Genocide Day must be recognised

Lessons for the world

TODAY, March 25, declared by our parliament last year, as Genocide Day, is a day of remembrance and introspection. We remember with grief, the innocent lives that were snatched away through a planned, cold blooded design by an occupying force that aimed at wiping out in one sweep of terror, a significant part of the Bengali population, especially its intelligentsia. Which is why the occupying Pakistani army targeted students and teachers of Dhaka University along with Bengali members in the East Pakistan Rifles and police as well as thousands of common people. Hindu Bengalis were especially sought out as part of a plan based on racism and bigotry.

"Operation Searchlight", therefore, has become symbolic of the lowest level that humans can stoop to, when possessed by the lust for power. Sadly, despite all the overwhelming evidence, the footage of the killings, the huge exposure by international media during 1971, the mass graves and eye witness accounts, the genocide on Bangladeshi soil in the 1971 War of Liberation, has still not been recognised as such by the UN. Shockingly, the prime accused—the Pakistani government, has still not officially given its apology to a nation of people who have witnessed unbelievable brutality that included mass murder, rape and torture. In fact Pakistan continues to deny that such atrocities even occurred, going as far as showing solidarity for war criminals of 71 and even passing resolutions to protest the carrying out of death sentences of war criminals. It is unfortunate that while many of its own citizens have voiced their condemnation of the genocide of 1971, the Pakistani establishment has chosen to live in the past—through denial of its culpability and support of those who helped in committing the war crimes.

Thus although the present government has provided some solace for the families of the martyrs through the successful holding of the war crimes trials, the people of this country are still haunted by the memory of the terror and mayhem inflicted on them and loss of so many precious lives. Recognition of that loss by the international community, trial of those members of the Pakistani Army who had committed these crimes and an official apology by the state that had ordered its army to carry them out are the least that we, Bangladeshis, deserve.

For the world March 25 should be a day of introspection as it signifies the ugliness of state aggression based on racism and greed—something that we humans continue to repeat, over and over again.

Bribe-taking caught on video

Digitalise land management system

ACTING sub-registrar in Narayanganj's Araihazar area was filmed taking wads of cash from people in his office. The video went viral online and its authenticity has been viewed by officials at the District Registrar's office. This incident is proof of rampant corruption in the offices that deal with land registration in the country. We wonder if this is the reason why officials involved with land management system have not been very keen on digitalising its services. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) had brought out a report titled "Union Digital Centre in citizen services: Role, possibilities and challenges" in December of last year highlighting the resistance from a section of the land management sector who do not wish the entire system to be digitalised because it would effectively close the door to corruption.

The report's finding was that 56 percent of all citizens who went to these offices on land-related matters had to pay varying degrees of bribes. The government had introduced Union and Service Centres way back in 2009 with the aim of increasing people's access to services at the grassroots level. While the move has been a good one, citizens are harassed by the likes of the sub-registrar who was caught red handed taking speed money for services that are supposed to be given freely. While an official of the district registrar office has told us that the matter would be looked into today, it is time for the government to introduce technology to fight graft in the offices that deal with land registration. When we know that digitisation will tackle bribery, what is the hold up in introducing the system?

BANGLADESH'S GRADUATION FROM THE LDC GROUP: PITFALLS AND PROMISES

How to ensure smooth transition after LDC graduation

This is part five of a series of articles based on the Centre for Policy Dialogue's (CPD) research on Bangladesh's graduation out of the LDC group

FAHMIDA KHATUN, SHAHIDA PERVIN and MASUDUR RAHMAN

BANGLADESH will cross a number of milestones during its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The first five years of the SDGs coincide with the last five years of implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) for the least developed countries (LDCs) for the 2011-20 period, which aims to halve the number of LDCs by 2020.

Bangladesh has become eligible for graduation at the 2018 triennial review of the Committee for Development Policy of the United Nations Economic and Social Council given its progress in gross national income (GNI) per capita, the Human Assets Index (HAI) and Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI). While this is a remarkable achievement for Bangladesh, it is important that the country graduates with momentum to avoid the pitfalls of the post-graduation phase. Development of productive capacity and structural transformation are key factors for graduation. On the face of it, Bangladesh's efforts towards implementation of the SDGs may facilitate graduation since several objectives of the IPoA and the SDGs have commonalities. Many of the SDGs are also similar to Bangladesh's objectives laid out in its Seventh Five Year Plan (7FYP). Thus, as Bangladesh works towards fulfilling its objectives through national policies, efforts may also help achieve several SDGs.

