

Myanmar’s days of impunity are numbered

Its attempts to exterminate the Rohingyas must be thwarted

OVER two years into Myanmar’s brutal military campaign against its Rohingya minority, its days of impunity seem to be coming to an end. Four developments in as many days over the last week ignited hopes for the prosecution of officials responsible for the genocidal campaign. First, The Gambia filed a case with the UN’s International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing Myanmar of committing genocide against the Rohingyas. Two days later, several rights bodies filed a lawsuit with an Argentine court against Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and several other top officials. On Thursday, the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague approved a full investigation into Myanmar’s crimes. The same day, in New York, a resolution was adopted at the third committee of the 74th UN General Assembly, which is expected to exert significant pressure on the Security Council to take action.

We hope the cumulative effects of these developments will finally hold accountable a repressive regime that has persecuted its minorities for decades, destabilising the entire region. But there are still barriers which call for a cautious optimism. Myanmar has rejected the ICC investigation while China, Russia and India had either vetoed the UN resolution or refrained from voting. Their persistent refusal, particularly of China and Russia, to stand up for human rights and justice for the Rohingyas is likely to continue. But these reactions are not unexpected, and the international community must not be blindsided by any such impediment now that the ball has finally started rolling.

Our expectation from the surge of global legal pressure is mainly three-fold: that it will lead to punishment for those responsible in Myanmar for the genocidal campaign; that it will provide fresh impetus to the stalled repatriation process; and that it will help in the consensus-building process to solve the Rohingya identity question and eventually force Myanmar to grant them citizenship and other rights.

The honesty of another rickshaw puller

Society should learn from him

WE are humbled by the honesty of a rickshaw puller in Bogura who returned 18.5 lakh taka to a passenger who had mistakenly left it in the rickshaw. 55-year-old Lal Mia is certainly one of those rare individuals for whom personal integrity is far more precious than money. Considering his social position, one would think that such a large amount of money would make it difficult for him to resist keeping. But no, Lal Mia was determined to give back the money to its rightful owner.

Such acts of honesty with no expectation of anything in return truly give us hope in the goodness of human beings. There have been, moreover, other instances of individuals who belong to the underprivileged sections of the society, displaying such honesty. In 2009 this column mentioned Rupchan, another rickshaw puller plying his rickshaw in Nilkhet, who found a bag containing TK 2.5 lakh and did what morally upright people always do: he took it to the nearest police station and handed it over to the officers there. In 2018 this paper reported on another rickshaw puller — 55-year-old Abdul Aziz Khan Janu Miah who had found TK 85,000 on a road in Sylhet city. After failing to find the owner, he handed over the money to two magistrates conducting a drive in that area.

These three examples defy the notion that poverty makes people commit crime. In fact, in our society we have seen individuals holding various powerful positions being caught red handed or facing allegations regarding dishonest activities. Corruption in fact has become a part of the system manifesting itself in practically all sectors and spheres. Financial irregularities have been found in the banking sector, public offices, law enforcement, educational institutions—practically everywhere we look. Such corruption eats away into the heart of the nation, retarding its development and killing its potential.

Thus when we hear about rickshaw pullers like Lal Mia, Janu Miah and Rupchan, it gives us hope that there are many such individuals whose principles and values will far outweigh their personal interest or need, that they would rather go hungry and struggle than take someone else’s possession or money, that they value honesty much more than material possession. They are ordinary men yet possess extraordinary virtues. Society has a lot to learn from them.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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How many more Bangladeshi women to suffer abroad?

The plight of female workers in the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia, has been a disturbing reality to say the least. The ones who survive bear the scars for the rest of their lives. And then there are those who return home in coffins. We can only imagine the sheer horror they had to endure before succumbing to their torture. In multiple cases, the absence of the sole breadwinner results in the families of the workers suffering from severe consequences.

What I cannot understand is why don’t the authorities deal with the matter with utmost urgency and take immediate measures? How many more stories of torture and killing do we need to encounter before there is an end to this mayhem? I believe it is the government’s responsibility to protect the rights and ensure the safety of the women migrant workers. Unfortunately, I feel absolutely helpless and fearful knowing that it will be long before the situation improves.

