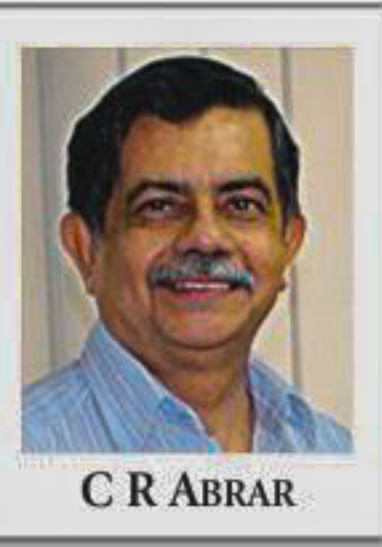


Re-impose sanctions on Myanmar?



C R ABRAR

RAKHINE is burning. The hapless Rohingyas are being butchered, children are thrown into fire, women are disrobed in

public before being gang-raped and houses are looted, torched and razed. In the process Rohingya neighbourhoods are destroyed. In the past, extremist members of the majority Buddhist community carried out such dastardly acts while the security forces looked the other way. Denial was the order of the day and little punitive measures were taken against the perpetrators. Over the last several weeks the situation has taken a turn for the worse. The law enforcement agencies, including the armed forces, have actively unleashed violence. The attack on the security forces allegedly by radicalised Rohingyas was a flimsy pretext for a violent crackdown on this marginalised community. There is a strong body of evidence to argue that such an assault on the Rohingyas was part of a well-prepared strategy involving non-state actors and state agencies. In October 2016, mainstream international media began reporting distribution of lethal weapons among a section of the population in the Rakhine state. This was soon followed by gruesome acts of violence against the Rohingya minority that is now being aptly described as 'planned genocide'.

Experts and the international media have put various labels on the action of the Burmese government - "ethnic cleansing", "crime against humanity" and "genocide". The sheer scale of evidence (documentary and satellite generated images) has debunked the lies and hypocrisy of the government that is being effectively led by the noble laureate Ms. Aug San Suu Kyi. Instead of mitigating the suffering of the Rohingyas the regime exacerbated their woes by denying passage of humanitarian aid to the affected people, engaging in crude censorship if the media, and barring independent observers and human rights monitors from accessing the area. Ms. Suu Kyi is reported to have been "upset" about international community's overt focus on one side of the conflict without "having the real information". It will be interesting to know what "real information" the once-icon-of-freedom was referring to.

Anyone with rudimentary knowledge of the Rohingya situation is aware that thousands of people in North Maungdaw are trapped in a 'locked down' area for more than a month and a half without access to urgently needed humanitarian aid and the freedom to move and seek protection from persecution. Harvests have been destroyed creating conditions of starvation for



ILLUSTRATION: CRAIG STEPHENS/ SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

thousands. The Arakan Project and other sources have reported that after the clashes between Rohingya armed groups and Myanmar's military, two helicopter gunships opened fire on fleeing villagers while ground troops attacked civilians, including women, children and the elderly, with

bayonets and guns. So far about 70 people have been killed that the government wants the world to believe were "insurgents". Ms. Suu Kyi may well be reminded that after the violence that flared up in 2012 and 2013 the Rohingyas have been forcibly removed from their

own homes in various townships and been placed in ghettos without having access to livelihood opportunities, education and healthcare. The dire conditions are reminiscent of conditions of the members of the indigenous African community under the apartheid regime of South Africa. If apartheid is understood as a political and social system that promotes racial discrimination in favour of a particular community then at the moment no country in the world can compete to fittingly qualify the top spot of an apartheid state other than Myanmar.

Daw Suu Kyi's attention also needs to be drawn to the recent study conducted by the reputed International State Crime Initiative of the University of London. The study confirmed "systematic, widespread, and ongoing violations, including: institutional discrimination, torture, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, destruction of communities, apartheid structures of segregation, targeted population control, mass killings, land confiscation, forced labour, denial of citizenship and identity, severe restrictions on freedom of movement and access to healthcare, food, education, and livelihood opportunities; and state-sanctioned campaigns of religious hatred". In no uncertain terms it concluded Myanmar's state's policies of persecution of Rohingyas as "genocidal practice".

