

Use of funds by INGOs working for Rohingyas

Reduce the inordinately high operational cost

WHEN as much as 80 percent of total donations for the Rohingyas is spent on operations by international NGOs (INGOs), one wonders what is left for those that the bulk of the money is meant for. Reportedly, this finding is fairly representative of many of the INGOs operating in Cox's Bazar. It is surprising that in some cases the operational cost of INGOs in Cox's Bazar was five times higher than what was laid out in the programme requirement. These findings, in a study recently released by the Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust, are problematic on many counts.

Firstly, given that there is always a resource crunch for the refugees, should the INGOs be spending such huge amounts of money meant for helpless Rohingyas stranded in a foreign land? Secondly, many INGOs seem to have overlooked the need to ensure aid transparency and incorporate local actors in the humanitarian response system to reduce costs which is contrary to their commitment to the Charter 4 Change (C4C) and Grand Bargain (GB).

We greatly appreciate the prompt response of the INGOs to the grave humanitarian situation faced by the Rohingya refugees. Their timely intervention has helped to ameliorate the plight of the refugees to a large extent. But we feel that there must be rational allocation to run the operations so that the bulk of the money can be used for those it is meant for.

The stakeholders may look into this matter and consider alternative ways of disbursing funds. One way could be giving funds directly to local NGOs which would help reduce transaction costs. An independent monitoring body should also be formed to oversee the expenditures of both local NGOs and INGOs.

Speedy trial of rape cases brooks no delay

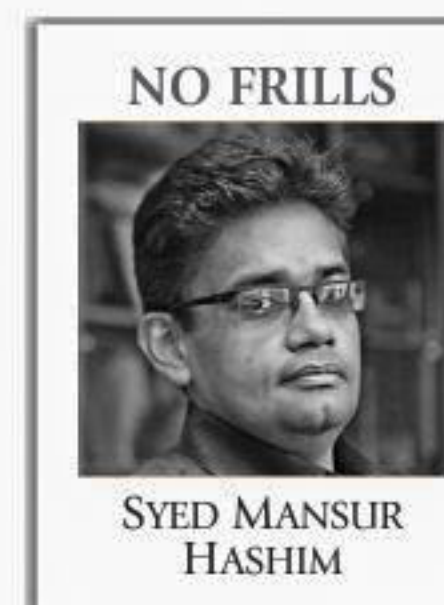
Ending sexual violence will be a far cry otherwise

AFTER the rape of two university students at a hotel in Banani in March last year, the outcry for justice was tremendous. The prime accused was arrested soon after. Given the attention the incident received from the public and the media, we saw tremendous activity on the part of law enforcement in investigating the case. Yet, one-and-a-half years into the case, there has been no sentence yet. This is especially worrying given that the trial process of these cases was supposed to be wrapped up within 180 days of filing the case.

We have maintained consistently that such delays in investigation and trial of rape and sexual violence cases effectively mean that justice is denied to victims. The reality of rape cases in Bangladesh is that victims fight an uphill battle at every step. A culture of victim blaming, lack of awareness about consent, and the medical and legal environment all contribute to keeping women silent. And when they do speak up, the character of the woman is brought to question in court.

In this context, the commitment by the state for speedy trial of cases filed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act is crucial. Yet, we continue to see numerous instances where the trials are not finished within 180 days. If we are to be truly committed to ending sexual violence, and ensuring that women not only get justice but have the scope of asking for it, the state must set examples by finishing the trial in time. Otherwise the delay will be exploited by the accused to their advantage.

China's march towards electric vehicles



NO FRILLS

SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THE world is still playing catch up with China when it comes to electric vehicles (EVs). According to the *Forbes* magazine, Chinese manufacturers produced and sold

770,000 EVs in 2017, which is a jump of about 53 percent over 2016. This phenomenal growth has been made possible by a very hefty and generous subsidy policy coupled with manufacturing incentives to EV companies and most importantly, subsidies to consumers who buy EVs. And it is not just passenger vehicles we are talking about here. *Forbes* reported in 2018 that "while electric bus sales in China were slightly lower last year as a result of cuts in electric bus subsidy program, 99% of the 352,000 electric buses on the road globally are running on China's streets and roads. There are now over 30 companies making electric buses in China."

Besides providing subsidies, the Chinese government has introduced policies like guaranteed vehicle license which is a major issue because Chinese metropolises like Beijing have put caps on the number of vehicle licenses (for regular petrol/diesel run vehicles) to just 3,000 annually and the rest of the applications go into a lottery pool. With three million vehicle license applications going into a lottery system, people may need to wait years for a license. People buying EVs are exempted from this system altogether. The average subsidy provided by the government is about USD 10,000 per vehicle and China's central and local governments dished out USD 7.7billion in EV subsidies in 2017.

