

## Myanmar government internal probe

Why refuse scrutiny by UN panel?

A military appointed committee is looking into Myanmar's operation in the Rakhine state. The irony here is that Myanmar authorities on the one hand have refused entry to a UN panel wishing to investigate allegations of persecution of the Rohingyas while on the other, the self-appointed committee is investigating on the premise of two questions: Whether the military units deployed follow the military code of conduct and whether troops strictly follow the chain of command.

The process is being questioned primarily because there is no independent party to verify whether the committee will conduct a fair and impartial inquiry and whether a military enquiry committee engaged in investigating its own members accused of mass violations of human rights can be impartial in the first place.

It is quite apparent that the Myanmar government is using one stalling tactic after another. From the very beginning of this humanitarian crisis, we have found that authorities there have shown very little inclination to engage with the Bangladesh government on the repatriation issue. Indeed the Myanmar army chief has told the US ambassador recently that Rohingyas are not native to Myanmar. Historical records on the other hand, clearly show that these people have been living in Myanmar for centuries.

The committee formed for investigating human rights violation is nothing more than eye wash—an attempt to disown the more than 500,000 Rohingyas forced from Rakhine state in the hope of never having to take them back. The committee is considered to be registering these displaced people with the aid of UN agencies and we call upon Myanmar to engage in meaningful discussion to resolve this crisis. The first step in that direction would be to restore order in the Rakhine state.

## Shielding the rapists

Why wasn't the case registered earlier?

WE are appalled to hear that the police at Tetulia, Panchagarh earlier refused to register a case against two rapists who repeatedly raped a girl and blackmailed her threatening to release a video clip of the incident, leading the girl to commit suicide. Police filed a case of 'unnatural death'. Officer-in-charge of Tetulia Police Station initially said they would file another case only upon receiving the autopsy report. We do not understand why the police would have to wait for the autopsy report to file a case against two rapists who, the family of the victims said, had provoked the girl to take her own life.

Local police illogically defended their decision by arguing that multiple cases cannot be filed for a single incident and that they could file another case only after the initial case of unnatural death is resolved.

The law of this land certainly does not oblige the police to have the autopsy report in order to record the complaint of incident to suicide. It is evident by the fact that the police, as our correspondent tells us, called the girls' uncle to say that they would file the case, which they finally did yesterday.

So, why did the police not take the case initially? One wonders whether it was just yet another attempt to shield the perpetrators, giving them enough time to flee. The brother of one of the rapists, is very close to a powerful local leader of the ruling party.

We on the authorities, firstly, to investigate the case swiftly with all seriousness and secondly, take disciplinary actions against those in the police force who failed to act in accordance with the law.



MUHAMMAD AZZIZ HAQUE

THE ongoing ethnic cleansing of Rohingyas in Rakhine State by the Myanmar and security forces of Myanmar has caused over half a million of them to flee and take refuge in Bangladesh. Consequently, an enormous burden of some one million Rohingyas, including the remainder from past influxes, has been foisted on Bangladesh by her immediate neighbour. If it has to be borne for long, the burden could prove a real drain on this small country's public exchequer, and could have serious social, security, environmental and other implications.

Bamars constitute Myanmar's dominant and majority ethnic community. Buddhists by faith, they detest Rohingyas, not just because they belong to religions different from theirs (majority of Rohingyas are Muslims and the rest Hindus), but also because of their dark complexion. So, we are witnessing communalism and a replay of apartheid in Rakhine which the world had seen earlier in South Africa when whites ruled that country.

The ruling junta rendered Rohingyas stateless by abrogating their citizenship in 1982. They had no freedom of movement within the country and are deprived of state education and jobs in the civil service. Consequently, Rohingyas have become a largely illiterate and pitifully impoverished minority. The racist, communalist and ultra-nationalist elements among the Buddhists and other want to either annihilate them or see them leave Myanmar for good, despite the fact that Rohingyas have been living in Rakhine since the 8th century.

In their bid to distort history, Myanmar authorities have ceased to call them 'Rohingyas', and are calling them 'the Muslim community in Rakhine' instead. They are turning a blind eye to the fact that historically, Rohingyas belonged to "a community that developed from people of various lines of descent, including Myanmarese, Arabs, Moors, Persians, Bengalis and others. Nobody among the living generations of the Rohingyas was born in Bangladesh. They were born in Myanmar and grew up there as offspring of that soil.

Myanmar is also running a misinformation campaign about how the ongoing crisis began. It is trying to respond to it to deflect the mounting

international pressure. Unfortunately, in her efforts to find a rapid and durable solution to the problem, Bangladesh is not getting the support of some of her traditionally close friends, namely China, India, Russia and Japan with whom she has deep and extensive trade and economic ties as well as cooperation in international forums and organisations. Their relief materials for Rohingyas apart, they have by and large sided with Myanmar authorities; in other words, with the persecutor and not with Bangladesh that has provided shelter to the persecuted Rohingyas.

