

## Myanmar's position unacceptable

*Any repatriation agreement must involve UN*

THE proposal by Myanmar that repatriation of Rohingyas be based on the 1992 deal is unrealistic. Unrealistic primarily because Myanmar is insisting on the clause that these displaced people must have proof of citizenship, i.e. they must produce either citizenship identity cards or national registration cards or other relevant documentation. The proposal is ludicrous because people fleeing conflict zones hardly have time to collect their documents and this is what has happened in the case of the more than half a million Rohingyas who have fled to Bangladesh since late August.

We agree with the foreign minister that although Bangladesh welcomes the engagement of the Myanmar government at an official capacity by forming a joint committee, Bangladesh must continue to insist on greater involvement of the world community to pressurise Myanmar to stop the violence being perpetrated in Rakhine state. That another 40,000 Rohingyas have crossed the border in the last 10 days merely reinforces the argument that the situation in Rakhine is anything but peaceful. Until such time comes when peace is restored in Myanmar by the Myanmar government, the humanitarian crisis involving the Rohingyas will not end.

Bangladesh has begun registering displaced Rohingyas in the country. The task is a mammoth one but authorities are being assisted by the UN. Hence, any repatriation programme will inevitably require the participation of the UN. The Bangladesh government, with the help of the UN, is carrying out the registration of Rohingyas on Bangladeshi soil and the authenticity of the records is unquestionable. Myanmar must come to an agreement with Bangladesh that will be monitored and assisted by the UN, for smooth repatriation of these people from Rakhine.

## College bus going against traffic

*A wake-up call for everyone*

THE picture of a college bus full of students moving on the wrong side of a road in the capital's Moghbazar Wireless Gate area was disturbing, to say the least. Published on the back-page of *The Daily Star* on Tuesday, it reaffirms our fears that the dangerous precedent set by high-profile traffic offenders is bound to have a trickle-down effect. We didn't know just how far down the hole it can go, but now we do.

Last month, police took action against individuals who sought to use their rank to drive on the wrong side of the road. Among the offenders were a state minister, a lawmaker, several bureaucrats, police officials and journalists. Some repeat offenders were also fined in subsequent drives. When high-profile people flout traffic regulations and even refuse to learn from the punitive measures taken against them, it inspires a certain level of confidence in the general offenders. It's alarming that even children now think it okay to flout traffic regulations. And to think they can get away with that on the strength of their association with a power base (a government institution in this case) is more troubling.

This is not just a case of some individuals breaking rules on the streets and how flagrant violations have collapsed our traffic system. The fact that the students in question also snatched away the camera from the photographer makes us wonder if we've failed to teach our children the basic principles of morality and dignity. Children are an impressionable group and we need to set proper examples for them so that they understand that no one is impervious to the law, and that nothing gives them the right to break it.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Why only blame Mushfiqur?

It is unfair and unjust to blame Mushfiqur Rahim alone for Bangladesh cricket team's debacle in the recently concluded Test series against South Africa. According to reports published in this newspaper, Mushfiqur is apparently under great pressure from the team management after the conclusion of the series in South Africa.

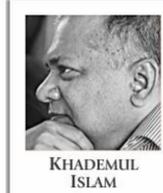
In both the tests, Bangladesh won the tosses but apparently took wrong decisions to field first in batting-friendly pitches. Who is to be blamed for the decision that proved wrong on both the occasions? Surely, it was not Mushfiqur's decision alone.

He deserves fair treatment for his contributions to the team during all these years. He should not be made a scapegoat.

AKM Ehsanul Haque, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP



KHADEMUL ISLAM

TWO parties are widely blamed for the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas: the Myanmar army and Aung San Suu Kyi. They stand amid the embers and ashes of torched Rohingya homes, objects of a furious global condemnation. Yet, the army, a feral beast from deep within a Mahabharat forest, keeps protesting its innocence, while Myanmar's Lady Macbeth sleepwalks through teak-roofed rooms feverishly repeating "Out, damned spot!" But all to no avail. Prince Charles crossed out Myanmar from his highly symbolic Asia visit list; the frowning visage of Bishop Desmond Tutu looms across the oceans.

But there is another villain in this grisly dystopian tale. Surely the Rakhine were just as hot-wired into the killing fields as the other two; surely, they were one of the signifiers in that ecosystem of death. As our own 1971 history illustrates, a proper genocide needs locals. To drive a stake through the heart of an entire community requires natives. To paraphrase Hillary Clinton, if it takes a whole village to raise a child, it sure as heck takes a whole bunch of them to raze many.

