

## Default loans will lead to a weakened economy

*Wilful defaulters must be punished*

WE commend the finance minister for having the courage and the foresight to make the full list of the loan defaulters public. This will strengthen our constantly eroding culture of transparency and accountability.

From the way the Bangladesh Bank has been changing provisions of the bank loans, extending the repayment time and relaxing the procedure of repayment, one would conclude that protecting the defaulters' interest is more important to our authorities than protecting the economy itself. However, it must be admitted that our state bank wouldn't and couldn't have done so without the direct involvement of the finance ministry. Every global and national institution worth its name have warned us against the menace of rising default loans and urged us to reign them in. Everybody appears to listen except the two bodies most directly concerned.

Let us repeat what we have said hundreds of times before. Loan defaulters should first be divided into two groups—the wilful defaulters and those whose loans became bad because of business and political circumstances beyond their control. All banking facilities within reason should be extended to the latter group and none to the former. In fact, the former group should be shown the sternest face of the law. For their action not only wasted scarce national resource but also put the whole economy at risk. The wilful defaulters are so by choice with the sole purpose of defrauding the government and the public and to syphon of funds from the banks. By allowing it for so long, the finance ministry and especially the Bangladesh Bank gave the worst possible signal that there could be—that loans do not need to be repaid in time. And if you are cleverer enough, never.

The role of bank directors as revealed in the finance minister's statement must also be equally condemned. They seem to think of their directorship as Aladdin's Lamp whose every rub should get them new loans without, literally, any limit. Here again the role of Bangladesh Bank comes into question. Why did it allow this to happen?

All said and done, the default loans are a failure of the regulatory bodies. Time has come for urgent corrective measures, including police and ACC action against the wilful ones.

## Chak families driven off their homes

*We do not want tourism on stolen lands*

THREE years ago, 15 families of Chak, a small ethnic community, were reportedly driven out of their homes in Shui Jaing Chak Para of Bandarban's Naikhongchhari upazila, after a group of eight to 10 criminals, with firearms and sharp weapons, attacked them, ransacked their homes and threatened them to leave the village immediately. For these three years, the 81 members of the community have been unable to return to their ancestral home and are living in misery. The victims allege that two powerful leaders of the ruling party were involved in the forced eviction, and that their land was grabbed in the name of a tourism project of the government. They were too afraid to file a case because of how powerful the perpetrators were, they claim.

Last October, the State Minister Mahbub Khan, during a trip to the area assured a correspondent of this paper that action would be taken against the perpetrators, no matter how powerful they were, if they really did grab land using the name of the government. He further pledged that "no member of any small ethnic community will be evicted from their land if tourism flourishes there." Meanwhile, the additional deputy commission in Bandarban said that they did not get any letter from the authorities regarding acquisition of land in Naikhongchhari area for tourism purposes. Obviously the land was forcibly grabbed on false pretence. Then, naturally, the question arises: why has no action been taken against those who evicted the 15 families from their ancestral land, especially if they did so in the name of a government tourism project? The allegations of involvement of powerful ruling party members cannot be taken lightly and the government must investigate whether the two accused misused their power in any way. We ask the state minister to intervene in this matter and honour his pledge that no ethnic community members would be driven off their lands for the sake of tourism.

Sadly, these are not the first, nor the last, families of this community to be evicted from their ancestral land for the purpose of building resorts and tourist spots for us to enjoy. Landgrabbing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and eviction of marginalised communities occur too often given the nexus between the landgrabbers and powerful elites. We want to say in no uncertain terms that we do not want tourism on stolen lands; we do not want helpless communities to be driven to starvation and homelessness so we can enjoy five-star comforts and spectacular views of the plush green hills of the Hill Tracts.

LETTERS  
TO THE EDITOR

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### Justice shall prevail

I was delighted to learn that the Gambia's filing of a case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) alleging it was committing "an ongoing genocide against its minority Muslim Rohingya population" finally paying off. The top court of the United Nations ordered Myanmar to take preventive action to ensure Rohingyas are not subjected to persecution.