Liton Das, by email

Growing sustainably through research and innovation



Development Policy (CDP) is mandated by the General Assembly (GA) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to review the list of LDCs every three years and to make recommendations on the inclusion and graduation of eligible countries on the basis of per capita income, human assets index and an economic vulnerability index. The committee is comprised of 24 independent development experts from around the world who review the list of LDCs, based on a rigorous methodology using a wide range of sustainable development indicators which reflect long-term structural barriers. Thus, countries are eligible to enter or leave the LDC category if they meet the defined inclusion or graduation thresholds for the criteria. The graduation thresholds are usually set higher than the regular thresholds in order to ensure that graduation is eventually sustainable. Therefore, Bangladesh now has the prospect of moving ahead from the list of LDCs subjected to the re-assessment of ECOSOC in 2024.

Likewise, according to the World Bank,

As the world prepares for embracing the forthcoming fourth industrial revolution, Bangladesh must also prioritise investment in R&D to grasp the immediate opportunities and mitigate the uncertainties of the future.

Bangladesh became a lower middle-income country in 2015. The World Bank assigns the world’s economies into four income groups namely, high, upper-middle, lower-middle, and low. This assignment is based on GNI per capita which is calculated using the Atlas method. The units for this measure and for the thresholds is current US Dollars. These classifications are used by the World Bank to aggregate data for groups of similar countries. Each year on July 1, the classifications are duly updated for two main reasons. First, factors such as income growth, inflation, exchange rates, and population change influence GNI

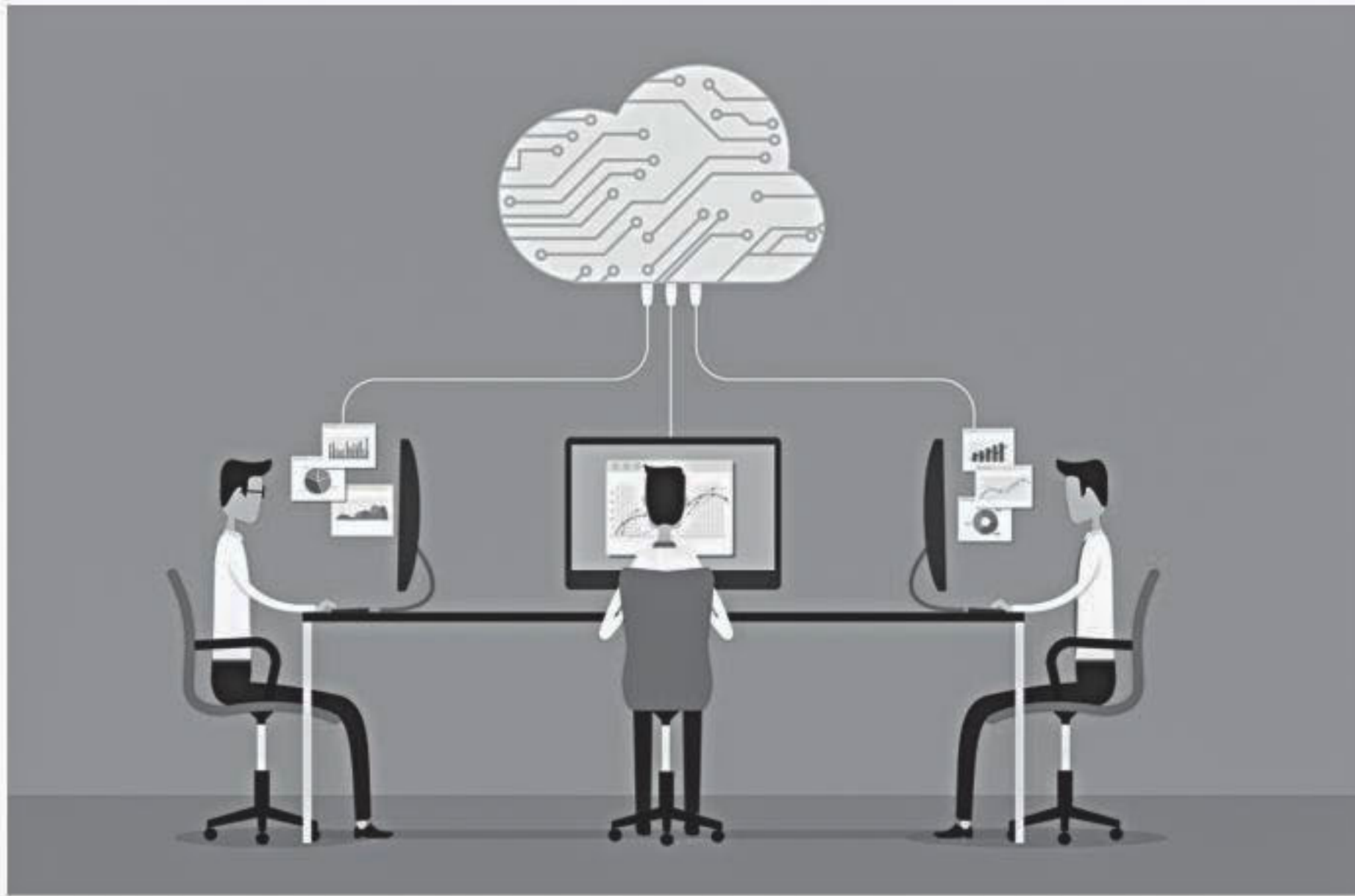
must find effective ways to overcome a number of challenges and obstacles. Given the backdrop of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), at present there are still about 24 million people in Bangladesh who live below the poverty line and the labour force participation rate is only around 58.2 percent. Hence, a lot of efforts will have to be generated to increase the current GNI per capita of 1,909 USD to the middle income threshold of 3,896 USD in the coming years. Although, at first glance overcoming these hurdles may appear to be daunting, technology and innovation can play a key role to promote the sustainable growth of