SDGs and LDC graduation
On the one hand, there are 169 targets under 17 SDGs that consider the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainability. On the other hand, there are three LDC graduation criteria. GNI per capita points to a country's income status and is widely referred to as the "income criterion"; the HAI measures the level of human development; and the EVI indicates a country's structural vulnerabilities to exogenous economic and environmental shocks. Sixty targets under 13 SDGs have clear potential linkages with GNI per capita.

Indicators under the HAI mainly measure human development, specifically health and education. In addition to direct connections between HAI indicators and SDG targets, HAI indicators can be connected with SDGs on poverty, hunger and social protection, which are basic needs that must be addressed in the human development process. A total of 17 targets under six SDGs have connections with the HAI that relates to health and education. While SDGs 3 (health) and 4 (education) have explicit indicators on human development, SDG 1 (poverty),

SDG 2 (hunger and nutrition), SDG 6 (access to safe water and sanitation), and SDG 10 (inequality) also have some linkages with the HAI. For example, SDG target 2.1, which refers to ending hunger and ensuring access to nutritious food, has a linkage with HAI indicator "percentage of population undernourished".

EVI indicators are mainly related to natural disaster, climate change, export concentration and instability, agricultural output and instability, population and remoteness. SDG target 2.3, which refers to doubling agricultural productivity, has linkages with the EVI indicators "share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in GDP" and "instability of agricultural

A number of SDGs, including SDG 6 (access to safe water and sanitation), have some linkages with the Human Assets Index which is one of the three criteria Bangladesh has passed to become eligible for graduation out of the LDC group.

PHOTO: ARIFUR RAHMAN

production". The income criterion also has linkages with SDG target 2.3. Though indicators under the EVI are not directly linked to the SDGs, but 31 targets under 12 SDGs are indirectly linked with the EVI. Thus, it is expected that implementation of these SDGs will support progress on the EVI as well.
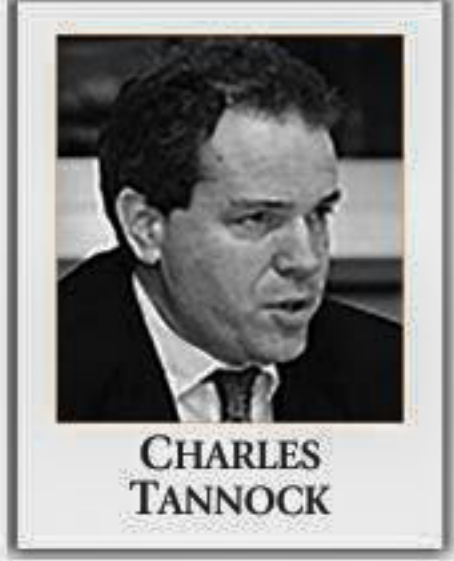
The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) outlined a number of policies that a country needs to pursue to graduate with momentum from the LDC category, with the justification being that graduation should be seen as a long-term development process rather than a narrow objective in a statistical sense. It

identified six broad areas for action and highlighted gender as a cross-cutting issue for continuing development beyond the graduation milestone: rural transformation; industrial policy; science, technology and innovation policy; development finance; macroeconomic policies; and employment generation. Commonalities between these seven areas and the SDGs are evident. A total of 50 SDG targets were found to be related with the seven key areas of UNCTAD's "graduation-plus" strategies for graduation with momentum.

SDGs and IPoA
A detailed matching exercise comparing the IPoA priority areas and SDGs indicates that all areas covered by the IPoA are also

included in the SDGs. While the SDG framework includes goals, targets and indicators, the IPoA has goals, targets and actions. The priority areas of the IPoA include: productive capacity; agriculture, food security and rural development; trade; commodities; human and social development; multiple crises and other emerging challenges; mobilising financial resources for development and capacity-building; and good governance at all levels. The actions for implementing the IPoA goals and targets are categorised into three groups: joint actions by LDCs and developed countries, actions by LDCs, and actions by development partners. Despite differences in terms of approach, coverage,

targets and indicators, both the IPoA and the SDGs have the common objective to eradicate poverty. Linkages between SDG targets and IPoA goals, targets and selected actions show that 83 SDG targets have connections with the IPoA.

SDGs and national policies
Six SDG targets match completely with national policies, 40 SDG targets match partially, 37 targets do not match directly with national policies but have some similarities in essence, and 21 SDG targets have no alignment with the 7FYP. However, 12 SDG targets of these 21 non-aligned SDG targets are reflected in some other sectoral policies. Another 26 SDG targets have to be pursued through

global initiatives.

Bangladesh has to pursue global and national objectives simultaneously due to various linkages among many of their indicators. While the achievement of a few objectives in one framework may help achieve some in another framework, equal efforts should be put into all global and national commitments. Bangladesh must also pay attention to the SDG targets that are not reflected in its national and sectoral policies for smooth transition after LDC graduation.

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The Brexit threat to British security

CHARLES TANNOCK

SOME moments in history are steeped in irony. To glimpse a current example, look no further than the United Kingdom. As the Brexit negotiations with the European Union approach a tipping point—this month's European Council meeting—the British government is seeking its scorned European partners' help in its dispute with Russia over the attempted murder of the former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, England.

But even before the brazen attack on the Skripals—targeted with the Soviet-designed nerve agent Novichok—Prime Minister Theresa May had become more forthright in highlighting the values and interests shared by the UK and the EU, including with regard to security and defence. Indeed, at last month's Munich Security Conference, she proposed a "deep and special partnership" on such matters.

In May's preferred scenario, the UK would continue to participate fully in EU agencies like EUROPOL, while upholding European Arrest Warrants (EAWs). Moreover, the UK would maintain its involvement in existing and future EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, and coordinate with the EU on sanction regimes under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

The attack on the Skripals has surely reinforced May's interest in ensuring strong security cooperation after Brexit. The kind of external threat that the attack represented is best addressed through cooperation with allies. But can the UK's allies take May seriously?

Those "who threaten our security," she said in Munich, "would like nothing more

than to see us fractured...and to see us put debates about mechanisms and means ahead of doing what is most practical and effective in keeping our people safe." Then, after reiterating that the UK had made a legitimate and democratic decision to leave the EU, she concluded that the ball is the EU's court. Not to accept her generous offer of close security cooperation would, in her words, amount to putting "political doctrine and ideology" first.

The irony of May's stance has not been lost on the 27 EU states that the UK is leaving behind. After all, by casting doubt on the unity of Europe—and, indeed, the entire West—Brexit itself is causing serious

British Prime Minister Theresa May at the EU summit in Brussels, Belgium, 2017.

PHOTO: REUTERS

damage to European security, all for the sake of political doctrine and ideology.

To be sure, hard-line Brexiteers like Trade Minister Liam Fox claim that the only external relationship the UK needs to buttress its security is NATO, led by the United States. Yet while NATO will obviously remain the paramount source of security for all of Europe, no one should be willing to entrust its security to US President Donald Trump, who

seems to have more contempt for allies than for adversaries like Russia's Vladimir Putin. As the intelligence chiefs of Britain, France, and Germany warned in a little-noticed joint statement released in Munich, any breakdown in security cooperation between the UK and the EU will have dire consequences.

But May cannot expect to maintain the UK's current level of security cooperation with the EU, especially in the context of the otherwise "hard" Brexit she envisages. When the UK departs from the EU, it will lose its right to shape the institutional frameworks that have long buttressed its security. This leaves May with two choices:

either she can leave those frameworks behind—a highly risky move—or she can accept, at least for the most part, the EU's terms.

For example, the legal framework for security-related data must also cover commercial data. If the UK can tolerate giving jurisdiction in this area to a European high court, as May's Munich speech seems to suggest, why not in other areas? The European Court of Justice has

an impeccable reputation as an independent judicial body—one that has fairly defended the UK's own interests many times.

Such an approach would generate significant goodwill in the negotiations. This, together with the UK's considerable security-related assets and expertise, would create space for the country to carve out unique concessions from the EU, such as full-time observer status in the EU's influential Political and Security Committee.

Whether or not such forms of cooperation—essential to ensuring security in both the UK and the EU—are realised, however, is far from certain. Though May now seems to hold a more realistic view of the security risks Brexit poses, others in her party remain obstinate.

For example, Owen Paterson, a former Conservative cabinet minister, recently suggested doing away with the Good Friday Agreement, which has delivered two decades of peace to Northern Ireland—a highly reckless statement, given the political sensitivities that the Brexit vote triggered in Ireland. Other Brexiteers, like Environment Minister Michael Gove, are also long-time sceptics of the Good Friday accords. This suggests that, in the eyes of Brexit ideologues, security must take a back seat to their nationalist dreams.

Perhaps the recent attack on a former Russian agent in a quiet English country town will be enough to remove the ideological blinders from more Brexiteers, showing them that a "Britain alone" is a "Britain vulnerable." But it is also possible that by the time the UK's citizens and leaders see Brexit from their allies' perspective—as a selfish and destructive act of betrayal—it will be too late.

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