I, like many others, applaud the court's decision. This goes to show that no matter how hard the evil perpetrators try to cover up their crimes against humanity, justice shall prevail.

Mary D'Souza, by email

# What comes after the ICJ ruling?

SHUPROVA TASNEEM

ALL eyes were turned to The Hague on Thursday when the International Court of Justice (ICJ) came back with its momentous decision on emergency provisional measures for the protection of the persecuted Rohingya population of Myanmar's northern Rakhine State. Specifically, the UN's top court ordered the following: i) that Myanmar take all measures according to Article II of the Convention to prevent the genocide of the Rohingya, which includes killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction in whole or in part, and imposing measures intended to prevent births; ii) that Myanmar ensure that its military, and any irregular armed units supported, controlled or influenced by it, do not commit the above acts, and do not engage in conspiracy, incitement, complicity or attempt to commit genocide; iii) that Myanmar shall take effective measures to prevent the destruction and ensure the preservation of evidence related to the allegations of genocide; and iv) that Myanmar shall submit a report to the Court on all measures taken to give effect to the Order within four months and every six months after that.

The Court's decision in favour of the Rohingya has been hailed as a significant step forward in the fight for justice for the world's most persecuted community. International lawyers and rights activists noted the unanimity of the decision despite the presence of a judge ad hoc nominated by Myanmar, although separate opinions were given later, and hailed the recognition of the Rohingya as "a protected group within the meaning of Article II of the Genocide Convention." Given Myanmar's efforts to strip the Rohingya of their identity and erase even the term "Rohingya", first by excluding them from one of the 135 officially recognised ethnic groups that live in Myanmar through the 1982 Citizenship Law and then by forcing them to accept the identity of ethnic Bengalis in order to receive national verification cards, this is nothing short of a moral victory for the now stateless community. When Nobel Laureate Aung Sun Suu Kyi shocked the world by deciding to personally defend her country's military at the international court's hearing last month, even she refused to use the word "Rohingya" once, despite delivering a 3,379-word speech—a telling identification of just how deep the racial divides run in Myanmar.

When the court order was being read out by presiding judge Abdulaqawi Ahmed Yusuf, the strong turn of words being used was difficult to ignore. At the very onset, it was established that "at least some of the acts alleged by the Gambia are capable of falling within the provisions of the Convention" and it is possible to establish, *prima facie*, the existence of a dispute between the two parties. The Court's simple and blunt refusal of Myanmar's request to throw out the case because of a "lack of jurisdiction" is also telling, as is their acknowledgement of the Gambia's right to take legal action against Myanmar, since "all the States Parties to the Genocide Convention have a common interest to ensure that acts of genocide are prevented and that, if they occur, their

authors do not enjoy impunity." The acknowledgement of the fact that a state, no matter how small and far removed from the atrocities being committed in another state, has the right to institute proceedings, that too on the basis of being part of a community of states as well as of specifically being a state party to the Genocide Convention, is noteworthy and may continue to have further impacts on future proceedings at the ICJ.

The frequent referrals in the hearing to resolutions from the UN General Assembly and specifically the fact-finding mission from the UN that spoke of the Myanmar army's "genocidal intent" was also a welcome turn of events for rights activists. Previously, many had expressed their frustrations at this important report being ignored, but the reading of the ICJ order showed that this sort of research

mobilising international condemnation and in creating pressure, especially from friendly nations and trading partners, to change domestic policy and take at least some reasonable steps in creating mechanisms for justice. However, this has not played out as expected. After the ICJ hearings in December, Myanmar set up a so-called Independent Commission of Enquiry, which released a facile report that claimed to have found war crimes that are "now being investigated and prosecuted by Myanmar's national criminal justice system" but failed to even come close to any honest reporting on the devastation unleashed by the Myanmar military on minority communities and, among other things, completely erased women's experiences from the conflict and the use of rape as a tool of war by the military, writing that, "although some

"acts of violence and intimidation (that) were committed with impunity using mechanisms of political power and military might" was released on January 22, many experts argue that Myanmar's current stance may only bolster support for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy in the upcoming elections.