special economic zones and further integration into the global value chain. A rounded approach to reduce unnecessary transaction cost and various other forms of market failures can also improve the overall innovation scene and the flow of foreign direct investment in the country.

Many nations of the world are now investing heavily on research and innovation in order to stay ahead in the race of competitiveness. According to the Global Innovation Index (GII) of 2019, innovation is blossoming around the world despite the recent slowdown of global economic growth. In fact, there has also been a shift in the global innovation landscape as some middle-income economies are on the rise. Countries around the world are now increasingly focusing on innovation of quality than quantity. While it is true that the innovation inputs and outputs are not equitably shared by all the economies, there are examples that economies can get different return on their innovation investments compared to their comparators. When it comes to innovation, being the small country that it is, Bangladesh offers immense potential. Bangladesh is well known for some of the cutting-edge social innovations, and social enterprises have been successful in Bangladesh. Consequently, prioritising investment on R&D activities across different sectors may also enable the country to both accelerate and sustain its growth journey.

Last but not the least, the government must also prepare for the imminent climatic threats and duly invest on technological solutions to reduce the environmental impact of development activities. It is imperative to keep in mind that drastic actions taken up for a short interval may sometime bring about some of the immediate expected results, but the question remains that what will follow in the long run? As the world prepares for embracing the forthcoming fourth industrial revolution, Bangladesh must also prioritise investment in R&D to grasp the immediate opportunities and mitigate the uncertainties of the future. Finally, increased investment in human capital formation and R&D activities will also ensure continued growth beyond the upper middle income status and help Bangladesh to escape the possible risk of being entangled in the “middle income trap”.

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SOURCE: WWW.FINGENT.COM

per capita in each country; and second, to adjust inflation and maintain the dollar thresholds by which they can separate the classifications fixed in real terms. After the new thresholds are determined, they remain fixed for 12 months regardless of subsequent revisions to estimates. As of July 1 2018, the new thresholds for classification by income are: high-income (12,055 GNI/capita at current USD), upper-middle income (3,896 - 12,055 GNI/capita at current USD), lower-middle income (996 - 3,895 GNI/capita at current USD) and subsequent low-income countries.

At present there is a broad based aspiration that Bangladesh will soon move up to the middle-income country category. However, in order to ensure a successful transition to the middle income country status, the country

Bangladesh. The government can adopt several strategies to amplify the overall gross national income. The government can take initiative to declare the next five years as the priority period for the development of overall capacity of the workforce. By introducing intensive skills training measures and initiatives to boost quality education, the government can amplify the capacity of human capital in the country. This in turn will have multifaceted implications on economic growth and development of the country. Citizens with higher level of education and skills will be more proactive, innovative and productive. As a result, they will be able to avail better jobs both home and abroad. The government can also increase employment and productivity through promotion of

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New Hope for Indian Unity



SHASHI THAROOR

have come at a better time.

The ruling concerns a disputed site in the dusty temple town of Ayodhya, in India’s most populous state, Uttar Pradesh. Ayodhya attracted international notoriety in 1992, when a mob of Hindu extremists tore down a Muslim mosque, the Babri Masjid, which occupied a prominent spot in a town otherwise overflowing with temples. The mosque had been built in the 1520s by a Muslim noble, Mir Baqi, in the name of India’s first Mughal emperor, Babur, on a site traditionally believed to have been the birthplace of the Hindu god-king Ram, the hero of the 3,000-year-old epic the Ramayana. The Hindu zealots who destroyed the mosque vowed to replace it with a temple to Ram and avenge a half-millennium of shame.