But in the global media coverage of the current crisis the Rakhine were largely missing, thereby escaping the severe censure directed at the other two. Over the years, as fresh atrocities took place, they would show up in the reportage of Human Rights Watch and other such bodies, but what was missing was a detailed, all-encompassing study. The reason for it, of course, was that Myanmar continually barred such investigations and the Rakhine tended to be hostile. Yet, if now they were to be hauled before the court of public opinion, it was necessary to have a precise understanding of their part in the interlocking mechanism of Myanmar's ethnic-cleansing machine. The marauders that appeared in the global journalistic margins were cloaked in the anodyne phrases of "pillaging mobs of youth", or "armed vigilantes" or "groups of young Buddhists", or fleeting images of men racing down rural paths in BBC documentaries, and thus hard to pin down. They sprang up, they terrorised, they disappeared. And sprang up somewhere else. Over time, the reporting on the Rakhine did become sharper (especially in the local Bangla press), but the overall view, like the patches of smoke-covered Myanmar border, remained hazy. The Rakhine, in effect, had become the avatars of Tony Blair, that slipperiest of war criminals—dubbed by a fellow Brit pol as "a mixture between Harry Houdini and a greased piglet, barely human in his elusiveness."

Until the ISCI report showed up in my email inbox.

## POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

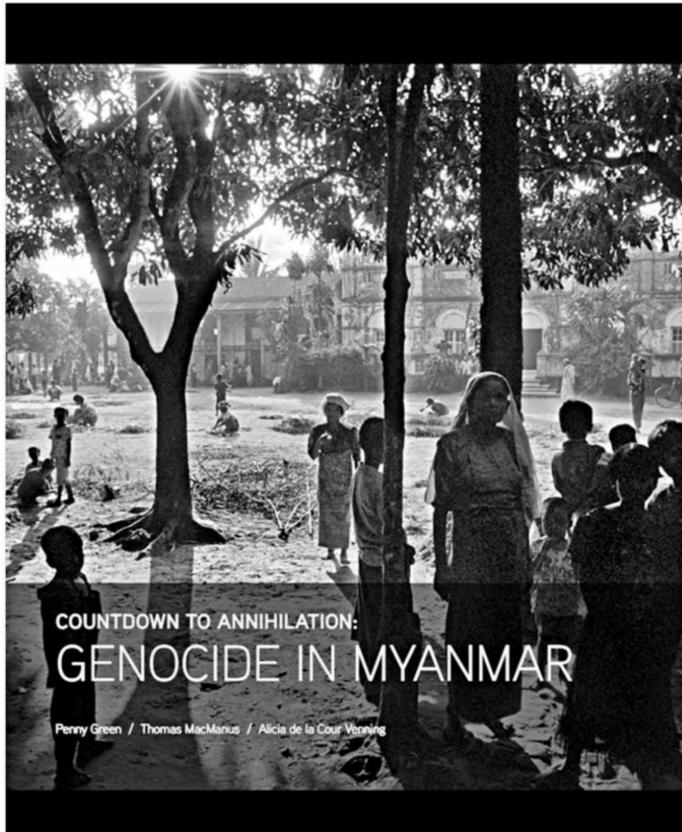
IN my column last week, I wrote about the prospects of Bangladesh graduating from Least Developed Country (LDC) status in the next few years and the need to anticipate the consequent loss of access to concessional development finance and focus more on climate finance as a possible substitute.

In this week's column, I would like to focus on the need for our development partners to work on their relations with Bangladesh. Although we stopped calling them donors and started calling them development partners some years ago, our relationship hasn't changed much; it remains them giving us concessional funding in the form of grants and low interest loans while we (both government and NGOs) are the passive recipients of such aid.

As we move on to middle-income

*As we move on to middle-income status and depend more on our own financial resources, the role of developed countries will need to change so that they become a genuine development "partner" rather than a "donor".*

# THE RAKHINE Avatars of Tony Blair?



The 2015 ISCI report titled "Countdown to Annihilation: Genocide in Myanmar" concluded that the attacks on the Rohingya minority amounted to genocide.

The International State Crime Initiative is a UK-based, interdisciplinary research centre founded to investigate state crimes such as genocide, war crimes and torture. The June 2012 communal violence in Rakhine state, after which state-organised persecution of the Rohingyas escalated, and later in 2014, when they became boat people, drew its attention. ISCI decided to assess whether the Myanmar government's crimes did indeed amount to a full-scale genocide. It conducted a 12-month study that included a nery four-month field investigation at ground zero in Rakhine state. The result was the publication in 2015 of *Countdown to Annihilation: Genocide in Myanmar*, that then represented "the only systematic academic fieldwork on the question of genocide in the Rakhine state."

Genocide studies have come a long way since Attila the Hun, and so unsurprisingly, ISCI utilised an analytical framework very similar to the one used by the Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT) in September in Kuala Lumpur (see CR Abrar's excellent account "Rohingya Genocide: Culpability through denial and inaction", published in *The Daily Star*, September 24, 2017). Part I of the report gave the historical,

political and economic context of the ethnic cleansing, with a focus on state-army-Rakhine relations. Part II was an account of how the reality on the ground was scrupulously tested against the genocide markers in the framework, detailing the processes of the first four stages that had left Rohingyas degraded to "a people whose agency has been completely destroyed." The final two stages—"mass annihilation and their erasure from Myanmar history"—began, as we know all too well, in August 2017.

