

PM's five-point solution

The world should heed the call

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina's five-point recommendations to protect all civilians in the Rakhine State should resonate well with all peace-loving people of the world. Her speech at the UN General Assembly has not only exposed the underlying causes of the problem, but implementing the recommendations in the manner that the prime minister has suggested will also help to resolve the long-standing manmade problem in Rakhine State.

The suggestions stem from our own experience of persecution and exodus to a neighbouring country. Bangladesh has exceptions, being chosen to serve the cause of human rights and justice than go for expedient and motivated options. It has constrained its doors to a persecuted people despite its many openings. It therefore cannot be a problem that Bangladesh can afford to see left in limbo without a solution.

We should take comfort in the fact that we are no longer alone to issue the world leaders, with a very few unfortunate exceptions, have given their verdict on the matter. The UN in no uncertain terms has recognised the killings as ethnic cleansing; France has recognised it as genocide; and public opinion in many Western capitals recognises it as such. And Great Britain has even snapped its training programmes with the Myanmar military.

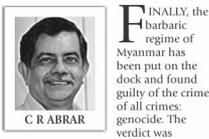
These are all very positive steps. And it's time to follow through the centenary of the genocide in Myanmar with concrete actions to force the military, the real institution that calls the shots in that country, to give up its idea of making the State of Rakhine free of the Rohingyas. The world community must now move beyond the talk and forge a coherent and time-bound plan of action to restore the country to a people that have been illegally and brutally forced out of.

Bangladeshis pay more for healthcare

Unnecessary tests one major reason

ACCORDING to a new report by the Health Economic Unit of healthcare expenditure, citizens are bearing 67 percent of healthcare expenditure, the government contributing 23 percent and other actors like NGOs shouldering 10 percent. The out-of-pocket experience by our citizens is easy to understand when we see that public health finance amounts to Tk 10,000 million in 2015 while citizens dish out nearly three times that much (Tk 30,200). By the government's own admission, although funding for healthcare has increased, its total share in healthcare expenditure has been on the decline. In fact it has declined from 37 percent to 23 percent in 2015 and there is massive discrepancy in its district-wise allocation of funds with the capital city consuming nearly half the total budget (46 percent).

What has changed over the years of course is the rise of private-sector driven healthcare. Indeed, going to the doctor nowadays almost always entails pathological tests for even the most rudimentary of ailments like fever and the over-prescribing of medication. This is supported in the report as it was found that a disproportionate amount of the national healthcare budget is being spent on medicines, healthcare services and curative healthcare (71.9 percent). That leaves a paltry 10 percent for investing in preventive healthcare and a measly two percent for education and medical personnel. A very gloomy picture but unless the government is willing to take steps to break the nexus that exists among healthcare practitioners, the pharmaceutical industry and the pathological test centres, patients in Bangladesh will continue to bear two-thirds of the total healthcare costs. There are enormous profits being made at the cost of the people and it is time authorities did something about it.



C R ABBAR

FINALLY, the inhumanity of Myanmar's regime of genocide has been put on the world map and guilty of the crime of all crimes: genocide. The verdict was delivered on the last day of the final session of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) on alleged state crimes against the Rohingya, Kachin and other ethnic minority groups on September 22 in Kuala Lumpur after three days of deliberations. In the opening session held in London in March this year, following preliminary hearings on the complaints of Kachins, Rohingyas and other Muslim populations in Myanmar, the court convened this final hearing. The tribunal, comprised of eminent jurists, genocide scholars and those involved in past genocide trials, heard testimonies of a number of survivors, members of victims' families, witnesses and expert witnesses. Oral testimonies, documents and records, including those of the Burmese government and the military (retrieved from archival sources of different countries), and visual materials (photographs and video footages) were presented before the tribunal.

Although symbolic, the verdict has major significance. For the first time, a conclusion has been drawn by competent authorities following thorough examination of facts and rigorous legal scrutiny: "The State of Myanmar is guilty of the crime of genocide against the Rohingya group." It went on to observe that "genocide against the Rohingya is now taking place with ongoing acts of genocide and the possibility the casualties of that genocide could be even higher in the future if nothing is done to stop it."

This essay argues that despite overwhelming evidence there has been a palpable reticence of the international community to call it genocide. The international community refused to acknowledge that the Burmese state's intent and actions were systematically directed to dismantle the structures of protection that the Rohingyas enjoyed until the martial law regime of General Ne Win in 1962. Jetsonising the country's pluralist and secular practices from the 1960s, the military government was hell-bent on ridding the country of the Rohingya population. 1978 witnessed the brutal execution of that intent when about 280,000 were driven out of Arakan with the launch of Operation Naga Min, or Operation King Dragon. The 1978 exodus was not the outcome of any communal strife between the Buddhist Rakhines and the Rohingya Muslims in Arakan. It was the result of a deliberate policy of banishing an ethnic minority from their ancestral habitat by the Burmese state.

