

Bangladesh and the fight to end torture



MIA SEPPÖ

ON June 26, the world commemorated the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture—an opportunity to uphold the dignity of life, access to justice, and freedom from torture, which is a right of all people, to be enjoyed without discrimination, regardless of their civil, cultural, economic, political or social position or status.

This International Day has deep and global roots, going back to the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), a global standard of customary international law, which recognises the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. It also states that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. These vital points are echoed in Bangladesh's constitution, which refers to the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice for all citizens. It guarantees the rights to life and personal liberty and provides safeguards in case of arrest and detention. Like the UDHR, the constitution stipulates that nobody shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Bangladesh and other countries have also committed themselves to guaranteeing the rule of law, good governance and effective institutions in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda and achieve its Sustainable Development Goals. Yet violations of human rights, abuse of power and impunity continue around the world and threaten the

achievement of sustainable development.

Torture, and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, can occur in many places. These violations are not limited to criminal custodial settings such as detention centres or prisons but can take place in schools, hospitals, institutions that care for children, or for persons with mental disabilities. Torture or ill-treatment may also take place in the public domain, for example during demonstrations where there is excessive use of force by the authorities.

Torture and ill-treatment can take many forms. Violence against women and girls, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions have been classified as torture, especially where impunity and lack of due diligence reign, and no systemic action is taken to prevent or redress such acts.

Bangladesh has been a state party to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) since 1998. The CAT's monitoring body, the Committee against Torture, will be reviewing Bangladesh for the first time, in Geneva from July 30-31. It is a welcome step that the government has just submitted its first state report, 19 years overdue.

Every state has a responsibility to take effective measures against human rights abuses. It is commendable that the government of Bangladesh supported a recommendation from the Universal Periodic Review 2018 to investigate serious human rights violations, including torture, extrajudicial killings and disappearances. The United Nations looks forward to action in this regard. More preventative measures should be taken to make sure that no further cases arise.

The United Nations also appreciates that Bangladesh enacted the Torture and Custodial



Santals, evicted from their land in Gaibandha, are seen at a makeshift camp in Joypur. The attack on the Santal community on November 6, 2016 resulted in at least three deaths, more than 50 people injured and around 2000 families displaced.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Death (Prevention) Act in 2013. However, very few cases have been filed, investigated or tried under this law. The media continue to report about people who have been victims of alleged excessive use of force, ill-treatment or torture at the hands of public authorities, or the latter's collusion or inaction when non-state actors are the perpetrators. There have been very few cases of compensation being awarded to victims. Intimidation and harassment have been alleged against individuals who have sought justice. There must be no reprisals, or else fear will prevent people from seeking redress.

National institutions have investigated and intervened in a few cases of alleged torture and ill-treatment. For example, violence against the Santal community on November 6, 2016 resulted in at least three deaths, more than 50 people injured and around 2000 families displaced. The attackers also ill-treated people, looted the community's homes and livestock and set fire to about 600 residences. Civil society and human rights activists raised serious concerns over inaction and alleged involvement of police in the unprecedented eviction drive. The National Human Rights Commission, together with the Parliamentary Caucus on indigenous people, conducted a fact-finding mission and found that the eviction was mishandled resulting in serious human rights violations, and recommended preventative measures and reparation. The matter is still *sub judice*.

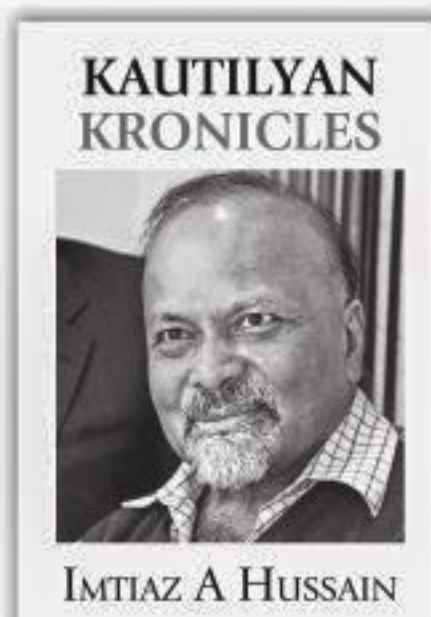
The upcoming review by the CAT will provide an opportunity for Bangladesh to showcase measures that it has taken or intends to take. This might include strictly enforcing existing policy and legal safeguards against torture, strengthening accountability of law enforcement agencies and other actors, capacity building and training, investigations of alleged perpetrators and bringing them to justice in fair trials, protection of witnesses and victims, making reliable data available to lawyers and policy makers, and information campaigns for the general public who may have limited awareness about their rights.

