

## Myanmar must grant Rohingyas citizenship

Int'l community needs to take substantive action

UN Secretary-General António Guterres' visit to the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh and subsequent statements reaffirm the need to address the fundamental issue at the heart of the Rohingya crisis—that is citizenship. Myanmar has not even begun the repatriation process despite signing a bilateral deal with Bangladesh in November last year.

The secretary-general has also reiterated what we have been saying all along: the need for the international community to unite and take a strong stance against Myanmar's state-sponsored campaign of denying an ethnic minority, who have been rendered stateless at the stroke of a pen, their basic rights.

But calls for international pressure so far have only had an effect insofar as UN agencies' access to Rakhine State is concerned as a tripartite MoU between Myanmar, UNHCR and UNDP has been reached—that too almost a year after the latest round of influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh. But the international community at large has not stepped up to press home the case of Rohingyas' citizenship as Myanmar is yet to amend its discriminatory 1982 Citizenship Law.

We would like to emphasise that any solution to paving the way for the recognition of the rights of an entire people must not be bogged down by semantics. We cannot allow Myanmar to use one pretext after another to prolong the repatriation process and bury the issue of Rohingya citizenship under manufactured issues. Bangladesh, despite being resource-constrained, has been doing its part to provide shelter, food and aid to Rohingya refugees. And it's time that the international community and world leaders realised that it is due to the lack of any substantive international action that has allowed Myanmar to enjoy impunity for so long.

## Address issues concerning quota system

Review committee has to act judiciously

We are puzzled that a committee has now been formed to "review or reform or cancel" the quota system for the civil service, come as it does after the prime minister had already announced in parliament on April 11 that quotas in public service recruitment will be abolished and later, on June 26, that a committee led by the cabinet secretary was working to resolve the matter.

Now that a committee has been formed, however, we would like to point out that the committee must go into the heart of the basic issues, principally as it concerns the character that our public service sector would take. And though it is acceptable to have quotas where special dispensation is made for disadvantaged groups to balance out any existing lop-sidedness, what is also important, simultaneously, is to not go overboard and not overlook the importance of merit. Because, in order to do justice to citizens by providing them with the best government services, it again is necessary to base public service recruitment predominantly on merit, which is not the case in the current system. For example, 56 percent of public service positions are reserved based on one criterion or another, reducing merit-based recruitment to 44 percent.

Meanwhile, the authorities need to rein in BCL men who have gone beyond all acceptable limits in terrorising peaceful student protesters, simply for exercising the most basic rights that are guaranteed to citizens in any democracy.

We are hopeful that the government will recognise the grievances of students, especially after the prime minister's assurance. But what we also hope is that the government will involve reform protestors to take in their sentiment and to resolve the matter as early as possible.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Saving female migrant workers

It was devastating to learn the extent of mental torture that our female migrant workers have to endure. They go to Middle Eastern countries, mainly Saudi Arabia, to improve their lives. Instead, many of them have had to come back, having been subjected to humiliation, physical and verbal abuse as well as torture.

In the last three years, nearly 5,000 female workers returned from Saudi Arabia.

What is most shocking to me is that returnees are sometimes rejected by their families due to social stigma. The government should take the matter seriously. It should stop sending women workers to vulnerable and exploitative places. Those who return should also be helped more by the government.

Mohammad Zonaeed Emran, By e-mail

Will the "VIP" culture stop?

Ahrar Ahmed deserves our appreciation for drawing the attention of the readers of *The Daily Star* to the exceptional courage shown by a police officer in stopping a flag-carrying car on a busy Dhaka road. The officer has indeed done a wonderful job. But I'm afraid I must say that I find it difficult to share his optimism that many officers will dare demonstrate similar courage because they may fear reprisal or repercussions.

M Mufakharul Islam, Dhaka University

# The paradoxes of progress

### KNOT SO TRUE



RUBANA HUQ

HUMANITY is supposed to have progressed. A Harvard University professor, Steven Pinker, argues in favour of it in his new book *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress*. On maximum standards of well-being, we are apparently faring way better than we did ever before. Yet, he shares his disappointment over people like us who have difficulty appreciating and understanding the strides the human race has made so far. Pinker almost risks sounding like Pollyanna, the orphan of Beldingsville, who is happily playing The Glad Game forever, feeling pleasure in pain, suppressing disappointment with optimism that, in reality, has no tomorrow.

