

Starving refugees from Myanmar

Get coordinated relief efforts going

THE humanitarian disaster that has been unfolding in Myanmar has seen an estimated 123,000 Rohingyas flee to Bangladesh. And we welcome the government move to set up camps for the refugees from Myanmar in Cox's Bazaar. While setting up of a camp is obviously going to be of help to control and account for the refugees, we must emphasise once again that there is need for coordinated efforts with international agencies to get aid to these people as early as possible because authorities are already overstretched in trying to meet the needs of so many people. There is need to build up adequate food stock to face the situation.

That the World Food Programme (WFP) and Office of International Migration (IOM) are helping in setting up these camps and aiding in their running is good news. However, diplomatic efforts must be invigorated to find a just solution to the persecution of the Myanmar ethnic minority across the border which has created the conditions for the large influx of refugees into Bangladesh.

Pending a settlement of the Rohingya crisis, every effort must be made to provide essential supplies to the refugees in these camps. The database being talked about must take shape as soon as possible because we have to keep account and track of every refugee who seeks shelter in Bangladesh. As we pointed out in our editorial yesterday, it is essential that we know the identities of the refugees so that they may be easily repatriated to Myanmar when the situation returns to normalcy.

Anti-terror operation in Mirpur

Need constant vigilance to combat terrorism

YET another anti-terror operation at a six-storey building in Mirpur, law enforcers recovered several incinerated bodies, presumably of militants who apparently had killed themselves by conducting a series of explosions. According to South Asia Terrorism Portal, a database tracking terror activities across South Asia, Bangladesh witnessed seven major terror incidents involving large-scale operations and casualties until this latest incident.

This incident shows the extent to which the militants are willing to go to keep their agenda afloat. If they had been captured alive, the law enforcement agencies could have extracted valuable information by interrogating them. But those militants were ready to kill themselves rather than be caught alive.

It also illustrates that while the law enforcers are continuing to go after militants, the terror threat is yet to be exterminated fully. That the militants have been neutralised before they could cause serious harm to innocent people is an indication of good intelligence work. However, as we have said in the past, we cannot afford to be euphoric over our successful raids. We have to maintain constant vigilance, exercise caution, employ human intelligence, and above all, keep people aware in order to contain, and eventually defeat, the phenomenon.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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North Korea, a threat to world peace

North Korea's continual defiance of the international community by conducting nuclear and missile tests poses a serious threat to the Korean Peninsula in particular and the world in general. It is not possible for the pariah state to act alone without the support and blessings of its closest allies.

It is difficult to comprehend how North Korea with its relatively limited resources could continue with such an expensive affair of production and test of nuclear weapons without large financial assistance from outside. North Korea must stop this madness and refrain from its provocative behaviour. It should understand that a war is not in the interest of anyone and must be avoided by any means.

AKM Ehsanul Haque, Dhaka

Stop child labour

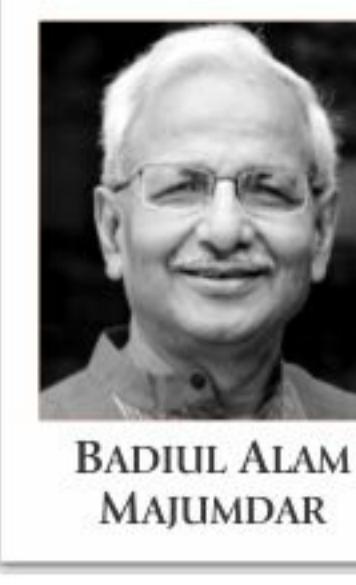
Children are employed in different sectors, working in restaurants, factories and public transports. They are supposed to go to school during their childhood, but instead, they have to do jobs that require considerable physical strength and may have a serious impact on their physical and mental health. At the workplace, they often have to go through harsh treatment by their employers. Worst of all, some children are even involved in drug peddling through which some get entangled in the world of crime.

The government has imposed a ban on child labour, but this ill practice persists largely because those kids hail from extremely poor families. In order to stop child labour, our government should introduce basic welfare initiatives for kids who belong to less fortunate families.

Zabed Wali, Chittagong

16TH AMENDMENT VERDICT

Have the critics read the judgment?



