

Last chance for Suu Kyi

Focus on the military

THE UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's de-facto leader, has a "last chance" to halt the army offensive that has so far killed hundreds of Rohingya Muslims and forced 400,000 people to flee their ancestral land to Bangladesh. The Rohingya persecution has gone on unabated, disregarding international public opinion. Thus the natural question is: what if Suu Kyi doesn't deliver?

In that case, will the UN and the world stand by and watch, according to the UN Secretary-General, an absolutely horrible tragedy that will be irreversible? This amounts to presenting the Rohingya a fait accompli—which is unacceptable.

It is unfortunate that instead of taking any substantive steps, the world body relies on a misguided belief that Suu Kyi will eventually respond to her conscience. It is also naive to think that the key to solving the crisis lies in her hands at all. Suu Kyi, despite being the face of Myanmar in the international arena, is not in charge of the country's security and defence affairs.

The military is calling the shots in this conflict, so any effort of the international community to address the issue should centrally focus on the military, over which the civilian government has little control.

It is even more upsetting that the three world powers—namely China, Russia and India—are not only silent about the plight of Rohingyas but through their statements have given the Myanmar's deadly military regime a sense of impunity. We are thus not surprised by the country's head of the army to now openly deny what is a historical fact.

We call on the UN to state unequivocally that it will be considering stringent measures, including reinstating the junta-era sanctions, targeting the military, its leadership and vast business interests, if the Rohingya persecution continues.

Four SDG goals stalled

Agencies malfunction due to political influence

WHILE there are many remarkable achievements for Bangladesh to boast in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to a Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) report launched on September 17, progress in terms of four specific SDG targets under Goal 16 i.e. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, is being severely hindered. The report states that various government agencies are not functioning as expected due to political influence, centralisation of power and dominance of executive branch.

While the existing laws of the National Integrity Strategy institutions are more or less sufficient, there does exist a culture of impunity that needs to be firmly addressed by the government. Laws must apply equally to everyone. Institutionalised corruption, money laundering, bribery and human rights violations on multiple accounts, including forced disappearances and extra judicial killings, arbitrary or unlawful detentions have continued despite being flagged multiple times by human rights organisations. Mechanisms, to investigate human rights violations, accountability of state-owned commercial banks, and corruption committed through political-administrative nexus, must be strengthened.

When citing success in terms of MDGs and SDGs we tend to think of peace, security and justice issues as separate from health, education and economic indicators. But economic growth, transparency and accountability of institutions and human rights are not mutually exclusive. Rather, one cannot be achieved without the other. In order to ensure that we continue to flourish as a nation, we must ensure greater transparency and accountability of legal, political, social and economic institutions, both governmental and non-governmental.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Hats off to Bangladesh from India

The whole world is watching the Rohingya crisis explode; however, it is unfortunate that no country except for Bangladesh has taken any substantive action or decision to address this problem.

There was a time when I had naively thought that Bangladesh was largely a land of poor people which is why Bangladeshis continue to migrate to other countries in pursuit of a better life. I am delighted to have been proven wrong at least over the last five years, during which, I have seen Bangladesh make remarkable progress in many different fields.

In regards to the Rohingya crisis, Bangladeshis have really won our hearts. The support that Bangladesh is providing to the helpless Rohingya refugees in spite of its own problems is definitely praiseworthy. Much respect to Bangladesh from India. And hats off to Bangladesh for doing what is right, irrespective of the circumstances.

Arshad Khan, India

Importance of self-defence

Nowadays, women and children are increasingly being exposed to violence and harassment at home, schools, workplaces, etc. One way to stand up to such assaults is by way of self-defence. Karate and judo are two options, but other forms of martial-arts too can be used for self-defence.

In karate for example, students are taught about the weak points of a human body, how to block attacks and strike with greater force. If people are taught how to defend themselves when they need to, perhaps we can slowly start to see people feel safer and more secure.

Addrita Latif, By e-mail

New challenges in implementing the Indian LoC

NO FRILLS



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THE 3rd tranche of the Indian Line of Credit (LoC III) worth USD 4.5 billion is of great importance to the country and we understand that some 17 projects

come under it. They include the establishment of transport/port infrastructure, better trade facilitation, promotion of investment in special economic zones and also investment in the areas of energy and trade in energy, and putting in place measures towards harmonisation, standardisation and certification. The areas of involvement revolve around trade, transport, investment, energy, and people-to-people connectivity.

