

Countering the other fundamentalism



STRAIGHT LINE
In view of the grisly and gory attacks, allegedly state-sponsored, on the Rohingya Muslim minority of neighbouring Myanmar, it would not be

out of place to take a serious look at the menacing face of the other kind of fundamentalism about which the international community has not been desirably vocal. Incidentally, the word 'fundamentalism' has often been used and expressed in a pejorative sense.

For the ease of understanding, can we term the embattled and frequently intolerant religiosity as fundamentalism? Are the so-called fundamentalists departing from the core values of compassion, justice, and benevolence that characterise all the world faiths including Islam and Buddhism too? One could raise such a query as the myth of the supposed fanatical intolerance of Islam has become one of the accusatory ideas of the west.

The Western media often gives the impression that the embattled and occasionally violent form of religiosity known as 'fundamentalism' is a purely Islamic phenomenon. This is not the reality. Fundamentalism is a global fact and has surfaced in every major faith in response to issues and problems of modernity. There is fundamentalist Judaism, fundamentalist Christianity, fundamentalist Hinduism, fundamentalist Buddhism, fundamentalist Sikhism, and even fundamentalist Confucianism.

Coming to the specific issue of the persecution of Muslims in Myanmar, a responsible United Nations official



Monks have been at the forefront of anti-Rohingya protests.

PHOTO: REUTERS.

has described it as ethnic cleansing while others have not hesitated to call it a planned genocide; and this alleged extermination of a distinct ethnic and religious entity is taking place in a Buddhist majority country where ironically, the monks are known for their courageous stand against military dictatorship and active commitment to democracy, but in the recent past have now turned dangerously virulent on a helpless religious minority.

The repression on the Muslim minority is both repulsive and deeply saddening because Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, wandered into the world in search of understanding. He renounced his princely title and became a monk in the hope of comprehending the truth of the world around him. Gautama was known as the Buddha meaning the "Enlightened One".

It would be relevant to recollect that the cardinal practice of

Buddhism consists of 'Sila' which means virtue, good conduct and morality. The 'Sila' is based on two fundamental principles:

Firstly, the Principle of Equality: that all living entities are equal. Secondly, the Principle of Reciprocity: to do onto others as you would wish them to do onto you. The Buddha's Four Noble Truths explore human suffering. The foremost Buddhist precept to live by is "Do not kill". This is translated as "Not harming" or

an absence of violence. Righteous action in Buddhism, inter-alia, includes moral restraint refraining from committing violent acts.

Of all the moral precepts instilled in Buddhist monks the promise not to kill comes first, and the principle of non-violence is arguably more central to Buddhism than any other major religion. So why have monks been using hate speech against Muslims and joining mobs that have left dozens dead?

The hostility in Myanmar is spearheaded by the 969 group, led by a monk, Ashin Wirathu, who was jailed in 2003 for inciting religious hatred. Released in 2012, he has referred to himself bizarrely as "the Burmese Bin Laden". The question is, are not Buddhist monks meant to be the good guys of religion? As mentioned earlier, aggressive thoughts are inimical to all Buddhist teachings. Buddhism even comes equipped with a practical way to eliminate them. Through meditation the distinction between your feelings and those of others should begin to dissolve, while your compassion for all living things grows.

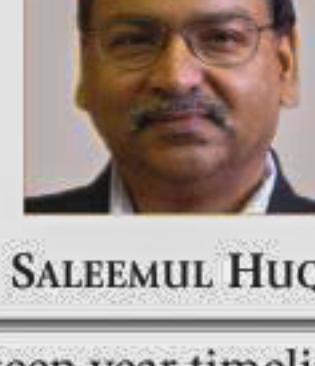
The ground reality is that however any religion starts out, sooner or later it enters into a Faustian pact with state power. Buddhist monks looked to kings, the ultimate wielders of violence, for the support, patronage and order that only they could provide. Kings looked to monks to provide the popular legitimacy that only such a high moral vision can confer. The end result would appear ironic because if there is a strong sense of the overriding moral superiority of one's world view, then the need to protect and advance it can seem the most important duty of all.

Discerning citizens of the world would hope that the Buddhist monks, a very important plank in Myanmar's struggle for democracy, would rise to the occasion and stick to the teachings of all the Buddhas - 'not to do any evil; to cultivate good; to purify one's heart.' Buddhists value wisdom and compassion most, of all virtues. Let Buddhist monks of Myanmar stand high and prove once again that *Ahimsa* or harmlessness is very closely connected with compassion. They surely can ascend the high moral ground by effectively helping to shake off the racist rage driven bigotry.