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THE story of the hawk snatching one's ears is well-known. As the story goes, the "victim" becomes so paranoid by a rumour that s/he does not even check its veracity. Unfortunately, the

same is happening regarding our Supreme Court's recent unanimous judgment declaring the 16th Amendment unconstitutional. Many ruling party leaders and their beneficiaries appear to be hell-bent on establishing that the Hon'ble Chief Justice (CJ) has, in his judgment, belittled Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and committed contempt of our Parliament—without even reading the judgment.

It is a matter of serious concern that some of the critics do not stop with criticism of the judgment; they demand that it be scrapped or that the CJ resigns. They also threaten to wage a movement with a one-point demand of the CJ's removal. Any reasonable citizen would be concerned about the way the judgment was unnecessarily politicised.

In support of their claim that the CJ has not adequately recognised the contributions of Bangabandhu in our War of Liberation, the critics refer to, out of context, two sentences from the 799-page judgment. They quote: "No nation—no country is made of or by one person. If we want to truly live up to the dream of Sonar Bangla as advocated by our Father of the Nation, we must keep ourselves free from this suicidal ambition and addiction of 'I'ness. [The suicidal ambition] that only one person or one man did all this and etc."

A careful reader would note the first and third sentences represent a rhetorical general statement. The two sentences quoted above merely represent a rhetorical statement, and in no way intend to diminish the contributions of Bangabandhu. This is clear from the middle sentence, in which the CJ not only unequivocally recognised Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation, but also expressed his desire to see Bangabandhu's dream of a Sonar Bangla become a reality. In the remaining part of this paragraph, it may be noted, the CJ expressed his frustration that the biggest barrier to the achievement of Bangabandhu's dream has been our suicidal addiction to 'I'ness. In his judgment, the CJ has forcefully argued

that achieving Bangabandhu's dream would require our united efforts, rather than sticking to this suicidal 'I'ness.

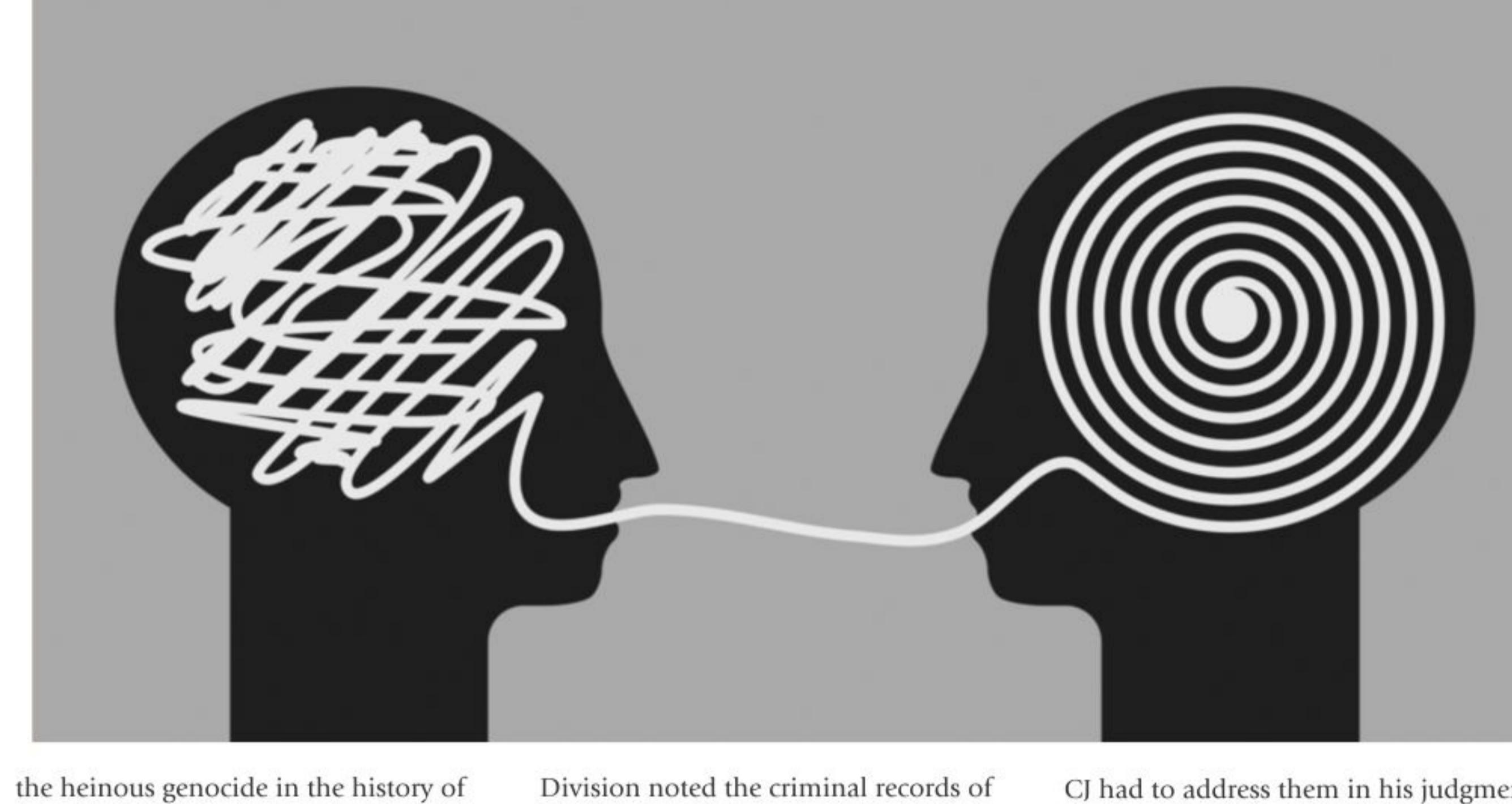
The misuse of these two rhetorical sentences to create the misleading impression that the CJ has belittled the contribution of Bangabandhu becomes apparent when one reads other parts of the judgment. For example, in page 29, the CJ wrote "... Yahya Khan ultimately gave election which was held in December, 1971. It was beyond imagination of the Pakistani rulers, Awami League headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman could secure a clear majority in the National Assembly and Provincial Assembly of East Pakistan ... Yahya Khan ultimately did not handover power ... rather he waged a war against unarmed and innocent people and committed