It most definitely was, the report concluded, a genocide. No two ways about it. It also thereby nailed the Rakhine.

Interspersed among and at various levels of the text of Part II were the field investigations that added up to a devastating picture of the role and actions of the Rakhine state, its civil society and monks, and the Arakan National Party (ANP) in the genocide.

The Rakhine state was the institutional arm of the genocide. It gave, among other things, blanket immunity to the murderous Rakhine thugs. Asked about an arson attack and massacre of Rohingyas in June 2012, the state attorney-general flatly said, "It happened at night time so there is no evidence."

Rakhine civil society was the multi-tasking enabler, stoking the fires of ancient communal prejudices. Its "human rights activism" on land, labour and environmental issues was based on "an extreme form of anti-Rohingya propagandizing"—i.e., that it was the Rohingyas, and not the Myanmar state or the ruling ethnic group the Bamar, who were the cause of Rakhine poverty and underdevelopment.

The Arakan National Party was the attack dog. They attacked Rohingyas. They attacked the offices of the UN and international NGOs distributing relief to the Rohingyas. When, to her credit, Aung San Suu Kyi in 2012 said that she was concerned about the situation in Rakhine state, the ANP attacked her local NLD (the National League for Democracy) party offices multiple times. Instead of resisting, she caved in and never again spoke on the issue. The ANP kept the chokehold on the NLD, and in the build-up to the November 2015 elections, Aung San Suu Kyi reportedly purged her party of its Muslim members and conspicuously did not field any Muslim candidates. After the elections, from the moment she shook hands with the generals, it was open season on the Rohingyas.

The monks were the ideologues. They spread the message of hate against Muslims; they pushed for the destruction of mosques as a defence against 'jihadist Islam' and blessed the Rakhine civil society members and politicians providing transport and refreshments to groups attacking Rohingya villages.

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The report makes for sickening reading—a validation of Lacan's statement that human history is a "sewer." What was perpetrated on the Rohingyas was awful. Simply awful.

It is especially difficult to look at the Rohingya children in the camps, gazing wide-eyed at their brave new world. The cruelty inflicted on them will be a stain forever on all the three parties, but especially on the Rakhine, for these children lived side by side with them.

The Yemeni poet Ahmed Al-Shami wrote about the loveless and the forlorn; his poems could apply equally to these children:

Ride, ride the horse of your despair;  
 Do not hark back to what you left behind.  
 The land you cross, love will not be there,  
 No fated meeting, no melodious air,  
 No welcome waits for you, and hope is blind.  
 Once and for all your halcyon days are gone;  
 All those ghosts behind you! You...  
 Dare now the dark to eat the light  
 you're riding through.

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 Khademul Islam is the editor of the literary journal *Bengal Lights*.

## From donors to partners

*Our relationship with developed countries needs to change so that we can become an active partner from a passive recipient of aid*



status and depend more and more on our own financial resources, as well as receive international loans on non-concessional terms, the role of developed countries in Europe, North America, Asia, Middle East and Australia will also need to change so that they become a genuine development "partner" rather than simply a "donor".

Here, I would like to mention a few dimensions of this relationship that can be developed to our mutual advantage.

The first dimension is the shift from the global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) over the period from 2000 to 2010 to the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) from 2016 to 2030. During the MDG era which focused exclusively on reducing poverty, the role of the developed countries was simply to fund the activities in the developing countries. However, the SDGs are truly "global" goals in which the developed countries as well as developing countries all have to take actions at the domestic level to achieve the SDGs both at the national and international level.

Hence, Bangladesh can be an active partner of many developed countries in attaining the SDGs both at the national and global level through mutual cooperation rather than a mere one-way fund-

ing relationship.

The second dimension of the changing role of donors to genuine partners is related to climate change. This has its own global agreement called the Paris Agreement which has the same timeline for implementation as the SDGs, namely, by 2030.

Climate change in turn has two areas of action: mitigation (reducing emissions of greenhouse gases) and adaptation (coping with the adverse impacts).

While developed countries can help Bangladesh with mitigation, such as through solar energy, Bangladesh can help developed countries with adaptation. This will engender a much more genuine relationship that is also mutually beneficial in order to tackle global goals.

The third and final dimension, which is related to both the above-mentioned dimensions, is the development of partnerships between Bangladeshi civil society and academia and their counterparts in developed countries, as well as in other developing countries to tackle global problems together. Thus we need increased South-South and South-North collaboration on research, education, cultural exchange and more so that we can learn from each other. Such mutually beneficial collaborations will be in the interest of each country.

In conclusion, Bangladesh's transition from LDC to middle-income status does not only refer to transforming our economic circumstances but also one of evolving mindsets (and those of our partners) in order to become agents of change rather than mere recipients of money.

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