer Rice
- 35 Research site
- 36 Hitherto
- 37 Golf goal
- 39 Poorly
- 40 Guitarist Paul



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## BEETLE BAILEY

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## BABY BLUES

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