India is a land where history, myth, and legend often overlap; sometimes Indians cannot tell the difference. Many Hindus claim the Babri Masjid stood on the exact spot of Ram’s birth and had been placed there by Babur to remind a conquered people of their subjugation. But many historians argue that there is no proof that Babur demolished a Ram temple to build his mosque. To destroy the mosque and replace it with a temple, they maintained, would not right an old wrong, but perpetrate a new one.

The Archaeological Survey of India, however, confirmed the existence of ruins beneath the demolished mosque that belonged to an ancient temple—though no one could be sure it was a temple to Ram. The dispute remained intractable, and dragged interminably through the judiciary. A 2010 ruling issued by the Allahabad High Court proposed to divide the disputed property three ways. All the litigants appealed to the Supreme Court, where the matter appears finally to have been resolved.

The court judgment gives the disputed site to a trust to be established by the government to build and operate a Ram temple, thus satisfying Hindus. And it rights the wrong done to Muslims by requiring

the state to provide five acres of land at an unspecified “prominent site” in Ayodhya for a new mosque.

To most Indian Muslims, the dispute is not about a specific mosque. The Babri Masjid had lain largely unused for nearly a half-century before its destruction, because most of Ayodhya’s Muslims had emigrated to Pakistan upon the partition of India in 1947. Rather, the dispute was about their place in Indian society.

For decades after independence, mainly under the rule of the centre-left Congress party, Indian governments had guaranteed Muslims’ security in a secular state, permitting the retention of Muslim “personal law” separate from the country’s

misplaced Western-style secularism. To them, an independent India, freed after nearly 1,000 years of alien rule (first Muslim, then British) and rid of a sizable portion of its Muslim population by virtue of the partition, had an obligation to assert an identity that would be that of the 80 percent of the population who are classified as Hindu. They have found encouragement in the assertive *Hindutva* of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party, which has overwhelmingly won two consecutive general elections.

The zealots are not fundamentalists in any common sense of the term, because Hinduism is a religion without fundamentals. There is no Hindu pope,

taught new wrongs to set right.

At a time when India’s social fabric has been placed under unprecedented stress, Indians greeted the Supreme Court’s judgment with almost universal relief, and there have been widespread appeals across political lines to respect the verdict, in the hope that it will bring closure to this contentious issue.

The Court’s verdict thus should be viewed as the start of a process of national healing. The fact that this longstanding dispute has been resolved with a judicial decision, rather than a communal riot, reminds the world that democratic India can overcome its most fundamental difficulties by relying on the rule of law



Muslims pray for peace ahead of verdict on a disputed religious site in Ayodhya, inside a mosque premises in Ahmedabad, November 8, 2019.

PHOTO: REUTERS/AMIT DAVE

civil code and even subsidising pilgrimages to Mecca. Three of India’s presidents have been Muslim, as have been innumerable cabinet ministers, ambassadors, generals, and Supreme Court justices, not to mention cricket captains. Until at least the mid-1990s, India’s Muslim population was larger than that of Pakistan (where a soaring birth-rate finally put it on top). The destruction of the mosque felt like a betrayal of the compact that had sustained the Muslim community as a vital part of India’s pluralist democracy.

The Hindus who attacked the mosque, however, saw the Indian state as soft, pandering to minorities in the name of

no Hindu Sunday, no single Hindu holy book, and no such thing as a Hindu heresy. Hindu “fundamentalists” are, instead, chauvinists, who root their Hinduism not in any of its philosophical underpinnings, but in its role as a source of identity. They seek revenge in the name of Hinduism as a political banner, rather than of Hinduism as a spiritual doctrine.

What the Supreme Court has done is to craft a solution that no political process could have arrived at independently, but which takes the dispute off the streets. Otherwise, the violence might have gone on, spawning new hostages to history and ensuring that future generations will be

and the spirit of unity that animated the nation’s struggle for freedom.

The Court’s decision also represents an opportunity for India to rededicate itself to the best ideals for which it has stood—democracy, pluralism, and peaceful and productive coexistence. If it does, India can leave behind sixteenth-century problems and determinedly address its twenty-first-century challenges.

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