Friendship, especially long-standing friendship, engenders among friends some mutual rights and expectations. People expect friends to stand by them in times of need. Naturally, Bangladesh

condemnation of the Myanmar authorities, and the fact that they sent out a minister to Bangladesh to discuss repatriation of their nationals.

As a major power, China is assuming global responsibility. Its current leadership's vision for a stable, peaceful and prosperous world embodies that responsibility. That vision also pervades China's numerous initiatives in the international arena, like the BRI (the Belt and Road Initiative), the AIB, BRICS Bank, SCO, CICA (Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia) and so on. The noble goals of that vision cannot be achieved if there exist forces of instability, persecution, racism, and the likes of those in the region.

Bangladesh considers China and India amongst her closest friends and develop-

the international community at large as well as the Secretary General of the UN, for their firm stance against the ongoing atrocities on the Rohingyas.

China, India, Japan, Russia and ASEAN countries that have well established ties of friendship and cooperation with Myanmar can persuade it to immediately create a congenial situation in Rakhine to enable the Rohingyas to return to their homeland in safety and security. The Myanmar government must also make reparations and rebuild their houses; and restore their citizenship in line with the Kofi Annan Commission's recommendation and also implement its other recommendations so that the Rohingyas can live with dignity and in peace.

Under mounting international pressure, Myanmar is apparently taking steps (or it could be just eyewash to ward off international community's criticism) to repatriate their nationals from Bangladesh after verification. Judging from our past experiences, we apprehend that Myanmar will make the verification process drag on for years on end; and thus, effectively block the repatriation process on the pretext of non-possession of any documents issued by the Myanmar authorities. Hardly any of the Rohingyas refugees in Bangladesh were issued identity cards by Myanmar. And even if some of them had documents to prove their birth and living in Myanmar, have they been able to carry those with them while running for their lives and fleeing to Bangladesh in the face of rampant killings, rape, physical torture, and arson attacks on their houses? Under the circumstances, the registration of the refugees upon their arrival in Bangladesh by the UN organisations and Bangladesh authorities must be accepted as proof that they came from Myanmar. Moreover, the whole world witnessed their mass exodus from Myanmar and arrival in Bangladesh as a decision, while satellite images showed their charred villages.

The Myanmar authorities have used the "terrorist attacks" on some police posts in Rakhine as a pretext to launch a massive crackdown on innocent and celebrated Rohingyas. If the issue is not resolved shortly, the region might witness advent of a new front for international terrorist groups. That won't be good for anybody, of course.

The friends of Bangladesh need to desist from blaming Myanmar for the communalism, racism, religious fanaticism, and savagery, etc. are indeed anarchists in the world of the 21st century.

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We are witnessing communalism and a replay of apartheid in Rakhine which the world had seen earlier in South Africa. PHOTO: STAR

expects China, India, Russia, Japan and its other friends to firmly stand by her and help find a durable solution to the Rohingya crisis that has been plaguing Bangladesh since the late 1970s.

Standing by Bangladesh does not necessarily mean abandoning Myanmar. In fact, Bangladesh also considers Myanmar a friendly neighbour with whom she enjoys common membership in some regional organisations. The only problem is that the simmering persecution of Rohingyas in Rakhine intermittently flares up into unspeakable atrocities, thus triggering massive waves of exodus of Rohingyas; with hundreds of thousands of them fleeing to Bangladesh for refuge. The latest exodus, termed as "a textbook case of ethnic cleansing" by the UN and "genocidal" by some others, began on August 25, (2017) and is not stopping despite mounting international

partners with intensive and cooperative bilateral relations. To further deepen mutual trust, Bangladesh addressed all the anxieties and interests of India in Bangladesh to India's satisfaction. On the other hand, Bangladesh always remembers with gratitude Russia's (the then Soviet Union's) invaluable support during her Liberation War, along with India's. Russia still has very momentous defence and technological cooperation with Bangladesh. Japan too has always been a major trade, economic and development partner. Being common friends of Bangladesh and Myanmar, they can help Bangladesh find a durable solution to this dire humanitarian crisis once and for all by using their leverage and good offices with Myanmar.

Bangladesh has shown her appreciation of the US, the UK, France, Turkey, Egypt, EU, OIC, and other countries and

# Private credit growth Where is this money going?

OPEN SKY PRIVATE credit growth hit a five-year high in August, giving rise to more concerns than hope. While private credit growth is essential to achieving seven-plus growth, its excessive growth which exceeds all realignings of the central bank raises some valid questions: 1) Is this money really going to the productive sector? 2) Is this money going out of the country through over-invoicing in the import sector or 3) Is our banking system good enough to accommodate this sudden credit surge?

Based on last May's growth figure of 16 percent, the central bank targeted a 16.3 percent private credit growth for the fiscal year 2018. Within only two months of the year, private credit growth jumped up to almost 18 percent with no sign of slowing down, raising concerns of higher inflation in the near future. Since price-dampers such as low oil price and better weather on the supply side are present, inflation may not rise immediately. However, concerns still persist as to where this money is going. A few inconsistencies in the external sector bolster the question whether a big part of this money is fuelling illicit financial transfers, which amounted to roughly USD nine billion last year. We will know how much capital was illicitly siphoned out of the country this year by the middle of next year, and the amount is expected to remain no less than USD 10 billion.

