

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## Electioneering not at the cost of public comfort

*Candidates must be made to conform to the code of conduct*

It is unfortunate that in our society the saying that rules are observed in their violation is being constantly demonstrated in our day to day life. And when rules are violated by people seeking public office, what examples do they set for the public? In the most recent instance, section 21 of the City Corporation (Electoral Code of Conduct) Rules 2016, which allows the use of loudspeakers only between 2:00 pm and 8:00 pm, is being flouted by all the candidates, with returning officers falling short of compelling the candidates to conform to the rubles of electoral conduct. And not only that, the limit on the number of loudspeakers a candidate may use in a venue/spot—which is one—is being exceeded with impunity. It needs little emphasis, but which we often care little about, that noise pollution can be as harmful to public health as any other type of pollution, if not more. It is hard to imagine, unless one is in that area, the effect of the microphones and amplifiers of all the 700 candidates blaring simultaneously.

One assumes that candidates agree to comport with the norms and stipulations governing the electoral behaviour before embarking on campaigns. And they must be aware of the existing electoral rules for city corporation elections. It is thus surprising that some candidates are unaware of the electoral laws, as a report in this paper reveals. Admittedly, election time in our country wears a festive mood. But one should not forget that campaigning shouldn't cause discomfort to the public whose votes the candidates are seeking, even more so when the SSC exams are knocking at the door.

Regrettably too, laminated posters are being used in violation of a High Court order banning single-use plastic. It is an irony that the mayoral candidates who promise us a clean environment are themselves adding to the pollution. The excuse that its use is not banned by the Election Commission (EC) is unacceptable. We believe that the EC must move decisively to enforce the electoral rules and the HC order. And if any of its directives violate the order of the court then that must be immediately rescinded.

## Untreated medical waste still being dumped in landfills

*The issue deserves serious attention from the government*

We are alarmed at the way untreated medical waste is still being dumped at the landfills of all the city corporation areas, posing a serious threat to public health. *The Daily Star* ran a series of reports on the deplorable condition of medical waste management in our divisional cities in the last one year to raise awareness about the issue and draw the attention of the government agencies concerned, but to no avail. According to our reports, the situation is pretty much the same in all the seven cities—Chattoogram, Rajshahi, Barishal, Khulna, Rangpur, Sylhet and Mymensingh—due to authorities' failure to check the malpractice and lack of necessary government arrangement to dispose of the waste.

Although the divisional cities, excluding the capital, have around 1,380 public and private healthcare establishments that produce over 20 tonnes of medical waste every day, there is hardly any mechanism to treat the waste. On January 26, *The Daily Star* reported on the situation of clinical waste management in Mymensingh City Corporation. In the city, there are a total of 221 healthcare facilities—public and private, but none of them have any mechanism to incinerate or sterilise the medical waste.

Although according to Medical Waste (Management and Processing) Rules 2008, all the healthcare centres must have mechanisms to incinerate or sterilise medical waste, many of the hospital authorities have opined that it is not feasible for them to set up such plants in their premises. There were also suggestions to reform the relevant law in order to make it implementable. Given the situation, the government agencies concerned, including the health ministry, DoE and DGHS, must sit with all the stakeholders and collectively come up with a plan on how to develop a proper medical waste management system to save public health as well as the environment.

It is, however, good to know that a private organisation in collaboration with Mymensingh City Corporation (MCC) has set up a medical waste disposal unit in the city. Although they only charge the hospitals Tk 2,000-3,000 per month for their service, only 18.63 percent of the healthcare facilities currently avail their service. Similar initiatives were also taken by private organisations in Chattoogram and Barishal. What the government should do now is make a proper arrangement with these organisations and encourage all the hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic centres to collaborate with them.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Introducing a metropolitan government

Establishment of a metropolitan government is necessary to ensure basic urban services of megacity Dhaka run smoothly, which must be emphasised ahead of the upcoming North and South Dhaka city polls to be held on February 1, 2020. The city corporations cannot yet solve the essential problems relating to water, gas, sewage, traffic congestion, power supply, road network, water logging, air pollution and river pollution. Therefore, it is essential to restructure the bureaucratic mechanism of outmoded city corporations, and replace them with metropolitan governments akin to Hong Kong, Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur and ensuring the participation of all occupational and professional bodies, law enforcing agencies and NGOs in metropolitan councils.

