

20 years of CHT Accord Remove impediments to full implementation

It has been 20 years since the Accord was penned between the Shanti Bahini and the government of Bangladesh, but still one hears a murmur of frustration in the Hills over the fact that not all the provisos of the Accord have been fully implemented. According to the PM, 48 of the conditions have been fully, and 15 of them partially, implemented. We would like to submit that in matters such as this, going by percentage terms may not present the actual picture of the situation as in this case. Although each one of the proviso is important, the more sensitive and complicated ones are those that become the reason for further disgruntlement for the aggrieved party.

In this regard the biggest sticking point is the issue of land. This is the most important issue to the Hill people as is the issue of land to anyone else in the country. And people fight and die for the piece of land that they call his or her own. Therefore, implementation of all other conditions will pale into periphery if this is not resolved very soon.

We understand that there might be matters that are creating impediments to the full implementation of the agreement, which might not have been foreseen while drawing up the Accord. But we also believe that there can be no problem that cannot be resolved through dialogue amongst the stakeholders. The governments should take cognizance of the frustration of the Hill people and undertake measures to remove the impediments or devise ways around those by taking the Hill people into confidence.

The resentment in the Hills is understandable because 20 years is too long a time to wait for full execution of an agreement. And the state cannot be seen to be soft pedaling on, if not abdicating, an issue that it had committed to a section of its citizens to fulfill.

Sonic weapons against protestors!

Suppressing rights through deadly force

THE use of noise emitting devices or "sonic weapons" by the police on Thursday, against peaceful protestors remonstrating against the government's decision to increase power prices for the umpteenth time this year—a genuine complaint—is an absolute shame. The right to free expression is a fundamental right in Bangladesh, as guaranteed and protected by its Constitution (Article 39), and is even included in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19). Through blatant and unnecessary use of force, the police have again violated this most sacred right of protestors, which is worryingly becoming the norm in the country.

While that is unacceptable, what is even worse are the increasingly deadly methods that the police keep resorting to in order to quash any form of dissent. For example, by using rubber-bullets, teargas shells, pepper sprays, etc.—all of which can cause permanent damage to a person. In fact, it was only a few months ago when a student lost his eyes to the reckless use of a police weapon while observing his basic right to free expression. Despite that, the police used sonic weapons on protestors which can disrupt or destroy eardrums, cause severe pain, disorientation, nausea and even incapacitate people. What is even worse is that they used it near two hospitals—Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital and BIRDEM Hospital.

Such repressive practices by law enforcers must stop. There is no excuse for denying people their fundamental rights as enshrined in the constitution, and even less so, by using uncalled for and deadly force.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Doctors' negligence

Recently, this newspaper published an editorial on the gross negligence of a doctor following a story published the day before. While conducting a caesarean operation on a patientin Comilla, the doctor in question delivered the patient's baby girl, leaving its twin inside the womb, believing that the other child was a tumour. By the time the problem was detected, the other child died. This is totally unacceptable and an indictment of the quality of our healthcare service.

Quality and affordable healthcare is a dream for many, more so for Bangladeshi people. Doctors should not fleece patients by prescribing unnecessary treatments, including surgeries. Also, when they are not sure what to do, they should allow their expert peers to conduct operations on their behalf. I think the performance of our health professionals should be brought under greater scrutiny. Deendayal MLulla, By e-mail

Bangla Academy should build a website for kids

I'm working on a wordbook for children. The other day, I needed to know the English word for Koi mas. So I searched in Bangla Academy's dictionaries, but to no avail. Then I browsed on the internet and found several words, but I was not sure which one was accurate. The same goes for other fish varieties that are common in our country.

I think Bangla Academy should create a website for children containing materials on common birds, fishes, flowers and animals that are often seen in our country. Also, the website may include some storybooks with moral teachings, biographies of eminent personalities, sci-fi books, rhymes and dictionaries designed specifically to meet the needs of the children. MdTofazzel Hossain, Rajshahi

IDENTIFYING ROHINGYA Perplexing papal priority



C R ABRAR

THE dusts of Suhrawardy Udyan have settled down by now. The much-talked-about papal visit to Burma and Bangladesh has come to an end. The visit created quite a bit of furore both at home and abroad. The Vatican staunchly defended its decision of not allowing the Pope to utter the word "Rohingya" during his Burma visit. Its spokesperson claimed that "the Pope is not going to lose any moral authority" and insisted that "still stands (intact)." Detractors, however, felt the Pope fell short of what was expected of him, given his strong track record of advocating for refugees and migrants. They held that "there should be nothing controversial about the Pope identifying people by the name they want" (Fortify Rights) and felt betrayed that he missed out "an unparalleled opportunity" to bring light to the indiscriminate violence against the Rohingya.