Within months of their arrival in Bangladesh, Myanmar (then Burma) had to concede to Bangladesh's demand of taking back the Rohingyas who by law were still its citizens. By the subsequent enactment of the 1982 Citizenship Law, Rohingyas were stripped of their rightful

status. In pursuit of its genocidal agenda the Burmese state crafted a comprehensive policy to destroy the Rohingya identity by systematically denying the community members to live in dignity and pursue their faith and cultural traditions. Since then a plethora of laws, regulations and administrative orders have been passed and institutions such as the infamous security force Nasaak were created—subjecting the Rohingyas to what termed as "sub-human". Despite the absence of any looming threat, the northern Arakan region was gradually turned into a militarised zone. Its Muslim residents have been subjected to degrading treatment, discrimination, torture, forced labour, forced relocation, and arbitrary taxes, and denied opportunities to practise their faith and culture and access justice. As a logical follow up to such "systematic weakening" another state-sponsored mass flight was orchestrated in 1992 resulting

the residual caving of 23,000 registered refugees living in camps (the number now swelled to 31,000) evoked little interest of the outside world towards the "most persecuted minority of the world". The Rohingyas' claim to secure international protection was perhaps further constrained by the fact that unlike Iraq and Libya, Arakan remains void of black gold. In the headquarters of international agencies in New York and Geneva and national capitals of concerned countries, it was perhaps a conscious choice to not confront the bitter truth of enduring genocide since it would necessitate urgent international action. Despite the ongoing genocide, Rohingyas were left to face the vicious state forces quite like their poor cousins in Burundi and Rwanda.

By foot-dragging over the issue of recognising the Burmese government's acts as genocide, powerful states and international actors—who champion

the residual group was destroyed and national identity of the oppressor was imposed. The Rohingya case also sufficiently meets renowned genocide scholar and Genocide Watch's President Gregory Stanton's ten conditions of genocide: classification, symbolisation, organisation, polarisation, preparation, persecution, extermination and denial. Stanton reminds us that these stages are predictable but not inexorable, and the process is not linear. Most importantly, "at each stage, preventive measures can stop it."

In their rush to embrace the once-patriarsh state of Myanmar, the powerful countries expeditiously sacrificed the Rohingyas at the altar of strategic and commercial interests, and international organisations hid behind the façade of intricacies of legal interpretations. Their usage of the term "ethnic cleansing", a term that has no place in international law, is a scheme to not state the fact. As



A Rohingya refugee cries as he holds his 40-day-old son, who died as a boat capsized in the shore of Shah Porir Dwp while crossing the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, in Teknaf, on September 14, 2017.

in 250,000 Rohingyas seeking refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh. The international community still chose to look the other way, remaining resolute in its denial mode.

Shrewd Burmese generals by then framed the project of depopulating Arakan of Rohingyas—not by brute force (that would draw international media attention and condemnation) but by creating conditions in which sustaining life became impossible. This resulted in slow and incremental outward movement of Rohingyas in small groups since 1992. Their number cumulatively stood at 300,000 in Bangladesh until the unfolding of events following August 25, 2017. In the interim, spikes in violence in Arakan shored up the number of incoming refugees.

Little effort was given to find out what prompted the cross-border movement of the Rohingyas. Compassion fatigue for

rule of law, democracy and freedom, and human rights—allowed the murderous Burmese army to act with impunity in implementing its long-drawn-out genocidal agenda on the Rohingyas. The international community's denial also contributed to the Burmese military's decision for the "final solution" of the Rohingya question that the world is now faced with. There appears to be a striking similarity between Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement of Nazi Germany and that of these entities' strategy of placating the Burmese military.

The heart-wrenching testimonies and video footages presented before the tribunal convinced the judges in no uncertain terms what Raphael Lemkin, the Polish lawyer who coined the term "genocide", meant: "Destruction of a nation or an ethnic group." The tribunal concurred with Lemkin that in the Rohingya case, the national identity of the

Daniel Feisterstein, the chair judge of the PPT, poignantly reminded the court, "It's a concept created by the perpetrator Slobodan Milosevic." It's a shame that the word of Dhaka and its meaning to the perpetrator language to justify its inaction.

In days ago, the UN Secretary-General, in response to a question about whether he agreed with UN Human Rights Chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini that what's happening in Rakhine State is ethnic cleansing, retorted back to the journalist saying, "When one-third of the Rohingya population had to flee the country, can you find a better word to describe it?"