According to the new terms and conditions laid out in LoC III, the draft deal states that Bangladesh will have to take prior approval from the lender for every piece of procurement for the projects under the LoC and that poses a major problem when it comes to implementing projects within specified timelines. As reported in *The Financial Express* on September 15, our agency officials have expressed serious reservations about such clauses as it will be extremely time consuming. These terms are on top of what was agreed upon in the LoC-II deal where 75 percent of goods/services/works had to be procured from India and remaining 25 percent from other countries (in case of projects involving civil work/construction, 65 percent would have to be procured from lender country). There are arguments both for

and against such provisions. The lending agency may feel them necessary to check graft while our agencies opine that it will add yet another bureaucratic step to the procurement process.

The Bangladesh side is supposed to sit and iron out what it will agree to by the end of the week and begin negotiations with its Indian counterpart shortly after that so that the LoC-III can be finalised within two months. It is interesting to

be noted that while we have been facing problems utilising the 1st and 2nd tranche of LoC(s), we are about to enter into a 3rd tranche loan agreement. With nearly half the projects under LoC-I still in limbo and problems with some of the 14 projects under LoC-II already emerging, it is imperative we do hard bargaining on these clauses. Without a relaxation on purchase conditions, it is widely feared that the latest and biggest line of credit will face even greater problems than the earlier loan packages

into existence in March, 2016 and hence it is too early to make a judgement on how that line of credit is being utilised. But whatever terms we agree on with Delhi, a few things are abundantly clear. We have a number of problems that have never really been addressed when it comes to project implementation. The issue of cost and time overrun has become a systemic problem and hence our costing of projects undertaken continually needs revisions—upward we may add.



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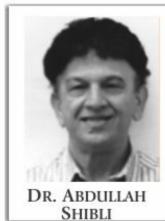
A few high profile infrastructure projects undertaken during the current government's tenure give us a clear picture of this major problem. According to the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) data, timeline of Padma bridge project spiralled by 42.9 percent due to successive revisions which ended up in an increase in cost by 183.3 percent, i.e. project cost nearly doubled. Another major undertaking, the Dhaka-Chittagong 4-lane project faced both cost revision (77.8 percent) and time overrun (22.2 percent) and the most striking of all, the Joydebpur-Mymensingh Road Improvement Project cost and time of completion doubled.

With such poor project implementation periods, precisely how much longer it will take when Bangladesh will have to take approval for every single purchase is of course open to speculation. It is not simply a question of taking prior permission for purchases made; it is also a question of our freedom of choice to procure materials, services or goods from domestic or foreign sources. We already have a plethora of problems in project execution and hardly see any logic in complicating matters further by agreeing to illogical demands that were not there in previous LoC(s). At the end of the day, it is up to our policymakers to negotiate a deal that makes sense and is implementable. These monies are not grants—they are concessional loans and will have to be repaid: "The loan has a 20-year repayment term, including a grace period of five years and a 1 percent annual interest rate along with a 0.5 percent commitment fee."

Syed Mansur Hashim is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

THE NORTH KOREAN CRISIS

Effectiveness of trade embargoes



DR. ABDULLAH SHIBLI

NORTH Korea (DPRK) presents an enigma and a challenge for the US and its allies. While DPRK is determined to improve its nuclear strike

capability, the US has been working for many years to stop DPRK from acquiring nuclear weapons, or at least to slow down its nuclear programme. In the latest round of US-DPRK skirmish on this issue, the latter tested a hydrogen bomb and two inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBM) and the US retaliated by getting tougher sanctions on DPRK passed through the UN. Sanctions against DPRK are not new. The latest measures which target a broad range of North Korean interests is a watered-down version of the original US proposal, and there is already scepticism if these would change anything as far as Kim Jong-Un's regime is concerned. DPRK struck back by sending another test missile over Japan on the morning of September 15. Whether one calls DPRK a "rogue nation" or considers it the "last bulwark against superpower domination", the failure of these efforts to bring the country to the negotiating table will unquestionably be a bad sign for global diplomacy and peace in East Asia.

Let us take a quick look at recent history to understand the current situation a little better. US presidents have had three options to stop the North Koreans from building nuclear weapons: diplomacy, sanctions and military. While diplomacy or negotiations has so far been the preferred option for the countries involved in the Six Party (DPRK, US, UK, China, South Korea and Japan) Talks, there has been no progress since 2012. The carrot and stick policy of the US and its allies lacked any carrots to lure DPRK to make any concessions.