None of the friends of Myanmar seem too concerned about Myanmar's reaction to the trials and their continuing denial. In fact, Chinese President Xi Jinping took this opportunity to kickstart a "new era in relations" between the two countries and sign multibillion-dollar infrastructure deals, including one for a strategically important port in the Indian Ocean that will definitely be a cause of concern for New Delhi. Whether India will react by distancing itself from Myanmar or by further improving ties with Myanmar to



The Court's decision in favour of the Rohingya has been hailed as a significant step forward in the fight for justice for the world's most persecuted community. PHOTO: YE AUNG THU/AFP

and advocacy can have an impact on legal proceedings. The strong monitoring role taken on by the Court as part of the provisional measures was also one without precedent and came as a welcome surprise to many.

However, while Thursday's events are definitely a positive step forward, it is important to remember that the provisional measures are only a sort of restraining order, and the actual case against Myanmar and the subsequent ruling could take years to reach its conclusion. More importantly, while the ICJ's rulings are final and without appeal, there is no way for the Court to actually enforce this ruling. The cynic might point to the provisional measures that were ordered by the ICJ with regard to the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina vs Serbia and Montenegro in April and September 1993, but which had no impact whatsoever in preventing the Srebrenica Massacre of 1995.

Arguably, the most important role that the ICJ plays in such a scenario is in

interviewees mentioned rape cases, these were all second-hand information heard from someone else."

A day before the ICJ order on provisional measures, Myanmar's State Counsellor Suu Kyi also wrote an opinion piece for the *Financial Times* where she made an embarrassing attempt to make excuses for their military's conduct, saying international condemnation can only further destabilise Rakhine and even going as far as to say that refugees in Bangladesh were providing "inaccurate or exaggerated information" and that the "international justice system may not yet be equipped to filter out misleading information". This blatant disregard for the international justice system is reflected in a Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs press statement released on Thursday, a bit too obviously titled, "There Was No Genocide in Rakhine". While a rare and surprising statement from key civil society groups in Myanmar condemning

limit the Chinese influence is yet to be seen, although their silence so far on the Rohingya issue makes it more likely they will take the latter route. Last month, Japan even became the first country to publicly voice its support for Myanmar, with Japanese ambassador to Myanmar Ichiro Maruyama saying that he does not think there is any possibility of a genocide occurring against the Rohingya. It seems that in this region, Bangladesh is the lone voice speaking out against the atrocities committed against the Rohingya, with Foreign Minister Abdul Momen calling the recent ICJ order "a victory for humanity"—although this sympathetic voice is yet to be translated into policy and our official position still largely focuses on repatriation only. What impact these hearings will have on the fate of the refugees in Bangladesh is still to be seen.

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# The Greta Effect

exchange of glares in her meeting with POTUS have made her the face of a new breed of leaders.

She can stand before the European Economic and Social Committee and call them "irresponsible spoiled brats" for not doing their homework right on the climate issue. She is constantly reminding everyone of the IPCC report that we are only 12 years away from when the effects of carbon emission will be irreversible. Greta, of course, is not a lone ranger. There are three other young leaders who are bringing the climate issue to the fore: In Castlemaine, Australia, Milou Albrecht, 15, is leading a pressure group to force German corporation Siemens to withdraw from an Australian coal mining project. In New York City, Xiye Bastida, 17, claimed a climate strike at her school last March. Jayden Foytlin and her friends in Louisiana sued the federal government for violating their rights to a liveable planet. Scout Pronto Breslin, 16, founded a group called Hudson Valley Wild to resist chemical encroachment. These young girls are remarkable for their courage and imagination as well as moral clarity. Their dream is to model the world that they want to see. Looking at these girls, one wonders, is the paradigm of leadership shifting? Why are so many girls championing causes that are far from gender specific? Does the eco-anxiety stem from the fact that women and children are probably going to be the first casualty of climate change?