Terming or not terming a group by its preferred self-identification tag is not an issue of simple semantics. Intrinsicly tied to this is the question of recognition of a group's right to self-identification. An important component of Burma's ruling elite's genocidal agenda against the Rohingya is the denial of the latter's self-identity. Since the military takeover in 1962, the State in Burma launched a systematic campaign to destroy the Rohingya identity. Despite the existence of valid historical records and official documentation of the existence of the Rohingya community in Arakan for centuries, the Burmese authorities deviously present them as "illegal migrants" from the region that is currently Bangladesh. Rejecting the Burmese claim that Rohingya are recent arrivals and the Rakhines are original settlers, eminent SOAS historian Michael Charney persuasively establishes "the shared immigrant nature of the entire population of the littoral" known as Arakan. He strongly argues that "No group in Arakan would pass the test as 'indigenous.'"

The Pope's acquiescence to the pressure of the Burmese authorities for denying the use of the term Rohingya was a missed opportunity to condemn the genocidal acts of the Burmese government. His act became a party to the denial of the group identity of a people who are facing an existential threat from a state-sponsored genocidal act. Had the Pope stood his ground, it would have probably encouraged many others to support the rights of the Rohingya. It was a missed opportunity for the Pope "to publicly refute the unconscionable pressure by Aung San Suu Kyi and the Myanmar military to deny the Rohingya their identity." (Human Rights Watch)

At a recent RMMRU conference on Ending the Slow Burning Genocide of Rohingya by Myanmar, Rohingya activist Nay San Win reminded, "The term Rohingya is not a racial slur. It is a dignified

term for more than two million people who are living across the world." The then UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, in 2014 in Naypyidaw, expressed concerns about the welfare of the country's Rohingya Muslims. Ban did so in deference to the international human rights principle of self-identification of groups, and to the obvious dismay of his hosts.

It will be unfair to hold Pope as an individual responsible for this blunder. At a press conference in Yangon held at the end of Pope's visit to the country, Myanmar's Catholic Church's Bishop John Hsane Hgyi suggested that reports of atrocities being committed are not "reliable" or "authoritative" and that those who are criticising Myanmar's response to a complex situation should "go into the field to study the reality and history" to obtain "true news." Such statements do not help

groups. One wonders what prompted the minders of the Pope to execute the visit even when the refugees were fleeing violence in Arakan. This visit, as one observer put it, was essentially "wading into a diplomatic and political minefield." One may recall that Pope Francis in the recent past has publicly denounced "the persecution of Rohingya brothers and sisters" who he said were "tortured and killed, simply because they uphold their Muslim faith." In the decades ahead, if and when the Vatican releases the documents pertaining to this papal visit, one would get to know whether the Burma visit was the result of internecine conflict within the Vatican establishment to malign an otherwise progressive Pope or was it a collective decision to promote Catholicism in a country where Christianity is the fastest growing faith, according to 2014

attack on police posts in August with the three-month-long brutal campaign of the Burmese military that had resulted in the exodus of hundreds of thousands of refugees. Without extending his support to the demands of the victims for trial of the perpetrators, one wonders what prompted the pontiff to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the architects and executioners of this slow burning genocide when they themselves are celebrating their murderous acts? Surely there is no reason to believe that Gen. Ming Aung Hlaing, the head of the Burmese army and the Butcher of Arakan, broached the idea to the Holy Father when they met in Yangon!

The Rohingya episode drives home the point that despite his efforts in promoting the cause of the underprivileged, his own herd, the Catholics, remain the Pope's priority. In



Pope Francis arrived in Bangladesh from Myanmar on Thursday as part of a visit that has been overshadowed by the plight of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees.

PHOTO: AFP

but remind the observers to recall the complicity of the Vatican and other German Churches with the Nazi regime, and to wonder that the corpus of international human rights instruments that have been framed over the last 70 years have had little impact on the institution. The Rohingya episode has again demonstrated that despite their avowed declaration to stand up for the wretched of the earth, when push comes to shove, the institution does not condemn the perpetrators at appropriate moments when it should and such condemnation would wake up the rest of the world to the realities of what is going on.

The papal trip to Burma was conceived in June this year, much before the current wave of atrocities began. As the situation in Arakan deteriorated since August 26, the Vatican secured ample warning about the wanton genocidal acts of the Burmese security forces with active connivance of the Buddhist vigilante

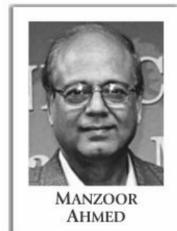
Population and Housing Census conducted by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

During the first two days of his visit to Bangladesh marked by formal meetings, the Pope did not utter the term Rohingya. It is only during his meeting with the members of the affected community that he made a reference to Rohingya. The Pope had little to offer to his baffled Rohingya guests. He was visibly moved by the horrific recounting of experiences of the Rohingya families. But it appears even those were not enough for the leader of the planet's 1.6 billion Catholics to unequivocally condemn the genocidal acts of the barbarous Burmese regime. Instead, he begged forgiveness for the rest of the world for turning a blind eye, for dragging its feet and not acting, for not extending its support, for not being tough on Burma and for appearing to give parity to the Rohingya militants'

this context, a question raised by the Chicago-based Rohingya Nasir Zakaria – "Is one minority more valuable than another?" – becomes pertinent. The Vatican should learn from the fact that the appeasement policy of Hitler during the World War II did not work. If the genocidal regime in Burma is not effectively resisted, one would not be surprised that in its project to make Burma only for Buddhists the regime will target the Christians and other minorities soon after it accomplishes the current task of annihilating Rohingya. The episode further lays bare the irony that the debate surrounding the Rohingya has reduced to utterances while the entire population in Arakan is facing genocidal extermination. Shame on the international community for failing to acknowledge and decisively act on this slow burning genocide.