power. In page 226 of the judgment, the CJ stated, "After independence, those unholy alliances of power-mongers twice reduced this country to a banana republic, where people are seen as commodity which can be bluffed and compromised at any unworthy cost to legalise their illegitimate exercise of power. They ... abused their position and introduced different bluffing tools (sometimes gomovote, sometimes rigged election and sometimes no election at all!) as means to prolong their power game."

Let us now come to the issue of contempt of Parliament. The CJ not only did not belittle it, rather he reprimanded the High Court Division for their snide remarks about the Parliament. In their judgment, the Justices of the High Court

Constitution grants the MPs absolute freedom of speech, although according to constitutional expert Mahmudul Islam, it is not applicable to the Justices (Constitutional Law of Bangladesh, 2012). In addition, the sections 53, 63 and 133 of the Parliament's Rules of Procedures bar the MPs from discussing the conduct of the President and the Judges in the Parliament, defying which they criticised the Judges in Parliament using vicious language.

On cannot help but get the impression from reading the entire judgment that our Attorney General's legal argument before the Court was rather weak, which he tried to compensate by introducing political issues and aggressiveness. Because of this introduction of political issues, the



the heinous genocide in the history of the modern world. He postponed the holding of National Assembly and massacred innumerable numbers of helpless Bangalees that led to the declaration of independence by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 26th March 1971." As a humble admirer of Bangabandhu, I find no aspersion against him by the CJ. Those who are unscrupulously trying to find connection of the CJ with Pakistan, should also note the strong language with which he condemned the Pakistani genocide.

One should also note that while recognising Bangabandhu as the declarer of our independence and the Father of the Nation, the CJ has branded the two Martial Law Administrators as usurpers of

Division noted the criminal records of the MPs. They also mentioned that the MPs have been less serious about their law making responsibility and hence the laws passed by them are defective, flawed and of low standard. The CJ chastised them by saying, "The above observations by the High Court Division regarding the members of Parliament are totally uncalled for and we do not endorse this view at all."

However, in view of the use of "unparliamentarian language" in criticising the judgment and the Judges after the High Court declared the 16th Amendment unconstitutional, the CJ called our parliamentary democracy, not the present Parliament, immature. It may be noted that Article 78 of our

CJ had to address them in his judgment. It may be further noted that the CJ expressed shock at the Deputy Attorney General's strong resentment against some of the Amici Curiae and one of the Amici Curiae's derogatory remarks against the Judges.