What happened five years ago? We had an abnormal 40 percent growth of both exports and imports. Since Bangladesh's exports are mainly garments-based (80 percent), any growth in export would cause similar growth in imports through back-to-back letters of credit. Not only has that pattern been

lost in the last fiscal year, the picture this year too is quite dubious. While import growth in the FY-2017 was nine percent, export growth dropped to as low as two percent, suggesting some possibilities of over-invoicing for imports and under-invoicing for exports—the classical channels that enable money laundering from any country overseas. If that is even partly true, credit growth will not contribute to output growth or employment generation at an expected speed. It's like feeding delicious food to a diarrheal patient and not seeing any health improvements.

be even lower (6.4 percent), although their estimates are like that of a conservative grandpa. Where did these big cartons of capital machinery go? Did these boxes really contain capital goods or something else? Is it not the central bank's job to inspect the containers?

A two percent rise in exports should have made import growth to be somewhere around, say two to five percent. In addition, 15 percent negative growth in remittances in FY-2017 is supposed to dampen domestic demand and import growth to a great extent. Imports, however, has turned out to be

import a good with its actual value, say USD 100, but tell your counterpart in the US or Europe to send an invoice of, say USD 250, which your country will pay overseas from the foreign currency reserve. The American dealer will keep USD 100 for him and deposit the rest in the designated account as instructed by the Bangladeshi money launderer.

Under-invoicing works in the opposite direction for money-trafficking exporters. A Bangladeshi exporter sends, say USD 225 worth of garments to Europe and tells the foreign counterpart to send, say only USD 100 to Bangladesh and deposit the rest in a European account as instructed by the Bangladeshi exporter. Remittance channels too can be used to pile-up funds overseas. The recent current account balance has Bangladesh and an inconsistent rise in imports give enough ground to suspect a recent hike in illicit financial outflows from the country. The resultant collapse in the current account balance has Bangladesh inevitable, slowing down the growth of foreign currency reserves.

Money has invisible wings just like the market has invisible hands. The government has to think about how to develop institutions to throttle capital outflow. We should be careful as to whether a big part of this credit is turning into election money. The central bank's credit growth target of 16.3 percent for the whole FY-2018 was definitely an underestimation of the economy's credit appetite under a low-inflation regime. Bangladesh Bank posed an untimely conservative stance by not lowering the policy rates as well. However, a recent spike in private growth from 15.66 percent in June to 18 percent in only 3 months is not something to celebrate. The entire country's credit sector should do more homework to find out where this money is going—to consumer credit, SME, power sector, or somewhere else?

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The growth of capital machinery imports has also risen from 14.1 percent in FY-2016 to 37 percent in FY-2017, breeding doubts as to whether this amount of capital goods has really been added to our production process. If that amount, supposedly entered our industry, why did GDP growth barely edge up from 7.11 in FY-2016 to only 7.24 percent in FY-2017? Of course, capital goods will keep adding to our output over future years. Their source has to be seen. It is significant rise in GDP growth in FY-2018? Probably not. The World Bank estimates that our FY-2018 growth would

hyperactive, contradicting all expectations and thus sparking some suspicions: where is this money going? The government should investigate who the big importers are and the purpose behind "importing" so much capital machinery. Are businessmen bringing in potato chips in the name of computer chips just to dodge import duties? If precautionary measures are not taken and the money has already been parked overseas, then the government should simply fluid default loans whose ratio is still above 10 percent since June 2016. How does over-invoicing work? You

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Violence against women and children

It's a matter of extreme sorrow that violence against women and children in our country is on the rise. We are accustomed to reading newspaper reports about violent incidents against women every day. A report by Aisn O'Sullivan Kenda (ASK) documented that at least 93 women were raped from January to March. According to another report published in *The Daily Star*, 1,050 women were raped across the country last year. Children aren't spared either. A report by Shishu Odhakar Forum shows that at least 521 incidents of child rape occurred last year.

These statistics show how horrific the situation is when it comes to the safety of women and children in our society. We strongly demand that the perpetrators of all rape cases be brought to justice swiftly. Shaker Riaz, By mail

### Lack of playing grounds in Chittagong

The Outer Stadium in Chittagong once used to groom prominent cricketers, some of whom ended up playing in the national team. But, currently, the famous stadium is a venue of a fair, meaning that the no one can play there. The construction of a 'swimming complex' was underway at the stadium until the High Court ordered to stop it. The Polo Ground field also hosts month-long fairs few times a year, while a park replacing the Agrabad jamoree field. The remaining five major fields across the city are also occupied one way or the other. Building players are frustrated as they cannot practice due to the unavailability of playing grounds. We hope the concerned authority will address the problem. Zabed Wali, Chittagong