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Why not one ministry for school education?



MANZOOR AHMED

THERE is sometimes a jostling about which of the two ministers of education should represent Bangladesh in any international forum for education, such as a Unesco meeting or a UN System consultation in relation to the SDGs.

Going by international protocol, the Minister of Education is invited and he, rather than the Minister of Primary and Mass Education, ends up attending these fora, even when the agenda concerns primary and basic education or literacy, which are often the focus of much of international cooperation in education.

Bangladesh is the only country in the world with two separate ministries managing school education. The Ministry for Primary and Mass Education has the responsibility for the pre-primary to class five level while the Ministry of Education administers education for classes 6-12. Why do we need separate ministries for school education? This stands as a major obstacle to decision-making and implementation of essential reforms, as explained below.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) of the People's Republic of China, for instance, is the single agency that regulates the national education system including compulsory basic education, vocational education, and tertiary education.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development in India is divided into two departments: the Department of School Education and Literacy, which deals with primary, secondary and higher secondary education, adult education and literacy; and the Department of Higher Education, which deals with university education, technical education, scholarship, etc.

Some countries have a separate ministry-level agency for higher and professional education, but nowhere is the management of school education split between two national ministries. There is a good reason for this universal practice: the need to plan and manage school education in an integrated and holistic manner. The separate Division of Primary and Mass Education was created in 1992 to provide a momentum

to compulsory primary education and adult literacy when the Education For All programme was adopted globally in 1990. But the division was turned into a separate ministry in 2002, driven by the age-old bureaucratic tendency that keeps an agency growing even when it has outlived its useful life span.

Of course, which minister should represent Bangladesh in international meetings is not the main problem. There are other more substantive issues. At least three kinds of complications arise from the divided planning and management jurisdiction for school education.

First, the global sustainable development goal regarding education (SDG 4) specifies equitable, inclusive, high quality and free primary and secondary education by 2030 for all children, as well as lifelong learning for all. Bangladesh would be missing a key feature of a middle-income country if it cannot ensure universal and compulsory primary and secondary education for all children.

It is essential to plan and manage school education as one unified effort instead of focusing on primary education only, which originally prompted the creation of the separate primary education division in the Prime Minister's Office, which later became a full ministry.

Second, compulsory education is still limited to schooling up to grade five, though education up to grade eight was recommended as the domain of compulsory education in the first post-liberation education commission in 1974. This was re-affirmed in the Education Policy 2010. However, looking at the task primarily as shifting the jurisdiction from one ministry to another, and a turf battle about resolving the related practical and logistical problems, stymied the effort.

Even half of the children in the age for grades 6-8 today are not completing this level of education. And little attention is being paid to improving school facilities, teachers and what students learn at this level. The idea of universal secondary education has not registered even on the distant radar sight of the authorities. The question can no longer be ignored, if SDG 2030 targets are to be taken seriously.

Third, a unified vision of compulsory basic education that extends to 10th grade, and eventually 12th grade, calls for a unified approach for the key

actions. These include designing the curricula with continuity and right sequence, preparing teachers in huge numbers and ensuring their professional quality, and assessing and monitoring learning both in school and through appropriate (and not too frequent) public examinations.

All of these tasks are now divided between two ministries without the much-needed holistic view—the way these things are managed in all other countries.

A central authority responsible only for the overall strategic changes, policy direction, setting national standards and consensus building should be the goal for transformation in education governance. Greater decentralisation and decisions closer to where the beneficiaries are—at the district, upazila and school levels—in a responsive and participatory way, should be the guiding principle. Thus, the one national ministry for education need not be over-burdened.

A certain way of thinking and set of habits have developed through a generation of the divided but over-centralised management of school education and a reductionist vision of education accepting grade-five primary education as the state's obligation. This is no longer acceptable.

A permanent and statutory education commission was foreseen in the National Education Policy 2010 to guide and maintain an oversight of transformation of the education sector to serve national aspirations and the challenges of the 21st century. It is high time to act on this proposal.

An education system that envisions universal primary and secondary education with quality and equity in line with the imperatives of a middle-income country and the SDG 4 education targets should be the pledge of the political parties intending to compete in the next parliamentary election.

Political commitment should be integrated with a holistic planning and management of the education sector through one national centre of authority. What can be a more important item in the political manifesto?

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