Pollution is China's greatest headache and the smog in big cities is creating major public health issues. But obviously subsidies of such magnitude cannot continue forever and Chinese policymakers are introducing legislation in 2019 to force better fuel efficiency. Under these new rules, auto manufacturers will have to have engines with an average fuel economy of 42 miles per gallon (mpg) by 2020 and 54.5mpg by 2025. Those car manufacturers which fail to meet these standards will acquire negative credits, which if they reach critical numbers have to be offset by buying positive credits from other companies (a major drain on revenue) or cut



SOURCE: WWW.FLEETCARMA.COM

Chinese manufacturers produced and sold 770,000 electric vehicles in 2017, which is a jump of about 53 percent over 2016.

the production of fuel-driven cars. While it is the intention of the government to phase out the generous subsidies on EVs, the policy thrust is to get EVs to have longer ranges and greater battery pack densities. This is where Chinese policymakers are forcing systemic changes in the auto industry.

To propel the EV automobile industry, China wants to become king of EV batteries. Today there are only a handful of battery suppliers. Among them are big names like Panasonic, Samsung, LG Chem and the Gigafactory jointly owned by Panasonic and Tesla, and finally BYD, a Chinese venture where Warren Buffet, the American billionaire has substantial investments. Now according to Bernstein (a Wall Street research firm), EVs will dominate as much as 40 percent of the global vehicle market in 20 years time. If global vehicle production remains roughly the same as today, 40 million out of 100 million vehicles produced will be EVs! Those are serious numbers. Research points to a scenario when the EV batteries will cost the same as a combustion engine in the two-decades-from-

now scenario, we are looking at a battery market worth USD 240 billion annually. China is most certain to lead in the investments needed to produce a large percentage of those batteries.

Already we are seeing the first of the mega-sized battery producing plants (Gigafactories) being established. Today, the manufacturing capacity has doubled over the last three years to 125GWh (gigawatt-hour), and as reported by *Forbes* in 2017, manufacturing capacity "is projected to double again to 250GWh by 2020. Even that will not be nearly enough. Total cell production capacity will need to increase tenfold from 2020 to 2037, the equivalent of adding 60 new Gigafactories, during that period." The original batteries were developed in Japan. Then came the South Koreans with further innovation and now, the innovation is being done in China. The large-scale adoption of EVs in China is propelling this phenomenal growth in battery technology and manufacturing base. Indeed, experts contend that China's global share is battery production is slated to rise above 70 percent by 2020.

China and more recently India, both countries having massive populations and very large conventional automobile industries are moving towards EVs on environmental grounds. It would be premature to expect Bangladesh to follow suit. However, Bangladesh does have companies that produce batteries, some of which have actually gone international. Our companies should seriously look into the prospect of attracting foreign investments to set up the sort of battery manufacturing plants being envisaged for the Chinese market. After all, if the projections are correct, we could be looking at 40 million EVs being sold yearly two decades down the line. There is no reason to believe that battery prices will not come down significantly when mass produced, especially on the scale being talked about here. The expertise for producing international standard batteries already exists in Bangladesh. Our manufacturers should start eyeing this segment now, as opposed to 20 years from now.

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Can religion decide Indian citizenship?

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

THE determination of the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to push through the controversial constitution amendment Bill in the coming winter session of parliament beginning on December 11, which would give citizenship to "persecuted" religious minorities in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan is creating fresh unrest in Assam and straining the alliance between the Bharatiya Janata Party and its ally Asom Gono Parishad (AGP).

The government has stepped up its efforts to evolve a political consensus on the Bill and convened two meetings of the 30-member Joint Parliamentary Committee that is studying the proposed legislation drawn up two years ago. The JPC, comprising 20 lawmakers of the BJP and its allies and the rest drawn from the opposition parties, met in New Delhi—on November 20 and 27—in a desperate bid to hammer out the elusive consensus on the Bill. The winter session of parliament could be the last chance for the BJP to table the JPC report and the Bill during the five-year tenure of the current parliament before the general elections.

The November 27 meeting of the JPC, headed by BJP lawmaker Rajendra Agarwal, was substantive and lasted for three hours but a consensus remained as elusive as ever. The meeting saw the opposition lawmakers moving clause-by-clause amendments with members of the

meeting on condition that he be not identified. A Congress member of the JPC said if all the proposed amendments come into force, then the Indian government has to nullify the Assam Accord of 1985 under which anyone entering the state illegally after March 24, 1971 should be declared foreigner and deported. Agarwal went on record to say that the suggestions and amendments put forward by the JPC members relating to the Bill on November 27 will be taken up at the Committee's next meeting. He made it clear that the amendments have to be passed by the committee through consensus but if that doesn't happen then voting may be resorted to.