The writer is a columnist of *The Daily Star*.

PLANNING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE Time to look inwards

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



In 2015, the world made two major global agreements, first in September in New York on 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and then on climate change under the Paris Agreement in December. Both these global agreements have the same fifteen year timeline for their implementation, i.e. by 2030.

However, in each developing country there are two very distinct and separate audiences and reasons for adopting, implementing and reporting on such global agreements negotiated and agreed by all countries under the United Nations. The first reason is to satisfy the requirement of the global agreement itself where each country is obliged to prepare an initial plan and then submit periodic reports in its implementation to the concerned UN body.

The second reason is that the country has genuinely incorporated the goals into its own national planning and budgetary systems, and hence is implementing the global goals primarily to support its own national development.

While many countries start by responding to the first reason to submit reports to the UN, often helped by international consultants flying in to help with the report writing (sometimes even writing the report for the government), such reports tend to have little traction within the mainstream planning and budgetary practices at national and local levels, as they are aimed primarily at international audiences.

This has been particularly true of climate change where developing countries initially had to produce National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) followed now by National

Adaptation Plans (NAPs) for adaptation and also Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) which have now become just Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for mitigation actions.

The time has now come for the developing countries to genuinely try to integrate or mainstream these global goals into national, sectoral and local level plans within the national



planning and budgeting systems of each country. Bangladesh has already made some progress along these lines of mainstreaming climate change and SDGs into national, sectoral and local planning processes and also into the national budgeting processes. This was launched, to some degree, under the 7th Five Year Plan (7FYP) from 2016 to 2020, and will be much more integrated into the Perspective Plan to 2040, and even more

into the Delta Plan to 2100.

One of the main criteria for making a successful transition from a sectoral and outward looking approach is the involvement of the main planning and finance ministries in understanding and then implementing the climate change and SDG. This has already been achieved in Bangladesh with the planning and finance ministries fully on board.

The second criterion that marks this shift from external looking to nationally driven agenda is a shift in expectations of who will finance the implementation of the global goals at the national level. As long as a country looks to external donors or climate funds or other development assistance to support the implementation of global goals at the national level, the country will prepare its

national plans with the primary purpose of attracting additional international financial support for their implementation.

Although Bangladesh has been a pioneer in providing finances for the Climate Change Trust Fund as well as other national actions, it is still, in my view, looking to external funders to support national actions. Bangladesh should now be in a position to move towards doing its own planning, financing and implementation to a great extent by itself without depending on external funding to start implementation. That is not to say that external funding is not to be sought or welcomed, but rather that we do not depend on external funds to do what we can on our own.

Finally, let me touch on an important aspect of genuine national development planning and implementation, which must involve all ministries and agencies within the government, as well as all branches such as legislative and judicial as well as the executive. This is sometimes called a Whole of Government (WOG) approach.

I would add to this WOG approach also a Whole of Society (WOS) approach that will include the private sector, media, civil society, academics, youth, women and many others, who all have a role to play in both the planning as well as the implementation of our climate change as well as Sustainable Development Goals going forward.

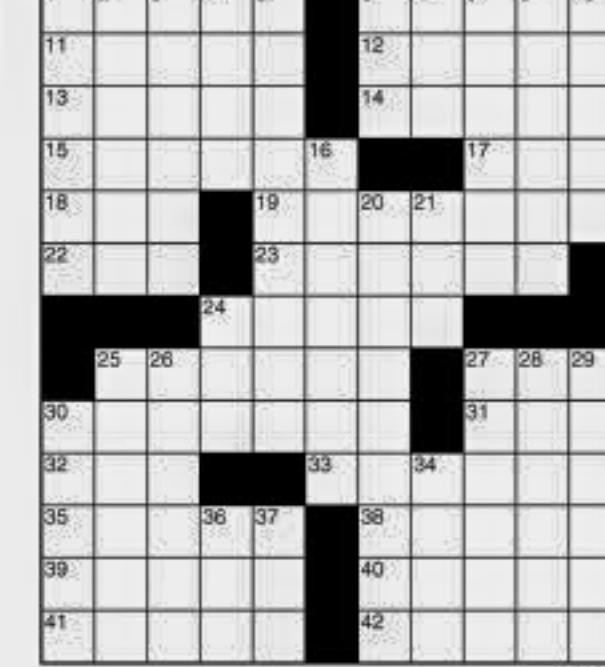
Bangladesh has all the ingredients in place to pull off this transition from externally focused to genuinely nationally driven goals to both tackle climate change as well as deliver sustainable development by 2030 if the government gives appropriate leadership and all the other actors play their respective roles properly.