Time magazine points out that the "global under-30 population has been rising since 2012 and today accounts for more than half of the more than 7.5 billion people on the planet. What will the world look like when this new generation leads?"

In contrast, Bangladesh, according to the updated electoral roll, has 110 million voters. Going by the old census, we just have about 50 million people who are under 18. This is the demographic dividend that have been aligned with our development discourse by the economists.

We could be benefitting from the highest number of young people being involved in the workforce. But our youth force needs to be plugged in with the global reality not only of now but also of the future. There are sporadic attempts to sanitise the movements under the hyped-up rubrics of SDGs or MDGs. Jaago Foundation, 10-minute-schools are doing wonderfully well to galvanise the youth movement in Bangladesh. Often, we see some sponsored copy-cat activism. Just imagine the way the Flash Mob that was popularised by Step Up movie series has been hijacked by TV commercials. Now you cannot distinguish a flash mob from an item song. Somehow, convictions

that they do not want any BS. They wanted drivers to have proper license and training, they wanted road rules to be followed, and they wanted to ensure road safety for all. The young ones coordinated through social media and the streets belonged to them. In the beginning, it felt like "as you like it" charade in a school programme that features role reversals. Everyone felt that the children were taking to the streets for the common good of all. And the notion extends beyond the current generation. However, the selfish oldies soon sensed that things were getting out of their hands; the civil disobedience was a bit too much for their old guts to stomach. They decided to "discipline" the little ones who wanted to bring "discipline" to the system.

We, the senior citizens, proved to the little ones that we aren't ready to practice what we preach. It looks good on TV to shower individual figures such as Malala or Greta with accolades, but we are very good at drawing the lines that we think will "protect" our kids. After all, that's the sanitised and controlled culture that we have grown up in where the seniors and juniors always maintain a vertical trajectory. We cannot think of the young ones as our peers or stakeholders of the common good.

In order for us to have a Greta of our own, we need to create a culture where young thoughts and minds are given the required space to grow and flourish. We need to inculcate a sense of mutual respect. Our next generation needs some "adult allies" who can hone the youthful ideas and channel their energies to do greater things for humanity. Greta's parents are great examples. If we cannot move beyond partisan politics and economics that privilege one group over the other, we will never be able to secure a better future for the future generations. Indeed, we owe our future generations a beautiful world.

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BLOWIN' IN  
THE WIND

SHAMSAAD MORTUZA

this Swedish teenager has made at the UN, World Economic Forum, and British Parliament amid others. She started small with a school strike project to protest against the carbon emissions and mass extinctions that are killing the world, and eventually found a bigger platform to voice out her concerns before a global audience.

Time magazine touted Greta as person of the year in 2019 and placed her among the echelon of young leaders who are making a difference. The gale force with which she has taken the world by storm made one right-wing Austrian newspaper *Die Presse* obliquely compare her to Marx and observe, "A specter is striding through Europe, it's name is the 'Greta effect'."

A section of the conservative press even mocked her illness. Greta is suffering from a type of autism known as Asperger syndrome, named after the Austrian paediatrician, Hans Asperger. Such patients have difficulties in social interaction and nonverbal communication, including difficulties reading body language. They are known for being direct and seeing the world in black and white. Going through the lectures, it is apparent that Greta is annoyed by the way the generation that is running the show (our one) is not doing anything at all. For Greta, most of us pay lip-service that global warming is happening. Hardly any country in the world is actually doing anything to bring down the temperature by 2 degree Celsius as was agreed in the Paris convention, for instance. Greta's no-nonsense attitude and her now famous