Myanmar's systemic persecution of the Rohingyas, its inability to take appropriate actions against the perpetrators of gross rights abuses, its incapacity to ensure enjoyment of fundamental rights for all its people, and its execution of what appears to be an orderly plan to depopulate the

Rakhine region of the Rohingyas make a strong case for the international community to consider re-imposing sanctions against Myanmar.

The western world, the self-professed champion of democracy and human rights, needs to set its priorities right. Enough concession has so far been made to the 'new government' to prepare a roadmap to put things in order in Rakhine. No excuse is enough for the government's active connivance in genocidal practices. The little hope that was generated after Ms. Suu Kyi formed the Kofi Annan Commission soon petered out when the former Secretary General claimed to have not personally witnessed anything he "would define as oppression" following his September 2016 visit to Sittwe and Aung Myingalar ghettos. His position was in sharp contrast of a few others who compared the sites with those of Nazi Germany's Jewish ghettos.

The western governments and big corporations remain firmly entrenched to pursue their trade and investment interests and are unlikely to respond favourably to the call for re-imposing sanctions on Myanmar. The starting point could be targeting the ordinary masses of those countries and others who are guided by compassion, humanity, reason and respect for rights and dignity. With the support of this group the state crimes committed by the Myanmar regime against the Rohingyas need to be widely circulated in the social media. Support must be garnered to exert pressure on the companies for boycotting their products that engages with Myanmar and all kinds of produce of the freedom-trampling genocidal apartheid regime of Myanmar.

The writer is Professor of International Relations at the University of Dhaka. He researches and writes on rights and migration issues.

Zila Parishads: At a crossroads

SHAKHAWAT LITON

THE first ever election to district councils, also known as Zila Parishads, scheduled to be held on December 28, may be considered an important step towards fulfillment of the dream of the framers of our Constitution. They dreamt of a democratic local government and translated their dream into the Constitution in 1972. According to constitutional provisions, participation of people must be ensured in the district administration through their elected representatives, as the district has been declared an administrative unit by the Constitution itself, and district councils were created through laws to meet the constitutional provisions.

Holding elections, however, is not enough to honour the spirit of the constitutional provisions. Each of the district councils must be empowered with necessary jurisdiction, human resources and funds to plan and implement development activities in its area and supervise the functions of the local administration. If the local administration, led by deputy commissioners, are allowed to keep on exercising their authority over the local administration, the district councils will remain powerless and dysfunctional just like the upazila parishads. The upazila parishads could not be fully functional as upazila nirbahi (executive) officers, who belong to the administrative cadre, have been allowed to exercise their full authority over the upazila level administration.

Moreover, MPs, who are advisors to district councils, must be prevented from interfering in the functions of the councils. Their meddling in the local government body's functions is against the spirit of separation of powers.

The government, therefore, in addition to holding the elections, should plan how to bring dynamism to the district councils. The ruling Awami League can play important role in strengthening the district councils in view of the upcoming elections in December. The party should pick honest, efficient and dynamic candidates with party support. It is certain that local AL leaders will be elected chairmen to all 61 district councils [three district councils in CHT

areas are run by separate laws]. The BNP and Jatiya Party are not in the electoral race as they do not have enough representatives elected in other local government bodies who are electors in the district council elections.

A strong district council is very important to improve governance at the district level. Being top tier of the local government system, district councils can play a significant role in implementing the government's agenda for developments.

The history of the district administration, however, reveals the ground realities.

India Company split the entire Bengal into 19 districts, and appointed an English supervisor for each district to supervise collection of revenue. Of them eight were in what is now Bangladesh. The number of districts in Bangladeshi territory increased to 16 in 1916 and then to 17 in 1947 and 19 in 1969.

