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Myanmar: Rohingya Crisis: Denigrating Suu Kyi does not Help

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It is rather sad that human rights activists, western media and many other leaders of repute have made a concerted effort to denigrate Suu Kyi without realising her constraints in dealing with a humanitarian problem (Rohingya) that seems to get out of hand. The irony is that more she is criticised, more she is admired and supported by her people and more importantly the Army in Myanmar. Not that she is indifferent but she has many other correlated problems in dealing with the crisis. An Adviser to her had said that “she is appalled by what she has seen and she does care deeply” about the crisis.

What is more, increased western chorus against Suu Kyi would only encourage the Rohingya leader Al Ullal, trained in Pakistan and flush with Saudi funds to order another strike to scuttle any chances of return of the Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh!

One analyst of RSIS had rightly said that the international reaction to lambast Suu Kyi is unhelpful. It is only feeding the ultra nationalist rhetoric that a democratic Myanmar already faces!

It is not clear what the international community wants. Do they want to destroy the infant democracy that it still in the transition stage? Do they want to renew the sanctions against Myanmar which will only throw the country back into Chinese arms? This time India too may not abide by any coercive sanctions. Is it not correct not to raise the pitch but allow the Myanmar government to find its way to seek a solution of a problem that has been festering for over a few decades? The best approach would be to leave Suu Kyi alone.

The UNHCR had called the exodus of Rohingyas as a text book example of “ethnic cleansing.” Not that it matters, but the city of Oxford had decided to withdraw an honorary title it bestowed on Suu Kyi in 1997 on grounds of her inaction in the crisis. They perhaps are not aware

that it is their country Britain that was the cause of the present day crisis!

While the two countries that are directly affected by the crisis Myanmar and Bangladesh seem to be talking to each other and finding ways and means to solve the crisis, it is surprising that other countries who are not directly involved seem to be raising the pitch on the crisis.

The Iranian Deputy Parliament Speaker Ali Motahar declared last month that the Muslim world should form an expeditionary force to go to the rescue of the Rohingya. He threatened that the crimes of Myanmar government will not be halted without using military force! The Saudis already have an NATO like standing army.

Towards the end of September, the National Security Adviser U Thaung Tun addressed the UN Security Council and made a very objective and sober analysis of the situation in Rakhine Province in Myanmar. He said

1. One needs to recognise that the recent violence in Rakhine State was triggered by the attacks carried out by the so-called ARSA (Arakan Salvation Army) terrorist group.
2. The attacks resulted in the death of 12 security officers, one immigration officer one soldier and a number of innocent civilians and the Security forces were obliged to defend themselves.
3. It is to be stressed that there is no ethnic cleansing and genocide in Myanmar. Myanmar is home to over 135 officially recognised ethnic groups each with its own culture and to a variety of religions who have been living in harmony throughout history.
4. The Muslims are not a minority in Rakhine and they constitute 95 percent of the total population.
5. The villagers in the affected areas are living in fear of retaliation by the ARSA following the revelation that a large number of Hindu villagers have been massacred and buried in mass graves.
6. In spite of assurance of assistance and security many are still crossing over to Bangladesh.
7. Myanmar is willing to start the verification process that was once tried in 1993.
8. The government has launched a number of initiatives that includes an implementation committee for dealing with the recommendations of Kofi Annan Commission. The Report of Kofi Annan represents a “viable” road map to forge forward.

In an indirect reference to international criticism, he appealed to the international community to join hands with them to ensure that democracy takes firm roots at a critical juncture in the life of their young democracy.

The reaction of the Bangladesh government has been very sober and that is one country that is most affected. It is said that over 522000 refugees have officially registered themselves as refugees after crossing over. The speech of Prime minister Sheikh Hasina was without rhetoric and her proposals to move forward in the UN General Assembly are practical and doable. She appealed for the return of all the refugees and full implementation of Kofi Annan Commission Report.

While efforts are being made to bring back normalcy, the man Ata Ullah who has brought untold misery to thousands of Rohingyas by ordering the attack a day prior to the release of Kofi Annan's report is said to be determined to continue his activities to liberate the community. A Reuter's report of 6 October indicates that some of those who participated in the attacks now in refugee ranks have declared their intention to go back and attack "again and again." There will be serious repercussions if another attack takes place.

An article in the Atlantic has rightly identified that problem of the Rohingya's crisis is one of identity. Whereas the humanitarian groups and the Western Nations see the "self-identifying Rohingyas as the world's most persecuted minority, the government of Myanmar and majority of its people see "the handiwork of a foreign group with a separatist agenda, fueled by Islam and funded overseas. It is this difference in perception that will make the Rohingya issue all the more difficult to resolve in the near future.

Suu Kyi herself had said that the issue has to be handled more delicately, lately as it has received extra attention from the international community. It is more difficult to resolve any problem when all are watching it. This is true!

Given the recent violence in Rakhine State and undue international attention, the fragile peace process to which Suu Kyi has set her heart is likely to be impeded. The UNFC's planned meeting had to be postponed. The next Panglong Conference due in November will also have to be postponed. The Army meanwhile is continuing its operations against the KIO and thereby throwing the latter more into the arms of the Chinese supported Wa Group. The Shan State/Army Group has already warned that the situation in the country will worsen if the peace process is stalled.

Suu Kyi has her priorities. In her address to the diplomats in September, she warned that Myanmar's fragile democracy faces an uphill battle and huge challenges. She should be allowed to attend to these challenges. Denigrating her will not help.

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