

## OIC countries must keep up pressure on Myanmar

Advocate repatriation with full citizenship rights

**W**E cannot emphasise enough the need to heed the call of our Prime Minister for OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) members, currently meeting in Dhaka, to exert united efforts to bring about a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis. There is no question that the Rohingyas must be able to return to their homeland. But repatriation must come along with the guarantee of their full rights of citizenship and security of their lives.

It has been stated from the Myanmar side that the returnees must live in areas allotted by the government. This goes completely against the principles of proper repatriation; the Rohingya refugees must be able to return to their own villages and homes where they originally lived. Such a statement suggests ghettoization of these refugees who will be penned in without any rights or privileges. This is completely unacceptable and contradicts all the conditions stipulated by Bangladesh in the repatriation agreement with Myanmar and also by the UN.

We are reassured by the OIC's promise to remain united in defending the rights of Rohingyas and its resolve to stand by Bangladesh, a member of the OIC. It is also encouraging that Canada's foreign minister attending the OIC conference has expressed her country's support for Bangladesh in helping to meet the needs of the Rohingya refugees. As the PM has pointed out at her meeting with the Canadian foreign minister, the coming monsoons and cyclones make it all the more urgent that the Rohingya crisis is resolved as many of these refugees are vulnerable to possible landslides.

The OIC with its 57 members wield sufficient clout to exert pressure on Myanmar to comply with the conditions of repatriation.

## Flourishing yaba trade

Fight requires multinational approach

**A**CCORDING to a news report in this paper on May 6, law enforcers arrested a physician in possession of yaba pills, who is a post-graduate student and enrolled in BCS. Recent reports tell us that educated people have joined a growing army of dealers who trade in this illicit drug that has seen a phenomenal rise in usage over the years. Indeed, we find that over the course of a decade, yaba shipment hauls by law enforcers jumped from 36,543 pills in 2008 to nearly 29.5 million pills in 2018. We are looking at a transnational trade in pseudoephedrine and ephedrine which are produced commercially in India and China, some of which are then diverted to factories in Myanmar by drug cartels. The finished product finds itself rerouted through Bangladesh using the new route Teknaf-Kuakata-Barisal-Dhaka.

The problem related to yaba production and distribution is an international one. It is not merely about pressing upon any one country to take more concrete steps to stop the 50 or so factories on their side of the border. It requires political will right across the South Asian belt to set up a coordinating agency that will include all the narcotics departments in different countries. A fight against this cheap but hugely addictive and damaging drug also requires strengthening of monitoring as regards our own pharmaceutical industry, which could also be a source for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. Unless something is done to combat the trade in this illicit drug, we will be putting millions, particularly the youth, at risk.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Protect the Sundarbans from polluting factories

Reportedly, there are 190 factories built within 10km of the Sundarbans. Of them, 24 are considered highly dangerous for the environment.

The flora and fauna of the world's largest mangrove forest is under threat because of the presence of these factories. As the oxygen level in the water has reduced significantly, the number of aquatic creatures is also on the decline. Thus, the ecosystem of the Sundarbans too is in danger.

We urge the government to evict polluting factories and ensure that no such factories are built near the forest in future.

Zabed Wali, By e-mail

### Make healthcare affordable for all

I do not know exactly how many countries in the world allow doctors who work for public hospitals to have their private practices. In Bangladesh, there are currently no laws that prohibit this. As private practice is more lucrative, many doctors ignore their responsibilities at public hospitals.

What is frustrating is that they charge patients exorbitant fees at their private clinics. People from lower income groups cannot afford to pay such fees. The government can introduce laws limiting specialist doctors from charging such high fees.

Pushpan Chowdhury, Chittagong

# Time to let the youth shine

### OPEN SKY



BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

**H**AD Shakespeare been alive and the opportunity to visit Bangladesh, he would have withdrawn his poem, "Crabbed Age and Youth." Instead, seeing Bangladesh's politicians, he would have written a new poem, "Shining Age and Subdued Youth." Rabindranath too would disown his poem, "Expedition of the Youth (Taruner Abhijan)." Bangladesh has entered a new era where too many senior citizens are everywhere—in power, politics, in all professions, policymaking and what not! Without being a developed country, Bangladesh, as far as politics is concerned, now looks like Japan—a country with a rapidly aging population. This severely impedes the growth of a new-generation of leaders.

Young people bring innovative and modern ideas but this is not being made use of in our major parties where seniors are engaged in every policymaking decision. The present government now incorporates a few young ministers, but they are state ministers—controlled by older ministers in all portfolios and, hence, enjoy very little liberty to do anything innovative on their own authority. We have forgotten that young leaders have more ideas and greater energy to bring changes to the landscape of the economy.

Bangabandhu and Gandhi—the two great leaders of this continent—ventured brave philosophies when they were young. And so did Martin Luther King Jr in America. John F Kennedy dreamed of landing on the moon, and another young president, Barack Obama, rescued the world's leading economy from a financial tsunami. Their young age, innovative thinking and unflinching determination, coupled with boundless energy, made their dreams come true, vindicating again that age matters. *Time* magazine recently announced the 100 most influential people of the year where our PM's name was included. The editor, however, didn't forget to mention that 45 people out of the 100 were under the age of 40. If we make a similar list for



Bangladesh, at least 80 percent of the people will be more than 60 years old. We need to revert this trend to make our society more dynamic.

We live in a country where politicians almost daily brag about the "demographic dividend", but we see no reflection of that when it comes to nominations or institutional leadership. The median age of population in both Bangladesh and India are almost the same—28 years—but the average age of Indian MPs is 55, whereas it is close to 70 in Bangladesh, ridiculously higher than the global average age of 53. A 2012 UNDP report showed that only 28 percent of MPs in the world are 60 years old or more, but in Bangladesh it is more than 60 percent, warranting a reform in MP nominations by the major parties.

Life expectancy in Japan is around 20 years more than that in Bangladesh, but the average age of our MPs is about 15 years more than Japan's. In 2015, the British parliament saw more MPs in their 30s or 40s. Bangladesh seems to face a serious vacuum in leadership. Our youth have long been held back from holding responsible positions, fairly tactfully.

Public universities have ominously stopped forming elected student bodies

and that vacuum has spawned the growth of *mastans* and given rise to the unhealthy "tender business". We have forgotten our history. There was a time when we had great leaders, including Bangabandhu, who were the products of public universities and who had the guts to fight for change due to their youth and vigour. The current AL secretary was a known student leader in the 1980s. Do we know any young leaders of that stature right now?

Top leaders in a party are expected to be old. That's not a problem as long as they are young in spirit and farsighted in their planning. That was the case with the great Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, who was at the heart of defining the China that we see today. Our Prime Minister has demonstrated enormous energy in building a modern Bangladesh. But are we courageous enough to bring about the necessary changes for inclusive growth that would ensure faster employment? Aren't we killing the competitive spirit of our young generation? What have we left for them to do? Have we left them with enough jobs or leadership positions?

Young people are needed to spur

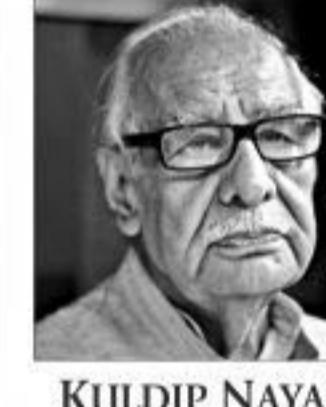
business. While India moved up 30 steps in the "doing business index"—from 130 to 100—in a short time, we have been lurking in the range of the 170th position for years. It is not because we lack the ability, but because our demographic potentials have been bottled and suppressed. We need young change-makers to transform Bangladesh.

We need young game-changers particularly in the financial industry, which must go through massive transformations that are sure to displease many influential quarters. The fact that the United Kingdom didn't hesitate to hire a young Canadian economist, Mark Carney, to run its central bank, shows how desperate a regime can be to infuse new blood into it. The same was true for India when it hired Raghuram Rajan at RBI (now a possible candidate to head the Bank of England). Young policymakers have the energy and brain to bring the radical changes that our economy needs the most right now. And it is time to let them shine, not their grandparents.

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## India-China relations on the mend

### BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

**I**NDIA's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru proudly supported Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-Lai. He had emerged after defeating the First Front Army commander, Chiang Kai-shek. The Chinese premier had supported India's movement for independence when British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said that India's independence was not

dependent on the victory of the Allies in the Second World War, which was a foregone conclusion when America declared support to Britain and such other democratic forces.

Still Nehru was able to get the backing of the Congress. It made the declaration even though Mahatma Gandhi believed that Adolf Hitler, leading the fascist forces, would emerge victorious. That Chou En-Lai betrayed Nehru by launching the attack in 1962 was a severe blow that Nehru could not survive.

After that, the non-aligned countries together amended the Colombo proposals and partially

actual border line. Nehru said that he had asked the Indian army to oust the infiltrators and clear its territory. Since then the relations between the two had been more or less hostile. Some time ago, India showed its muscles with the standoff at Doklam. China had to withdraw its forces behind the present border. Prime Minister Modi's trip last September for BRICS did reduce the tension.

The positive side of Modi's trip then was the reiteration by the two countries to fight against terrorists. But here, too, Beijing elucidated its own theory. Yet, the friendship of China and Pakistan is only getting stronger to the concern of New Delhi. Not long ago, Beijing had begun stapling visas of Indians visiting China from Arunachal. China wanted to indicate that it was a "separate territory" and not part of India.

New Delhi has borne the humiliation quietly. China had accepted without demur the maps showing Arunachal Pradesh as India's territory. To recall the dispute over a small territory lying between Arunachal and China's border, the status of Arunachal Pradesh has been seldom questioned. Tibet for China is like India's Kashmir which, too, has raised the standard of independence. There is, however, one difference: the



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping sit as they take a boat ride on the East Lake in Wuhan, China, on April 28, 2018.

PHOTO: REUTERS

retrieved Nehru's prestige. The proposals recognised the new border where China had delineated through its forces. New Delhi showed annoyance by calling back its ambassador in Beijing. Relations between the two countries had remained sour since.

It appears Prime Minister Narendra Modi has accepted the China-dictated border. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) can argue that it has accepted what was de jure. What is hailed as a historic moment is abject surrender to Beijing. It is practically a defeat. Had the Congress Party done so, it would have been paraded as a force that had sold India.

Modi, with his flowery speeches in Hindi, may go down well with the people who cannot understand the intricacies of the border problem. But surprisingly, the party has the support from the Nagpur headquarters from where the RSS high command operates.

China and India have seldom agreed on where the

Dalai Lama is willing to accept an autonomous status within China. Kashmir today wants independence. Maybe, the Kashmiris will come round to accept a similar status one day. The problem is so complicated that a minor change can lead to a major catastrophe. It is not worth risking.

The Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh last year had brought back the memories of the days before the Chinese annexed Tibet. Nehru did not raise any objection at that time because he was on personal terms with Chinese Premier Chou En-Lai.

The Dalai Lama's visit did not raise doubts about Tibet but it renewed the debate of its annexation by Beijing once again. China called his visit a "provocation." It had warned India that the Dalai Lama's visit would affect the normal relations between the two countries. Indeed, tensions intensified with Doklam. Yet, India managed to hold its own.

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In fact, China's problems with India have roots in the British demarcation of the India-China border. China refuses to acknowledge the McMahon Line that demarcates Arunachal Pradesh to be a part of India. Any activity that takes place in this area is viewed by China sceptically.

Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's visit to the "disputed" territory despite Chinese protest showed that New Delhi was prepared for hostilities if it came to that pass. Then the Indian soldiers did not have shoes for a mountain combat. India is now a power to reckon with.

It looks as if China would go on provoking India to exhaust its patience. When war is ruled out, this is the only option China has. How to retaliate, without resorting to hostilities, is the situation India faces.

Beijing is trying to revive the India-China *Bhai Bhai* scenario. Days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first visit to China after the Doklam standoff between the two countries, a statement issued by the Chinese foreign ministry said that both sides possessed the "maturity and wisdom" to handle their differences through peaceful discussion and by respecting each other's "concerns and aspirations."

They also agreed to use the Special Representatives' Meeting on the boundary question to seek a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement. The two militaries will strengthen confidence-building measures and enhance communication and cooperation to uphold border peace and tranquillity, said the statement.

Meanwhile, China and India have agreed to build a high-level cultural and people-to-people exchange mechanism between the two nations. The informal summit meeting between Prime Minister Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping also stressed on the need to strengthen the China-India Closer Developmental Partnership so that the two will always keep to the right direction.

The latest move is aimed at further strengthening the bilateral ties between the two nations. On the last leg of his two-day visit, the Indian prime minister and the Chinese president walked along a sidewalk on the shores of the Wuhan's East Lake and later sailed in the same boat for "peace, prosperity and development" in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. This augurs well.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.