The United Nations Secretary General has urged all states "to end impunity for perpetrators and eradicate these reprehensible acts that defy our common humanity." The UN stands ready to work with Bangladesh to make this a reality for torture survivors and everyone else.

Mia Seppo is United Nations Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh.

Oscillating Anglo-American relations

When rolling stones keep on rolling



IMTIAZ A HUSSAIN

KAUTILYAN KRONICLES

As the cliché goes, gathens no moss. According to musician Robert Zimmerman, it is "like a complete unknown," indeed, "with no direction home." Under his more popular identity, Bob Dylan, he penned "Like a rolling stone," often regarded the crème de la crème song in its genre. It might also be the swansong of a fabled bilateral relationship. Gone awry, that relationship arguably symbolises the upended global status of two partners.

Anglo-American relations shed light on how Great Britain and the United States fare globally today. Although US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, described those relations as "the beating heart of the entire world" (on May 8, 2019, in London), little did he acknowledge how those relations had been headed south for quite a while, even worse, within two more months they would face a crossroads. Magnifying the transatlantic setting, we see many more crossroads awaiting both countries.

Reduced to its lowest common denominator, Anglo, bilateral relations have waxed and waned for other dynamics than ethnic identity. When political, those relations show more multilateral contours than otherwise, with military discourses (as, for example, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, from 1949), and policy trade-offs (as in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development). When economic, they revolve around one form of a liberal order or another, including its increasingly challenging form, intra-transatlantic competition. Yet, when cultural, discourses have rarely, if ever, articulated a Protestant work-ethic, a puritan platform of expectations, or even of a bilateral veto-power monopoly in multilateral negotiations. US vital interests throughout the 20th century, in fact, were anything but cultural. No matter, no "beating heart of the entire world" ever sat on the passenger seat.

Small wonder it was that British Ambassador to the US Sir Kim Darroch

shunned the high-ground of Anglo-American relations with his White House exasperation. His was not the first leaked complaint. Under President Bill Clinton, Robin Renwick (British ambassador 1991-95) described US foreign policy as "weak," and the policy-making environment "chaotic." Clinton's greater capacity to smoothen ruffled feathers papered the cracks better than Donald J Trump's pittance.

Trump's administration exposes a Republican distaste of transatlantic relations, even though Republicans want to monopolise

has a history. President George W Bush's Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, once distinguished between "old" and "new" Europe (literally "west" versus "east" Europe), promoting not only interest-driven calculations, as opposed to cultural, but also how malleable interests eclipse bedrock cultural counterparts. Though the cornerstone 1941 Atlantic Charter served as an Anglo-American highpoint, Winston Churchill was sidelined by Franklin D Roosevelt in the subsequent conferences with "Uncle Joe," that is, the "gulag" perpetrator, Joseph

fraternity than a cotton/tobacco thirst.

Special Anglo-American relations stemmed from late 19th-century diplomatic exchanges, when Britain's global leadership faced European resistance, and the United States, having consummated its own western expansion, spilled over, as it transpired, towards Asia. Today's US conservative revivalism is not to an Anglo-Saxon identity with transatlantic moorings but a US-specific Anglo-Saxon variation, just as today's transatlantic relations resemble those during the US independence war, with France the closest, Britain the farthest.

Frequent "transatlantic scorecards" (of the Brookings-Robert Bosch Foundation Transatlantic Initiative) reiterate that reality. The latest found overall US-European relations registering a paltry 3.9 (out of 10). France scored the highest, 4.6, Great Britain 3.5, with Germany and Turkey 3.3 (and Russia's 2.9 being the basement). France apart, all scores were below the collective European Union's 3.7. Of all types of relations, *military* got the most favourable rating, with 4.4, while *economic* notched up 3.8 and *political* 3.6. Aligning *culture* with the *military* or *economic* in that stream distorts the entire story: politics becomes more than *politics* with *cultural* usurpation (ostensibly to preserve some threatened status quo).