Is the world better today?

True, in 1986, we had 65,000 nuclear warheads, whereas we have only 10,000 today. In almost 75 measurable standards, we are now told that there have been improvements in many areas including life expectancy, declining child and maternal mortality, etc. Today we have increased calorie consumption, declining famines, increasing per capita income, reduced poverty rate, decreasing pollution and an acceptable level of democracy and human rights. It's also reported that people today opt more for leisure and achieve more as well. Wars and genocides are supposed to be relatively less catastrophic when compared to the nine-times-deadlier tribal warfare of ancient times. Apparently, the medieval Europe had 30 times higher rate of murder than today. Today, slavery (in traditional terms) has vanished; executions are unacceptable and wars between countries kill fewer people than what they did a few decades

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ago. Rapes and riots are also down. Apparently.

But the circus of audacity is far from over. In spite of all the "progress" humanity has achieved, we have dangerous lunatics living amongst us, who threaten the core of conscience. Two days ago, America's National Rifle Association released a video threatening journalists. It warned "every lying member of the media" as TV host Dana Loesch appears in the video, dressed in black, complete with an hourglass by her side, cautioning the "media" and

"Hollywood phony" against their use of free speech, which "alter and undermine" what the US flag represents. The video also warns them about time running out for them. This was shared by NRATV, who define themselves as "America's Most Patriotic Team On A Mission To Take Back The Truth." If this be the case, then is falsehood actually being crafted as truth? Have we all started to play The Glad Game just like the little fictional Pollyanna?

Is the world becoming delusional by the minute?

Currently, different parts of the globe look very similar. A 'New Turkey' apparently emerged on June 24 this year. Erdogan combined a sense of Islamic

Apparently, he is irresistible.

At this pace, one can't help but wonder if the deadliest are the most passionate and if the world is giving in to the frenzy of cruelty, and if there have been serious reversals in humanity. Post August 2017, the Myanmar military attacked Rohingya villages, killed and raped women, tortured men, destroyed homes, shops, and mosques. Amnesty International's latest report labels these atrocities as crimes against humanity under international law. It has also named 13 individuals who commanded these crimes to take place. The 186-page report details almost every crime backing it up with evidence. It also shares how women and girls were raped during or

economic zones in Thilawa, Dawei and Kyaukpadaung. Added to their optimism is the new gain that comes from the right of passage of gas and oil between their extraction sites and China, which will yield USD 13 million annually. The government hopes to reduce the 40 percent budget deficit to 20 percent in 2018. Exports are expected to increase, especially to its largest trading partner, China, reinforced by the construction of the gas pipeline. FDI inflows are supposed to grow stronger as investors are secure and assured of a predictable investment environment. Who cares about their poor ranking in the World Bank's Doing Business index, where they are at 170 out of 190? Rankings don't matter much



Rohingya refugees fleeing into Bangladesh from Myanmar in October 2017.

PHOTO: REUTERS

nationalism with Ottoman longings and a tinge of Kemal Ataturk nostalgia to win the election. Yet he nullified the parliamentary system, which was established by Ataturk, and replaced it with a presidential one. In 2017, Erdogan won a referendum by a slim majority and put in place a few new changes, and with the last election, he now has full control of the executive with the authority to issue decrees, appoint his cabinet, dissolve parliament and indulge in political appointments. After his latest victory, he can now freely hound opponents, just like he did in 2016 when thousands were put in prisons. He can also stifle media or manipulate news content to his pleasure or fancy.

Another political lunatic that one could always pick on is Rodrigo Duterte, the president of the Philippines. His anecdotes are ruthless and distasteful. His on-stage performances routinely make headlines. Duterte loves the attention and the spotlight and can't live without it. His controversial anti-drugs campaign has attracted international criticism to which he remains indifferent. His voters give him the courage to be audacious. Seventy percent of his constituency support him, while the members of his congress can't help voting to extend the state of emergency.

immediately after a military attack, in their own village, in empty houses, fields, schools, and, in one case, even in a mosque. They were also raped in their own homes. And also, when they were fleeing to Bangladesh. Amnesty makes several suggestions including one to the UN Security Council to immediately refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC), so that the crimes can be investigated under the Rome Statute. It also asks the EU and the ASEAN to impose targeted financial sanctions on Myanmar. And then it even asks Bangladesh to allow free entry to Rohingyas, to apply the principles of non-refoulement, and amongst other suggestions, to prioritise post-trauma care through funding and programmes.