To conclude, we are concerned that if the judiciary is pitted against the other two branches of the government, their relationship of mutual respect will be undermined, which will make all three branches weaker. When institutions become weak, the state becomes weak. In a weak state, the citizens are harmed. We must therefore immediately stop this suicidal course.

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The poor state of our higher education

NAMIA AKHTAR

THE protest on September 9, 2015 against the imposition of 7.5 percent VAT on private university tuition fees has to be understood as a mild response of the body to a chronic illness. When a patient suffering from a chronic disease faints, the patient is taken to the hospital and given medication that provides temporary relief to the body. Unless the patient receives continuous medical treatment, the disease remains uncured and the body continues to suffer internally even though external symptoms are occasionally visible.

The student protest was similar to the body's response to the chronic illness—that is, the country's deplorable state of higher education. The body has not been cured entirely; the disease remains!

I studied at the development studies programme of a private university for a year, but did not finish my degree out of extreme academic frustration. While we had the privilege of having excellent professors as our teachers, the facilities were absolutely deplorable, and academic standards were kept intentionally low to make the degree saleable. The library was not shelfed with the latest available scholarly literature nor was there any common reading room. I know some professors who resigned in protest against these practices.

Despite charging exorbitant tuition fees, private universities often fail to provide adequate facilities, which speak of their exploitative nature. Students are merely economic objects to these universities. Most of them function as corporate entities seducing students with the lure of a "golden future" that awaits them once they finish their degrees, a prospect that rarely becomes a reality.

In Bangladesh, universities in general—private or public—lack an environment for free thinking. There are mainly two types of barriers to free speech in classroom: one is an institutional restriction imposed on the academic, and the other imposed by the academic on the student. Most academics cannot speak or interact as they want because of constraints imposed by institutional guidelines.

According to Foucault, the purpose of

institutions is to manufacture homogeneous minds that support a particular discourse, or rebel within limitations to challenge the status quo. The second category of restriction on free speech—imposed by the academic on the student—does not necessarily arise due to institutional restrictions on free thinking; it largely takes place due to the existence of a profound belief in the academia that students must subscribe to the views of their instructors. So instead of being trained to challenge and question the status

regard, is the intellectual correctness of the teacher as well as the intellectual inferiority of the students—the students do not protest or raise objections to such an authoritarian academic environment. On the contrary, in the Western universities, professors treat students as intellectual peers.

Liberals arts and humanities are the backbone of any civilisation as these produce thinkers who shape or create a society. Thus, the curricula of our universities need to be intellectually challenging to produce great thinkers and



quo, our students are being trained in a manner that promotes a particular ideology. This is a passive process of indoctrination, one that most students do not understand.

In his theory about the three faces of power, Steven Lukes argues that the manifestation of power is internalised, ingrained within individuals. As a consequence of the internalisation of a particular belief system—which, in this

scholars. However, instead of grounding students in solid theoretical knowledge for better understanding and critical analysis, our liberal arts and social sciences education is centred exclusively on factual scholarly literature which does not provide nourishment for the intellect. Education at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels is still based on traditional lectures, rather than seminar sessions.

Moreover, even at the more accepted public universities, with the exception of a few departments, writing term papers are not mandatory for the students. Term papers or essays help develop critical and analytical skills as well as writing skills that are essential in the workplace. On occasions where writing papers are mandatory, students can secure respectable grades through one form of plagiarism or another.

New research suggests that there is a mismatch between skills sought by the employers and skills possessed by the graduates. As a consequence, our education system is creating a class of "educated unemployed." This is happening because Bangladesh does not have a culture of hiring Student Assistants who will be engaged in research or other administrative tasks of the universities. They are almost non-existent, with the exception of a few job openings at the libraries, as universities do not invest sufficient funds in research. More research funds need to be allocated to create an intellectual society that would not only create an efficient workforce, but also a more tolerant society.

I think the government can enact a law making it compulsory for the universities—both public and private—to produce quality research that are of national significance. Poor-quality research is the reason Bangladeshi universities are yet to catch up with their Indian or even Pakistani counterparts.

The students might have been successful in removing VAT, but they are yet to acquire a high quality education. One of the crucial steps to attain that reform would be to make the financial information of all universities public in order to ensure the efficient utilisation of funds. In addition, academic institutions must nurture an environment of academic freedom that encourages free thinking both among the academics and the students. In addition, academics must also encourage students to think independently rather than indoctrinating them with their own ideology.

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