To punish DPRK, the UN Security Council, on a parallel track unfurled the "stick" approach without any success. In order to understand why these sanctions failed, one does not have to look very far. Sanctions can range from "comprehensive economic and trade sanctions to more targeted measures such as arms embargoes, travel bans, and financial or commodity restrictions," according to the UN, and have three goals: limit access to a good or service, modify a country's behaviour, and/or to penalise it.

The problem with sanctions against DPRK has been two-fold: the list of sanctioned goods and services is not comprehensive enough and secondly, countries and businesses have found enough loopholes to bypass these sanctions. The latest round of sanctions passed by the UN Security Council on September 11, the 9th such measure since 2006, covers some of DPRK's vital

imports and exports. However, on the eve of the Security Council vote, USA scaled back its demand for very stringent measures against DPRK to avoid vetoes by China and Russia.

However, it is doubtful if the latest measures will change Kim Jong-Un's behaviour given that he has three goals: to get military concessions from the USA, deter USA from attacking DPRK, and reunification on its own terms. Nonetheless, the new sanctions on textiles will cause economic problems for DPRK. Since DPRK's exports of coal, iron, seafood and other minerals have already been severely curtailed by previous rounds of sanctions, textiles had been its biggest foreign exchange earner. In 2016, DPRK's textile exports brought in USD 752.5 million, with 80 percent going to China. The latest embargo would also reduce North

much for China working with us—but we had to give it a try!" "North Korea's economy is almost entirely dependent on China, with Beijing providing Pyongyang with food, fuel, and machinery." And ironically, North Korea's economic growth climbed to a 17-year high in 2016.

However, China should not be singled out for the failure of sanctions to deliver. For example, while UN sanctions prohibit the sale of luxury goods to DPRK, countries often define what that means. "The resolutions list jewellery, luxury automobiles, sports equipment and snowmobiles but make no mention of televisions, consumer electronics or home appliances." DPRK has become adept at cannibalising parts from permitted items for prohibited uses. DPRK has been aided also by its diplomats who have been found to be

region, and its goals can be summarised as follows: i) Show solidarity with DPRK to prevent Korean reunification on US terms; ii) Prevent any future war; iii) Prevent North Korean refugees from crossing into China and; iv) Forestall any threat to the ruling party in DPRK.

China also would be cautious about provoking Kim Jong-Un into any reckless move by cutting off all oil imports into DPRK since the history of Japan's experience after such US moves during the Second World War is still fresh on China's mind. China, nonetheless, holds a number of cards to ease the tensions going forward. Its leverage with DPRK is enormous since now 90 percent of DPRK's foreign trade is with China. With 100 percent Chinese compliance, Kim Jong-Un will realise that the economic cost of its nuclear programme is getting prohibitive.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un looks on during the test-launch of the intercontinental ballistic missile Hwasong-14.

Korea's fuel import by 30 percent, and combined with previous sanctions, 90 percent of DPRK's declared exports, including seafood, coal and textiles will be embargoed.

But, as already mentioned, economic sanctions on DPRK left a number of loopholes for it and its allies, particularly Russia and China, and commercial interests in all three countries to exploit. Russia imports DPRK's manpower for its construction and logging industries, and remittances are regularly flowing into Kim Jong-Un's coffers. Chinese entrepreneurs keep DPRK's textile industry busy by re-exporting garments with "Made in China" labels. US frustration with lack of full cooperation from China was evident from President Trump's tweet on July 5, 2017, "Trade between China and North Korea grew almost 40 percent in the first quarter. So

working as government procurement agents overseas. And, in the Chinese towns bordering DPRK, it is known that Chinese businessmen openly work with the North Koreans to ease sanctions.

I will be remiss if I end this commentary without any suggestions for the sanctions to work, but most importantly to end the current stalemate. In my view, it's a three-party dance involving the USA, DPRK, and China! How do we get China to comply with UN resolutions vis-à-vis DPRK? Here are my thoughts.

First of all, China's role in the conflict must become more transparent. As DPRK's largest trading partner, it must demonstrate due diligence in making sanctions work, and not procrastinate like it did earlier. It is understandable that China, which has a long border with DPRK, has some vital interests in this

However, if Kim Jong-Un remains defiant some further steps can be taken. These are: sanctions on any country that trades with DPRK or financial institutions that provide Pyongyang access to money, and enforce and strengthen some prohibitions on port calls by vessels that have been previously involved in illicit trade with DPRK.

In the final analysis, USA and its allies must offer something else besides threats of "fire and fury" to the North Korean leaders to bring the two parties closer. "That will require the United States to put something on the table that North Korea wants, perhaps a reduction in US-South Korean military exercises," to quote Kelsey Davenport, a US arms control expert.

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