Md. Yamin Khan, Shyamoli, Dhaka

# When economics prevails over genocide

## Myanmar remains defiant with its genocidal intent



A CLOSER LOOK

TASNEEM TAYEB

TWO days after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) approved emergency "provisional measures" asking Myanmar to stop persecution of the Rohingya in all forms—including killing, raping, and destroying homes and villages—two Rohingya women died in Rakhine State when the Myanmar army shelled a village. One of them was pregnant.

While many celebrated the ICJ's order of provisional measures, some—especially those who have witnessed the ineffectiveness of the ICJ's repeated "provisional measures" to protect Bosnian Muslims in 1993—had been cynical about the ultimate outcome of such a measure. Their scepticism is yet to be proven wrong.

Despite the ICJ's order, Myanmar—it seems—remains defiant with its genocidal intent against the Rohingya. And Myanmar has good reason for its intransigence.

First of all, while the ICJ's order is binding, it is not enforceable; and in the face of Myanmar's non-compliance, The Gambia (the country that brought the case against Myanmar at the ICJ) at best can approach the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for it to decide whether it will use its powers to force Myanmar to comply with the ICJ's order. And here lies the advantage of Myanmar.

China and Russia—two of Myanmar's major allies—are two of the five permanent members of the UNSC, which also includes the United States, France and the United Kingdom. Both these countries have in the past resisted the United Nations' attempts to address the Rohingya issue. To refresh the memory: in March 2017, China and Russia blocked a UN Security Council statement that would have "noted with concern renewed fighting in some parts of the country and stressed the importance of humanitarian access to all affected areas", as reported by news agency Reuters.

With deep economic and military ties with China and Russia, it is no wonder that Myanmar is safe and strong in the knowledge that the UNSC will not be able to induce it to comply with the ICJ's verdict in the months and years to come.

Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Myanmar earlier this month and the signing of 33 memorandums of understanding (MOUs), agreements, exchange letters and protocols send a strong signal to Bangladesh and to the

wider world about its strategic ties with the country. According to Myanmar's Directorate of Investment and Company Administration data, in 2019 China was the second biggest foreign investor in Myanmar, accounting for 25.21 percent of investment in the country; Singapore was the biggest, making up 26.86 percent of the foreign direct investment Myanmar received in the same year.

On the occasion of Xi's visit, a joint statement in Chinese state media said that China "firmly supports Myanmar's efforts to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests and national dignity in the international arena" and hopes for it to advance "peace, stability and development in Rakhine State." Even if one does not read too much into these

said, "It is difficult to imagine how meaningful recovery and development are possible in Rakhine without addressing the underlying human rights issues that currently impact every aspect of life for communities." Despite World Bank's assurance that, "The project is being carefully prepared so that it does not reinforce or perpetuate movement restrictions or other forms of segregation, and that it creates new openings for social cohesion and positive exchanges between communities," how it is going to make sure of this remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, Myanmar's military ties with Russia have only strengthened over the years. In January 2018, Russia agreed to sell six Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jets to Myanmar costing at least USD

institutions in Russia in January 2018, as suggested by Russia's Deputy Defence Minister Lieutenant-General Alexander Fomin.

Apart from these economic transactions, around 60 foreign companies from around the world have ties with businesses controlled by the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited and the Myanmar Economic Corporation—two military-governed businesses in Myanmar. It is these two conglomerates that dominate the economic and commercial landscape of the country. To address this, the UN fact-finding mission in 2019 urged imposing targeted financial sanctions on companies linked with Myanmar's military and suggested that foreign companies doing business with Tatmadaw-controlled corporations could be complicit in international crimes.

During the Rakhine State Investment Fair in 2019, Suu Kyi said, "Myanmar has opened up its economy to the world. We have been constantly adjusting our policies, rules and regulations to be in line with international best practices and to make the investment climate more favourable, predictable, facilitative and friendly. We want to establish a welcoming economic environment for all." Unfortunately, it seems the welcoming environment is not inclusive of the Rohingya.

Given the scenario, it is not surprising that the world, including international bodies like the UN, has miserably failed to address, let alone stop, the genocide unleashed by Myanmar against the helpless Rohingya. Thousands of adults and children have been killed; millions forced to flee; and an unaccountable number of women and girls have been systemically sexually violated, impregnated and exposed to various sexually transmitted diseases by the Myanmar military. And the world watched the spectre unfold before their very eyes like an audience at a macabre movie screening.

While the world is busy exploring potential economic tie-ups with Myanmar, thanks to its vast untapped resources and strategic geopolitical importance, it is the Rohingya and Bangladesh that are bearing the brunt of Myanmar's economic possibilities. While the ICJ's verdict is a welcome move, without political will to hold Myanmar to account it will not yield any positive outcome for the Rohingya. Expecting much from it would be a folly. The 1995 Srebrenica massacre should serve as a reality check.