The November 20 meeting of the JPC was stormy with strong protests from the opposition members on a host of procedural matters and various provisions of the Bill. Such was the ruckus in the meeting that there was no time for the foreign secretary, home secretary and law secretary, who were waiting to brief the members on different aspects of the Bill to the JPC members do to so. Ahead of the meeting, a delegation of the AGP, which is not a member of the JPC because the party does not have a member in parliament, had met Agarwal and reiterated its strident resistance to the Bill. Agarwal sought to mollify the AGP by saying that he will take notes from all 30 members of the JPC before finalising its report on the Bill. The Biju Janata Dal, which rules eastern state of Odisha, wants the exclusion

Bill. That was the first in a series of protests the NESO has decided to organise weeks running up to the winter session of parliament. One is planned in the capital cities of all the seven north eastern states on November 30 and another around December 11 in Delhi, in an indication of the groundswell of opposition to the Bill in the last two months. Assam had witnessed a state-wide 12-hour general strike called by 60 organisations in Assam on October 23 protesting the Bill. Besides the AASU, the Khasi Students' Union (KSU), Naga Students' Federation, Mizo Zirlai Pawl, Twipra (Tripura) Students' Federation, All Manipur Students' Union, Garo Students' Union and All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union were part of the NESO protest.

The JPC had visited Assam in May in both Bangla-speaking majority Barak valley and Ahom-dominant Brahmaputra valley areas of the state to elicit the views of a cross-section of people. Soon after the visit, the governments in Meghalaya and Mizoram adopted resolutions against the Bill. The BJP-led government in Assam has not taken any official stand so far but the AGP, which is part of the ruling coalition, has threatened to withdraw from the government if the Bill is passed.

The Bill has once again brought to the fore the identity politics prevalent in the north eastern states. This was summed up by Sinam Prakash, Secretary General of the NESO chapter of Manipur when he said "it's not just the issue of Assam but an issue of the entire Northeast—we are not the dumping ground for illegal immigrants. Our identities, languages and cultures have been threatened." The remark by Tripura Students Federation General Secretary Sunil Debbarma read: "Tripura is a state which was never ruled by the British but it is under the rule of 'illegal immigrants'," an apparent reference to the huge number of Bangla-speaking people who migrated to what is now geographically Tripura at different points in time. Similar was the refrain of Lambok S Mangar President of Khasi Student Union and Tobom Dai, head of All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union.

The BJP finds itself in a bind over the future course of the Bill. The party has vigorously supported the National Register of Citizens exercise in Assam to keep out "illegal migrants" but fears it may not go down well in areas of the state with majority of Bangla-speaking Hindu people. Hence, its attempt to push forward the Citizenship Bill in support of its Hindutva agenda in the coming parliamentary elections in India. The AGP, on the other hand, feels the NRC exercise will be diluted considerably by the Citizenship Bill. Secondly, the BJP is conscious of the possible implications of the Bill, if passed by parliament, in the run up to the parliamentary polls in Bangladesh. The thinking in a section of the BJP leadership is that the Bill's passage may not be helpful to the "friendly" Sheikh Hasina government and it is better to postpone its tabling till the last week of the winter session (in January) of parliament after the polls in Bangladesh.

Evidently, the cocktail of ethnic, linguistic and religious divides created by the NRC and the Citizenship Bill poses a major challenge for many Indian political parties with a pan-India outlook.

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Activists of All Assam Students Union take part in 'Gana Satyagraha' protest rally against the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016, in Guwahati.

PHOTO: PTI

Congress, the Trinamool Congress and CPI(M) questioning the very idea of the Bill saying India is a secular country and its citizenship should not be granted on the basis of religion as it is a constitutional issue.

One lawmaker opined that citizenship for Hindus from Bangladesh be taken out of the purview of the Bill, according to another member who attended the

of Bangladesh from the purview of the Bill, said its lawmaker Bhartruhari Mahtab, a JPC member.

Reflecting the anxiety over the Bill, protests had erupted in Guwahati, Assam, on November 19 with the North Eastern Students Organization (NESO), an umbrella organisation of students' outfits in the seven north eastern states, holding a street protest against the

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Give children the freedom to realise their dreams

In our society, parents have a tendency to impose their wishes and desires on their offspring. Parents often want their children to grow up and become doctors or engineers. But a child may have different aspirations. When parents impose their own expectations on their children, it does more harm than good. Such expectations kill the child's aspirations, dreams and creativity. It is particularly pertinent to those who want to study in the humanities or social sciences, because people in our society think anything other than the hard sciences is useless.

Parents should give their children the independence to decide what they want to be and choose their career path. Parents can of course guide their children but that should not translate into them imposing their decisions on their kids because this can lead to mental pressure and depression among children. Parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children are not pressurised when it comes to choosing a career—it is their life, and they should be free to decide their fate.

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