Trump is clearly not the source of this slide, but his impact may serve as the dividing line between a healthy ("special") and an evaporating transatlantic relationship. Evaporation may not be an idle term: at the broader level it syncs with a United States losing global clout, at the narrower, identities getting fudged. Dylan's lyrics echo again: "like a complete unknown," the United States sought many a means to make itself relevant and necessary in a new 20th-century playground, the international domain; but the thinning audience, which can only go so far as a follower, left the United States "with no direction home."

Home is where the changes matter most for pecking the global order. Here the United States has changed the most: Anglo-Saxons have diminished, as a population proportion, from just over 25 percent in 1980 to below 9 percent in 2000. Increasingly, more people of a global

origin demand attention today: Africans (15 percent), Asians (6 percent), and Hispanics (18 percent), among others.

"Like a rolling stone," the United States does not face this predicament alone: Great Britain is also building walls, if Brexit can be interpreted that way. Europe must be kept aside for both countries, as too Africans and Asians, plus Latin Americans in the United States. Fending off "the complete unknown" countries against this surge is the clarion domestic call. Precisely when both countries can only be salvaged by that global community, Theresa May's United Kingdom and Trump's United States may be spending their ammunition unnecessarily.

Or the rest of the world demands more relative attention than can be given. Britain traded away part of its enormous historical global connections to join the European Community from the 1970s. It cannot expect returning to the same world, or for Britain to be accepted back as is.

Similarly, the United States earned a glow with the "single superpower" name-tag in the 1990s that is being lost to the "single world policeman" mantra it has opted for instead. Shifting from the sunny atmosphere of the former to recreating the Hobbesian "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" State of Nature in the 21st century can only exact a heavy toll, as quarantining countries and dispatching naval fleets against this country or that exemplify. Sure, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and now Iran, qualified as "rogue," but too many peoples and countries have been either destroyed or exhausted to enjoy the Fourth Industrial Revolution fruits, the transformation of "gone case" countries into growth-engines, or other neo-liberal thrills. Suspicion reigns supreme.

When external adversaries multiply, the dominant domestic cultural flock cannot but pay. Great Britain faces it, belatedly, the United States, dramatically. Dylan's words ring louder still: "You used to laugh about everybody that was hanging out." Yet, the last laugh ("You don't talk so loud, now you don't feel so proud") could be the most damaging for all.

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In this photo taken on October 20, 2017, former British Ambassador to the US Sir Kim Darroch speaks during an annual dinner of the National Economists Club at the British Embassy. Darroch resigned following the controversy over leaked diplomatic memos revealing his scathing criticism of the White House.

PHOTO: AFP

Anglo-Saxon credentials. He lionises a fragmented movement today: McCarthyism of the early 1950s, Richard M Nixon's late-1960s conservatism, Jerry Falwell's short-lived Moral Majority a decade later, and Ronald Reagan's assertive 1980s tenure. Trump's "America First" populism is seen as the Grand Ole Party's "homecoming."

Downgrading transatlantic relationship

Stalin. Simultaneously, John Maynard Keynes, one of the century's greatest economists and a flamboyant British representative at the Bretton Woods trade and monetary conference, was "trumped" by Harry Dexter White, his US counterpart (whose suicide as a plausible communist exposed McCarthyism). Britain's sympathy for the US civil war "South" was less out of Anglo-Saxon

QUOTABLE Quote

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
(1850–1894)

Scottish novelist and travel writer, most noted for *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

Politics is perhaps the only profession for which no preparation is thought necessary.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Broadway offering
5 Town square
10 Circle dance
11 Was radiant
12 Galoots
13 City near Capri
14 Turkey feature
16 Pacific or Mountain
20 Shrewd
23 Vast expanse
24 Weeper of myth
25 Dropped tomato sound
27 Flamenco cheer
28 Trial panel
29 Rocket part
32 Cell sound
36 Pleistocene

period
39 Neighborhood
40 Topeka's state
41 Hound's hands
42 Tribal leader
43 Different

DOWN
1 "Pygmalion" writer
2 Rain dance tribe
3 Metal sources
4 Laundry basin
5 Shop tool
6 Piercing Jennifer
7 Slinger tool
8 Last letter
9 Spots
11 Treasure
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36 Pleistocene

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18 At hand
19 Puts away
20 Shortly, in poems
21 Farm sight
22 Foot features
25 Warbled
26 Record for future broadcast
28 Music's Quincy
30 DVR option
31 Corona, e.g.
33 Spoken
34 Anchor's offering
35 Comfort
36 Mamie's husband
37 Baseball's Ripken
38 Conclude

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott