

Call Myanmar to account

The UN must act quickly

THE painful experiences of Rohingyas have once again been poignantly narrated to the visiting Nobel trio, and anyone who hasn't really been through the harrowing experiences cannot actually comprehend the horrendous nature of violence that these people have been through.

Myanmar's apparent foot-dragging in starting the actual process of repatriation betrays its opacity and insincerity in fulfilling the deal. And in spite of the agreement on repatriation, refugees are still trickling into Bangladesh, meaning that the persecution of the minority community, of whatever few Rohingyas left in northern Rakhine, is still going on. It has been resorting to all manners of subterfuge to delay the repatriation.

Bangladesh has been trying its best to help a permanent resolution of the problem and return of the refugees to where they belong. How long can it wait for it? Every day of delay in repatriation imposes a tremendous cost on Bangladesh. That the violence fits all the characteristics of genocide is beyond any doubt, yet the UN has been unable to initiate stern actions against Myanmar. And that is what begs the question.

Merely pronouncing wishes will have no effect on a regime that is determined to make the State of Rakhine Rohingya-free unless the current rulers and the military are called to account for the genocide they have committed in northern Rakhine. The UN Security Council must take cognisance of the matter and report it to the International Criminal Court, like it did in the case of Sudan. Russia and China, who have consistently resisted adopting all Council resolutions for severe action against Myanmar since the very beginning of the problem, should realise that their position not only prolongs the sufferings of the Rohingyas but also puts Bangladesh in tremendous duress in every respect. But more dangerously, their consistent veto gives the regime in Naypyidaw a sense of impunity too. And unless the regime is called to account, the persecution of Rohingyas will continue.

Who will guard the guards?

Police-turned-drug dealers

WE are horrified to learn that two members of the Detective Branch (DB) of police have sold off more than 700,000 seized yaba tablets and made a profit of Tk 8 crore! That the very custodians of the law are now increasingly engaged in criminal activities is a very ominous sign for law enforcement in the country. Such acts cannot be tolerated because the illegal yaba trade has been declared the number one problem in narcotics by the government! Reportedly, there are ongoing investigations into the matter.

The whole matter could easily have gone unnoticed had it not been due to the bungling of the DB men implicated in the matter, who had crossed the line and threatened the Cox's Bazar Officer-in-Charge who had brought the matter to the attention of the police HQ in the first place back in December, 2017. The audacity of these policemen-turned-criminals cannot be underestimated because once we have law enforcers getting involved in narcotics peddling, the war on drugs is doomed to failure.

Yaba has become a scourge for our society given that these tablets are easy to transport and distribute. What these men donning official uniforms have done is to help sustain the drug habits of tens of thousands of people and probably helped create a new generation of addicts. Their actions have undermined painstaking efforts by narcotics agencies in the war on drugs which is already a very complicated affair and the last thing needed is the presence of bad eggs on the force to undo the work that has been done so far. They have not only tarnished the image of the police force, but have also added to the risk the society faces from drugs. They must be made examples of.

LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

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Don't bail out failed banks

It is perhaps unprecedented in the banking history of our country that the government has continually bailed out failing banks. It is a very dangerous step. The banks that the government has been trying to prop up have already lost depositors' confidence.

Instead of bailing out failed banks, the government should take bold steps to ensure good governance in the banking sector, which will increase the confidence of depositors. Having been hit by numerous loan scams, the banking sector is witnessing a period of grave danger in its history. If the scammers go unpunished under the auspices of the authorities, the public will lose faith in the system completely.

MZ Emran, By e-mail

Call centre priorities

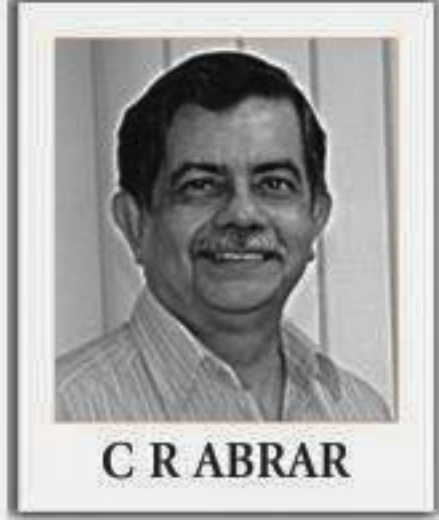
Call centres have rapidly evolved from being a simple add-on or customer-facing service to an important differentiator. At a time when the call centre business is witnessing ever increasing competition and internationalisation, a customer's experience of a company's online or telephone service can have a serious impact.

It is easy to see how a negative interaction may cause the customer to stop using the company's services. This hidden aspect of negative interactions with customers is often ignored by companies, as it seems that their management is often focused on cheaper ways of achieving the same or better performance at a lower cost. Instead, the focus should be on satisfying a customer's needs and expectations. That is the best way of achieving better results.

Sumaiya Akter, East West University

THE RAWAT OFFENSIVE

Blend of impropriety and arrogance



Centre for Joint Warfare Studies and the Ministry of Defence, recently held in Delhi, the army chief shared his thoughts on Northeast India. What was meant to be a talk of a professional soldier on 'Bridging Gaps and Securing Borders' of the region turned out to be an exercise in commenting on state politics of Assam with religious insinuation. More importantly for us, the general's observations betrayed the prevailing perception of an important section of the Indian establishment about Bangladesh.

Rawat expressed deep concern on the burgeoning popularity of the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) and attributed it to changes in population dynamics of Northeast India, particularly Assam. The increase in the number of Muslim-majority districts from five to eight or nine in Assam was presented as evidence. Claiming that the AIUDF has 'grown in a faster timeframe than the Bharatiya Janata Party grew over the years,' he warned, "Finally, what will be the state of Assam, we have to take a

The suggestion of covert support of Pakistan and China to various forces in the Northeast states has been a well-known rhetoric of the Indian security establishment.

call." As a recipe to avert the impending crisis, the army chief put forward his theory of "amalgamation" of the people of the region with the mainstream through teaching them Hindi, an issue that is likely to hit a raw nerve in the Northeast.

At a time when respectable Northeast observers are stressing that improvement in human development indicators in Bangladesh (which in many cases surpassed that of India) has resulted in cessation of flow of undocumented migrants from the country to the region, the Indian army chief finds it critical to establish that such migration continues



People expect fact-based rational comments from persons holding high offices, such as that of General Bipin Rawat, the chief of army staff of India. PHOTO: PTI

unabated because of Bangladesh's need for "Lebensraum"—the German word for "living space" first used by Adolf Hitler in Mein Kampf. "Large parts of their areas get flooded ... during monsoons. So they have very constricted areas to stay in, so people will continue coming into our place, into our areas," notes the wise general.

He then unfurls his key point: Inability to stave off a stronger nation (India) through conventional operations has led its detractors to opt for "planned immigration" through a "proxy game." "I think this proxy game is being very well played by our Western neighbour (Pakistan), supported also by our northern neighbour (China), to keep the area disturbed. We will continue to see this kind of migration happening," Rawat surmises.

The chief's candid observations have triggered a wide array of reactions. The Indian army was quick to counter suggestions that General Rawat "had made any political or religious remarks." "Army Chief just mentioned amalgamation and development in the seminar on Northeast," it noted. When her attention was drawn, the Union Minister for Defence refused to comment on the matter. The ruling BJP leaders of different tiers almost unequivocally welcomed and extended their endorsement. Perhaps sensitivity of the issue led the Indian National Congress leaders to refrain from making

the result of irregular migration of people of a particular faith? Has not the army chief risked stoking religious tensions in an already politically charged milieu?

Secondly, by commenting on political and religious affairs of a constituent state of the Indian Union, has not the general overstepped his remit? Can there be any doubt that the statement was indeed politically motivated and compatible with the BJP's divisive communal politics? Given the fact that bypassing two competent senior colleagues, Rawat was cherry-picked by the BJP administration in December 2016; was this a payback effort of the general?

Thirdly, by proposing "amalgamation" of the people of the Northeast into the mainstream through espousing Hindi language, has not the army chief been promoting the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's educational and social agenda, undermining the constitutional guarantee of equal status of all languages of the land and the much-coveted concept of "unity through respecting diversity"?

Fourthly, has not General Rawat breached existing conventions and codes of conduct of high functionaries of the state?

Fifthly, if indeed there was irregular migration from Bangladesh, was not it incumbent on the general to furnish evidence to back his claim? While people are not surprised by irresponsible statements of politicians, should not they expect fact-based rational comments from persons holding high offices, such as that of the chief of army staff?

And finally, has not General Rawat's tagging of Bangladesh with Pakistan and China amounted to blatant aspersion on a sovereign nation? Does this not undermine good relations with a country that has done everything within its power to address, among other things, the security concerns of India pertaining to the Northeast and a country that is being enticed to collaborate on matters of defence?

The response of Bangladesh government to the Rawat offensive has been disappointing. The government is yet to come up with any formal reaction. Good neighbourly relations with Bangladesh deserve a clarification of this statement.

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The conundrum of an opposition party in the House



OPPOSITION Leader Raushan Ershad's appeal on Tuesday (February 27) to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, to relieve three of her party MPs from the council of ministers to help the Jatiya Party emerge as the "real opposition" in parliament, sounds ridiculous. But in the present political context it is not something that would leave anyone dumbfounded. Her husband JP Chairman Ershad, who has remained the special envoy of the prime minister with the status of a minister for the last four years, on several occasions, publicly acknowledged that his party had become a "domestic opposition party" as it failed to play its role as the real opposition in parliament. He had suggested that her party MPs should quit the government although he himself did not resign as the special envoy.

Earlier, Raushan did not agree with Ershad and extended support to the party's MPs to continue as ministers. She did not acknowledge the reality that under her leadership the main opposition has been suffering from an identity crisis from the very beginning because of its unique position—three MPs in the council of ministers and others in the opposition bench. She, along with her party MPs, went as far as blasting those who criticised the JP for its dubious role in parliament. Several times she claimed that under her leadership the JP has emerged as the "real opposition" in parliament by playing a constructive role in the House.

Four years down the line, Raushan herself has changed her mind and raised the issue of identity crisis as she lamented her party's position by saying, "Are we the opposition and the ruling party?"

In a democracy, the opposition's main role is to question the government of the day and hold them accountable to the public. The opposition represents an alternative government, and is responsible for challenging the policies of the government and producing different policies where appropriate. The leader of the opposition plays a pivotal role in leading the opposition bench in the right direction.

What Raushan said in her speech speaks volumes about the state of the main opposition she has been leading in parliament for the last four years. She said she felt embarrassed when reporters asked her whether the JP was in opposition or in the government. "I do not give any interview to journalists due to this matter."

She said, "When you go abroad, can you [prime minister] say which is the opposition party in Bangladesh?" "Drop three Jatiya Party members from the cabinet. If you [prime minister] do it, Jatiya Party will survive and will be able to play its due role with dignity," Raushan urged.

Thus, Raushan seems as unpredictable as her husband. What she said on Tuesday she forgot the next day. On Wednesday, she claimed the present opposition is playing their due role in the House. "In the past, no parliament had been able to complete its tenure peacefully...this

government didn't face any hartal, siege and movement," Raushan said, adding that the development works carried out under the current government were never seen during previous governments.

So what do we make of all this? Are the three JP MPs who are in the council of ministers, beyond the control of the party they belong to? The JP is in a difficult situation. In the past, JP Chairman Ershad on several occasions announced that his party MPs would resign from the council of ministers. But his decision did not work as his party MPs refused. Even he himself could not resign from the post of special envoy to the prime minister.

The JP seems unable to take any disciplinary action against the three MPs if they do not agree to resign as

Their performance deserves praise from the government. Moreover, can the PM criticise the main opposition as she made JP the main opposition in the last parliamentary election boycotted by the BNP-led alliance?

So how do these internal matters of the JP impact our politics and democracy? The bigger picture is alarming. When the opposition leader felt helpless and appealed to the prime minister to salvage the damaged main opposition, it exposed the bankruptcy of our politics and democracy. This clearly shows that the current parliament is not functioning well. In many countries, it has been seen that when the parliament of a country remained dysfunctional, the government became arrogant and uncontrollable. In the absence of checks and balances and effective watchdog



Raushan Ershad in Parliament.

CREDIT: SANGSAD BANGLADESH

ministers. Earlier the JP faced a split in the past AL-led government's tenure during 1996-2001. The party joined the then government led by AL and one of its MPs, who was a senior leader, was made minister. At one stage, the JP high command decided to withdraw its support to the then government. But the JP leader refused to do so and around half of JP MPs supported him resulting in a split in the party.

Interestingly, though JP has been saying that it cannot emerge as a "real opposition," Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Wednesday lauded the main opposition's role in parliament. In her view, the JP's leaders including Raushan had shown patience that democratic practices can be carried out fairly. This is also the political reality. The main opposition MPs did not cause discomfort for the government in the last four years. They never cast votes against any of the bills passed by parliament.

mechanisms, establishing good governance and rule of law remains a far cry; human rights become vulnerable, corruption becomes rampant. Are we safe and free from any of these dangers?

In 2014, when three JP MPs were made ministers and the rest took seats in the opposition bench, a seasoned politician termed it as "a mango bar made of jackfruit." If we want a mango bar, it must be made with mango, not with jackfruit.

The underlying message of the drama staged by JP over the last four years is very significant. There is no alternative to forming the parliament through a free, fair and participatory election. This should be kept in mind before the next parliamentary election. No more mango bars made with jackfruit.

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