In independent Bangladesh, some reforms were brought in as well. In 1983, the then military ruler had planned to upgrade all 46 sub-districts to districts. A seven member committee was formed. In line with the recommendation of the committee, 64 districts were formed in 1984. The

1976 which provided for a district council in each district, to be comprised of elected representatives. But no elections were held. The DC continued to act as an ex-officio chairman of the parishad.

Under another military ruler, HM Ershad, things changed. His government enacted a district council law in 1988 with provisions for MPs to serve as chairmen of the parishads as a way of strengthening the base of his Jatiya Party at the district level. After the fall of Ershad in 1990, the then BNP-led government removed the chairmen of the district councils, and appointed DCs temporarily as ex-officio chairmen of the councils. The DCs continued to function as ex-officio chairmen until the Zila Parishad Act was passed in 2000 by the AL-led government with provisions for holding polls to the parishads. But no election was held. Again it was the AL-led government that in December 2011 appointed its party men as administrators to run the district councils who are still running the councils.

The history of districts tells both sides of the stories - underlining the important role played by the district administration and how district councils have been abused by successive governments for their narrow political interests. Now, the elections have put the district councils at a crossroads. The government, if it wants to, can transform them into the focal point of local economy and all other development activities. Each of the district councils could be turned into a mini-government that will have all jurisdiction to run the district administration.

The big question is whether Deputy Commissioners (DCs), who belong to the powerful admin cadres, will accept such change in the district administration. If the administrative cadre does not agree to curtail the jurisdiction of DCs to empower district councils, an unpleasant situation may prevail. In that case, the district councils, once they are constituted through the elections, may face hurdles while carrying out their functions the same way the Upazila Parishads have been facing since 2009.

Government policymakers should give careful thought to such a possibility. As Finance Minister AMA Muhith stated in his speech last June, we should keep in mind that the poor state of local governance remains a major impediment to overall good governance in the country.

The writer is Special Correspondent, The Daily Star.

The history of districts tells both sides of the stories - underlining the important role played by the district administration and how district councils have been abused by successive governments for their narrow political interests.



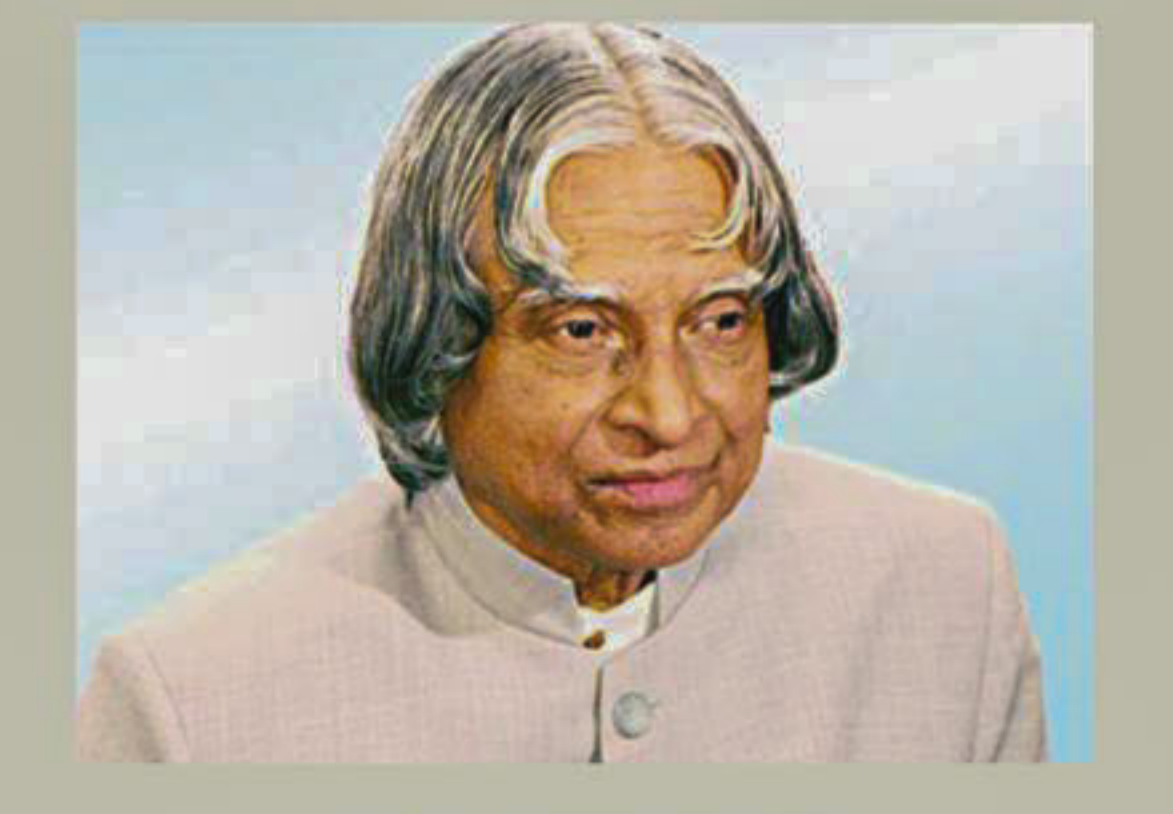
The main reason behind the creation of district as an administrative unit during the East India Company rule was to accelerate the collection of revenue. Demarcation of boundaries of districts and setting up of headquarters was on the basis of controlling organised dacoit groups, ensuring security for Europeans and some other administrative advantages. Districts had been used almost for the same purpose during the entire British rule. Their number had gradually been increased for the important role the district administration had performed.