Yes, Mr Secretary-General, it's the G word.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Redefining Europe, and Europeans

TRAVELLING through Germany in the run-up to its federal election on September 24, one cannot help but be struck by the lingering signs of profound trauma from the 2015 refugee crisis.

Suddenly and virtually without warning, nearly a million desperate people—mostly Syrians fleeing the carnage in their homeland—flooded to Germany. And while Germany may be Europe's most bureaucratically well-managed country, even it was overwhelmed.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's response to the crisis two years ago was to throw out the rulebook and open her country's borders. She famously told the German people, "Wir schaffen das" (We can do it).

But German public opinion today suggests that the country has become warier of such bold gestures. Yes, Germany did it, because there was no alternative; and many Germans are proud of their country for rising to the occasion. But most hope that such a crisis never happens again.

Although many Germans have come to terms with what happened two years ago, a small minority still feels betrayed. They have responded with anger and xenophobic nationalism, and these sentiments will undoubtedly be reflected in how they vote.

But Germany's trauma from the refugee crisis should be put into perspective. Far more refugees have sought and found protection in countries such as Lebanon and Turkey than in Germany. In relative terms, Germany would have had to take in 20 million

refugees to match Lebanon in 2015. In Turkey, Istanbul alone is now hosting more refugees than all of Germany.

Of course, Germany is not the only European country that remains unsettled from the refugee crisis. In my own country, Sweden, a political party that wants to shut us off from the rest of the world will most likely make strong gains in next year's general election. And in many Central European countries that only recently regained their sense of sovereignty, refugees are

security policy. The EU must replace lofty rhetoric with concrete action, while also accepting its regional and global responsibilities. Barbed wire fencing between Hungary and Serbia will not shield Europe from the effects of war in Ukraine, pushes us and terrorism in Anatolia, or violent conflagrations in the Levant and Mesopotamia. And it will not help Europe manage the dramatic shift now underway in Africa, which will be home to 40 percent of the world's working-age population in a few decades.



Well-wishers wave to asylum seekers arriving at the main railway station in Dortmund, Germany, September 6, 2015.

PHOTO: REUTERS/INA FASSBENDER

widely viewed as posing a threat to national identity.

One way or another, these issues will dominate European politics in the years ahead. Europe is slowly trying to build up resilience to the kind of trauma it experienced in 2015. It is a continent that once exported war and turmoil, but that now wants to protect itself from its neighbours' problems.

One of the lessons from 2015 is that the European Union will need to develop a far stronger common foreign and

Another lesson from 2015 is that European countries must learn to redefine their national identities. The United States, Australia, and Canada have all been built on immigration, and most of us are the progeny of people from somewhere else. Indeed, there is not much left of the "first nations" in these countries. It is now entirely possible for there to be more people of Swedish descent in Chicago than in Stockholm.

To be sure, Europe is different from its

Western counterparts. Its tribes have been fighting one another for millennia. And for the past two centuries, Europeans have been building ever-stronger nation-states and national identities on the basis of long, complicated historical experiences.

The EU itself was of course built by nation-states. But our citizens wanted to overcome their long legacy of tribalism and war. Judged by that objective, the EU's first half-century has been a tremendous success. And yet the strains are there for anyone to see. Whether justified or not, when people perceive a threat to their national identity, their tribal instincts kick in. And for a truly frightened few, Brussels and Mecca have both come to be seen as mortal threats.

For Europe to find its place in a rapidly changing world, its citizens will have to learn to tap multiple identities. One can be a proud Swede and a proud European at the same time; one can also be both German and Turkish, and derive strength from that duality. It is not disloyal to see oneself as a citizen of the world. On the contrary, it is honourable.

Such a shift in attitudes would make for a very different Europe. We would have finally moved on from ancient tribal conflicts and fears, and embraced a networked, digital future. Merkel will likely be elected to another four-year term as chancellor on September 24, told Germans that they "can do it." But whether Germany and the rest of Europe will do it remains to be seen. We have our work cut out for us.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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A community beset by drugs

I'm an inhabitant of West Dolairpur, Shyampur, Dhaka. Yaba, a dangerous drug, has hit our community so much that almost every family in our area has gotten at least an addict in their midst. An addict ruins the happiness and dignity of the family. Most importantly, he is ruining himself.

They are not the criminals, they are the victims of a widespread and vicious crime. The criminals are those who provided our youth with drugs.

They are the drug dealers. Almost everybody knows who these criminals are. I urge the concerned authorities to intervene and rescue our community from the clutches of drug dealers. Md. Ashraful Islam
By mail