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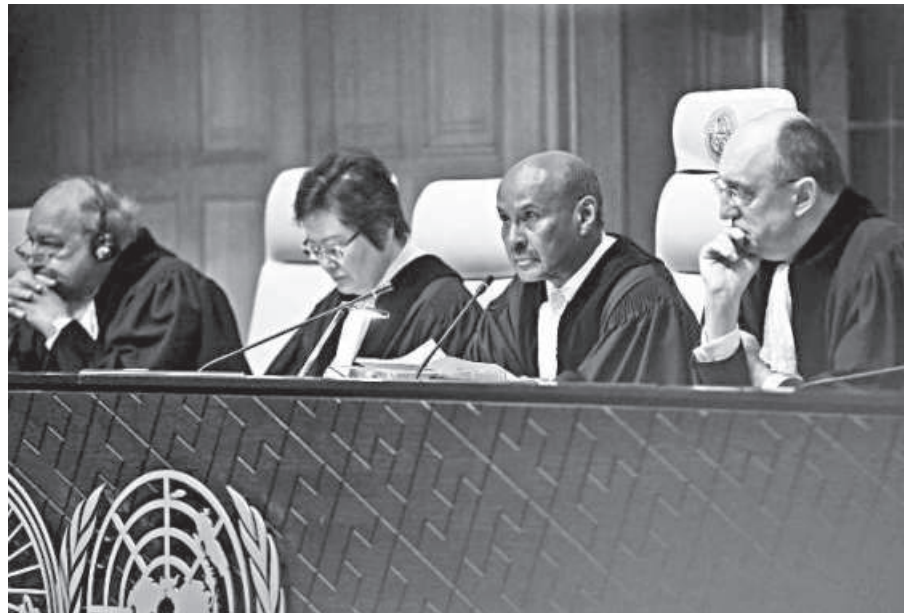


PHOTO: REUTERS/EVA PLEVIER

Judge Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf is pictured during the ruling at the International Court of Justice in the Hague, Netherlands on January 23, 2020.

two lines, it would be difficult to misread China's stance on the Rohingya issue.

During the visit, China and Myanmar also signed an agreement for the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) deep seaport project, a major town in the volatile Rakhine State that is at the centre of the Rohingya genocide.

China is not the only actor investing in Rakhine. The World Bank in 2019 came under heavy fire from international human rights bodies and non-government organisations (NGO) for its proposed USD 100 million development project in the conflict-riven Rakhine State titled, "Rakhine Recovery and Development Support Project".

In a letter to the World Bank dated April 9, 2019, obtained by Reuters, more than a dozen Myanmar-based NGOs

204 million. The deal was announced during the official visit of Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu to Myanmar in January 2018.

As late as August 2019, Myanmar military chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing paid a visit to Russia and during his stay, he visited the Irkutsk Aviation Plant Corporation that is assembling the six Sukhoi Su-30SM multi-role advanced fighter jets for Myanmar. Photos of him sitting in a cockpit next to a test pilot made quite a show of his trip to the plant.

Of course, warplanes are not enough; military personnel require training as well. Here too Russia comes to their aid—more than 600 members of the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military) were studying at higher military educational

# IRAN CRISIS TEST & Trump's foreign policy



JAMES M. DORSEY

AT the core of US President Donald J Trump's maximum pressure campaign against Iran lies the belief that Iran can be forced to negotiate terms for the lifting of harsh US economic sanctions even if it has no confidence in US intentions and adherence to agreements.

The Trump administration's belief, despite the conviction of much of the international community that maximum pressure has failed and risks provoking a devastating all-out war in the Middle East, says much about the president's transactional approach towards foreign policy that rests on the assumption that bluster, intimidation and the brute wielding of power can protect US interests and impose US will.

Richard Goldberg, an Iran hawk who resigned this month as the official on the president's national security council responsible for countering Iranian weapons of mass destruction, signalled in an op-ed in *The New York Times* titled "Trump Has an Iran Strategy. This Is It," that Trump attributes no importance to deep-seated Iranian concerns that he is gunning for regime change in Tehran and that building trust is not needed to resolve the Iran crisis.

"The Iranian regime doesn't need to trust America or Mr. Trump to strike a deal; it just needs to act as a rational actor to avoid collapse," said Goldberg, who, backed by former national security advisor John Bolton, served for a year in the White House.