Unfortunately, the report doesn't change anything much for Myanmar. In this current world of paradoxes, in spite of them saying "We Will Destroy Everything," Myanmar still is likely to prosper. After all, all is apparently fair in business and love.

Myanmar's plans are all intact. Out of the 15.6 percent of GDP accounting for public expenditure, out of which 31 percent is spent for the military, their social and educational spending remains at a high level. The state is investing heavily in the construction of new

anymore as with the EU sanctions gone, Myanmar happens to have a total trade figure of 2.09 billion euros in 2017 with EU, its sixth biggest trading partner, out of which 72 percent of its export to EU happens to be garments.

One just wonders if humanity today is all about trade gains and if progress is to be measured in numbers associated with monstrous market practices that uphold the brutal principles based on annihilation of ethics. One, however, also wonders why the world applied different lenses after the collapse of Rana Plaza and threatened to disengage with Bangladesh while it still continues to woo Myanmar? One wonders which bears the bigger mark of shame: Rana Plaza, following which Bangladesh paid a collective price for this national tragedy and remediated, or the atrocities against Rohingya Muslims, which continue to go unchecked and unpunished by the international communities that reap profits out of pain?

Can we expect trade embargoes to hit Myanmar or can we at least expect substantial trade gains from our trading partners? Is this really too much to ask for in exchange for us opening our doors to a persecuted community? Really?

Rubana Huq is the managing director of Mohammadi Group.

# Answering the Talanoa Dialogue questions

### POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

AT the 23rd Conference of Parties (COP23) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held last December under the presidency of the prime minister of Fiji, a new feature called the Talanoa Dialogue was introduced. Talanoa Dialogue is a traditional form of decision-making in the Pacific which is very different from the negotiations that usually take place in the UNFCCC.

Firstly, it involves discussion from all concerned parties and not just from designated officials. Secondly, it involves rounds of discussions to reach a consensus, rather than the adversarial negotiations that take place in the UNFCCC. Finally, it is open-ended with time being allowed to reach a genuine consensus instead of forcing a decision within a set time.

As a result, instead of closing the discussion at the end of the two weeks of the COP, the prime minister of Fiji—who remains the COP president until he hands over the responsibility to the president of Poland at the beginning of COP24, to be held in Katowice, Poland next December—has kept the discussion open for the



Although we are headed in the right direction in terms of tackling climate change, we are not moving fast enough.

PHOTO: REUTERS

intervening 12 months and has invited all interested groups, and even individuals, to answer the following three Talanoa Dialogue questions:

Where are we now? Where do we need to be? How do we get there?

He has solicited answers to these questions from around the world and has promised to synthesise and present them to the incoming Polish Presidency for COP24 in December.

In the spirit of the Talanoa Dialogue, I would like to share my own answers to the three questions below. I would like

to do so from the perspective of both a citizen of Bangladesh and a citizen of the world.

My answer to the first question of "where are we now?" is quite positive, for both Bangladesh as well as the world. I say this in relation to where we were a few years ago. In the case of Bangladesh, we have now recognised the magnitude of the climate change problem for the country and are rapidly taking steps to enhance our adaptive capacity to deal with the adverse impacts of climate change that are likely

to occur in the future. To be prepared for adversity is more than winning half the battle.

Similarly, at the global level, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change agreed at COP21 in 2015 has achieved a global consensus on what needs to be done (despite Trump's withdrawal).

However, I do want to acknowledge a caveat to my sense of optimism, namely that much more needs to be done.

Hence my answer to the second question, "where do we want to be?", is that we need to become climate-resilient and reach zero emissions as soon as possible both at Bangladesh and global levels. I must acknowledge here that although we are headed in the right direction, we are not moving fast enough.

This leads me to my answer to the third question, "how do we get to where we need to be?" I believe we need to redouble our efforts and pledges as well as accelerate them as fast as we can.

To sum up my answers, I feel that both Bangladesh and the world at large have finally decided to take the right actions to get to zero emissions and climate resilience. However, we are still very far from where we need to be, and hence we must raise our ambition as well as speed of action considerably.

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