In 1769, the select committee on the then East

number of districts has increased, but they did not get the democratic character in line with the constitutional provisions due to lack of political will of successive governments. Either MPs or DCs were allowed to run the district councils in violation of the constitutional provisions.

In 1975, the government led by Bangabandhu had replaced the traditional local government system with party machinery. District councils with representatives from Baksal and its front organisations were constituted, with party men at their helm as governors. General Ziaur Rahman promulgated a local government ordinance in

QUOTABLE Quote



A. P. J. ABDUL KALAM

Dream is not that which you see while sleeping, it is something that does not let you sleep.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Bill collector
 - 7 Track shape
 - 11 Jim Palmer, once
 - 12 Clip
 - 13 Word on a poster
 - 14 Hill workers
 - 15 Recital piece
 - 16 Bessie Smith's forte
 - 17 Non-payment result, for short
 - 18 Infamous marquis
 - 19 Sharpen
 - 21 Great amount
 - 22 "Well, I'll be!"
 - 25 Writer Follett
 - 26 Optimistic
 - 27 Chant
 - 29 Prepare potatoes
 - 33 Glowed
 - 34 Carp
 - 35 Janitors' tools
 - 36 Band helper
 - 37 Huron neighbor
 - 38 Mean
 - 39 Diplomatic skill
- DOWN**
- 1 Castle part
 - 2 Fuming
 - 3 Locker art
 - 4 Note
 - 5 Out of the wind
 - 6 Roulette bet
 - 7 Lustrous gems
 - 8 Pacific island nation
 - 9 Took, as advice
 - 10 Reduce
 - 16 Test programs
 - 18 Friday's creator
 - 20 Music's Lena
 - 22 Mrs., in Rio
 - 23 Relevant
 - 24 Bodybuilders, often
 - 25 Fate
 - 28 Beginning
 - 30 Staffers
 - 31 Book part
 - 32 Listens to
 - 34 Departed
 - 36 Crater part

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

WHY IS HE WEARING ALL THOSE FLOAT DEVICES?
HE'S A GOOD SWIMMER
BEETLE WOULD RATHER SLEEP THAN SWIM

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

I WANT TO BE A PEST CONTROL GUY WHEN I GROW UP.
HUH?
YOU KNOW WHAT THOSE GUYS DO, RIGHT?
THEY CRAWL AROUND IN FILTHY, SMELLY SPACES TO TRAP RODENTS AND SPRAY TOXIC CHEMICALS ON BUGS.
YOU HAD ME AT "FILTHY."

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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