Richard Goldberg appeared to ignore the fact that the US withdrawal 20 months ago from a 2015 international agreement that curbed Iran's nuclear program sparked doubts not only in Iran but across the globe about the value of a US signature on any agreement. He also appeared oblivious to the fact

that Iranian suspicions were reinforced by allegations that his salary, while at the White House, was paid by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a hardline Washington-based think tank that is believed to have close ties to Israel and the United Arab Emirates. He seemed equally oblivious of anecdotes about how his hardline views provoked clashes with other administration officials.

In his op-ed, Goldberg suggested that any new agreement with Iran could be ratified by the US Senate.

The Trump administration and Goldberg's misreading of what it would take to steer the United States and Iran off a road of more than 40 years of deep-seated mutual distrust and animosity and towards the turning of a new page in their relationship was evident in indirect responses to the former national security council official's assertions.

"Even if one day we negotiate with the US, the talks will not be with Trump, won't be strategic (no normalisation of ties) and will be done only by conservatives, not reformists. We need to see changes in the (US) Congress; whether Democrats will pursue a fair policy by which Iran is not under pressure over its missile program," said a regime insider.

The Trump administration has demanded among other things that Iran curb its ballistic missile program, a core element of the Islamic republic's defence strategy, given that its armed forces lack a credible air force and navy.

Hardliners, who rather than moderates have proven in other Middle Eastern conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian dispute to be the ones capable of cutting deals, are expected to win next month's parliamentary elections in Iran. The likelihood of hardline advances was enhanced by the fact that scores of moderates have been barred from running for office.

Iranian reformists argue that the accidental downing of a Ukrainian airliner by Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps demonstrates the risk of an Iranian strategy that is pre-empted on eternal

hostility towards the United States.

Goldberg offered a rare indication that the Trump administration recognises Iran's strategy of gradual escalation that, based on the assumption that neither the United States nor Iran wants an all-out war, aims to bring the two countries to the brink of an armed conflict in the belief that this would break the logjam and force a return to the negotiating table on terms acceptable to Iran.

Noting that Trump had failed in the past nine months to respond to multiple Iranian provocations, including the downing of a US drone and attacks on tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates and on key Saudi oil facilities, Goldberg asserted that Trump "recognised those traps for what they were and exercised strategic patience."

Trump's patience ended in December when he responded to the death of an American contractor in an attack by Iranian-backed Iraqi militias and the militias' siege of the US embassy in Baghdad by first authorising air strikes against militias bases in Iraq and Syria and then the killing of Iranian general Qassim Soleimani.

Goldberg would likely describe the president's decision not to respond to a subsequent Iranian retaliatory attack on housing facilities for US military personnel in Iraq as a renewed act of strategic patience.

Trump's strategic patience is bolstered by his retention of options to further increase maximum pressure on Iran. "Many wrongly believe the United States has already reached full maximum pressure on Iran," Goldberg said.

He also pointed to sanctions targeting Iranian state shipping lines that are set to take effect in June, the administration's recent identification of Iran's financial sector as a "primary jurisdiction of money-laundering concern," this month's imposition of sanctions on its construction, mining and manufacturing sectors, and Europe's triggering of the nuclear accord's dispute mechanism that could lead to the return of United Nations-mandated sanctions.

Goldberg and Trump's belief that imminent economic collapse and international political isolation could prompt Iranian leaders to suddenly place a call to the White House turns Trump's handling of the Iran crisis into a litmus test of the president's approach to foreign relations.

There is little in the tortuous history of relations between the United States and the Islamic republic that suggests that pressure will persuade Iran, convinced that Washington is gunning for the fall of the regime, to gamble on an unconditional return to the negotiating table.

Nor does North Korea's failure to succumb to US pressure even if Trump, in contrast to his remarks about Iranian spiritual leader Ali Khamenei, professed his love for Kim Jong-un.

Trump's policy towards Iran, rather than reinforcing Gulf confidence in the United States' reliability as a guarantor of regional security, has sparked a wait-and-see attitude and nagging doubts about US reliability.

If anything, risky US and Iranian strategies are likely to prove that the crisis can only be defused if both sides garner an understanding of the others' objectives and some degree of confidence that both parties would remain committed to any agreement they conclude.

So far, US and Iranian policies amount to a dialogue of the deaf that is likely to perpetuate the risk of hostility getting out of hand and incentivise regional players to think about alternative arrangements that ultimately could weaken US influence and reduce tensions with Iran by including it, despite US policy, in a more multilateral security architecture.

A podcast version of this story is available on SoundCloud, iTunes, Spotify, Stitcher, TuneIn, Speaker, Pocket Casts, Tumblr, Podbean, Audible, Patreon and Castbox.

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