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

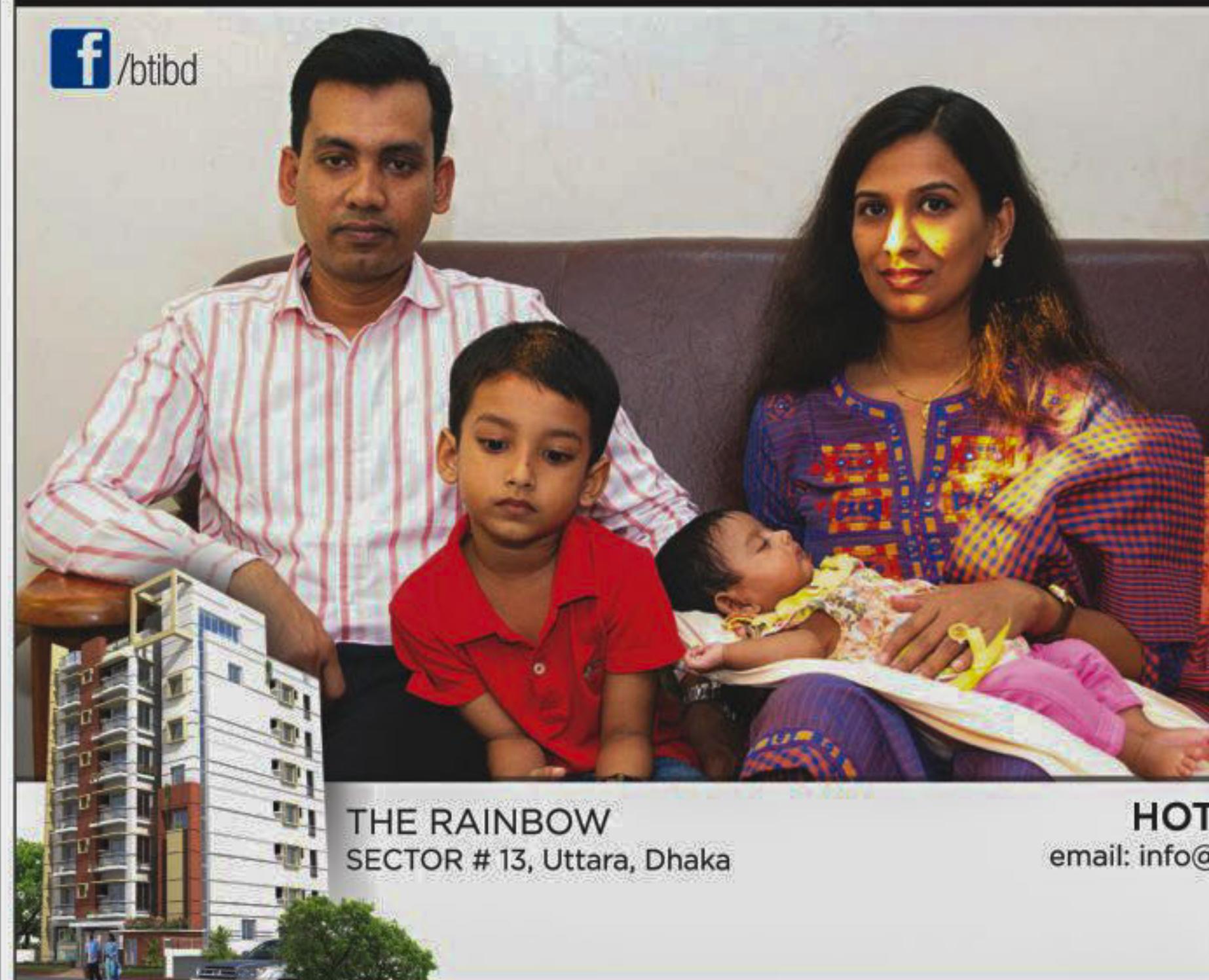
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27 Urgent call
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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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