

## Myanmar’s denial won’t change facts

*ICJ should issue interim order to stop the genocide*

THAT genocide had been committed against the Rohingya by the Myanmar military—that led to the killing of thousands of Rohingya and exodus of more than seven lakh to neighboring Bangladesh—cannot be denied. And the mendacity resorted to by Myanmar’s civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi is a shame.

What is even more preposterous is the claim by the Nobel Laureate that Myanmar’s own independent investigators were capable of investigating if war crimes or human rights abuses were committed against the Rohingya, since only seven soldiers have so far been prosecuted in this connection. And they had to serve less than one year of a ten-year sentence for the killing of 10 Rohingya men and boys in the village of Inn Din. If this is justice in Myanmar—the punishment for killing innocent civilians—then Myanmar should seriously consider revisiting its concept of justice.

Myanmar could not refute the allegation brought against it at the ICJ, and its failure to acknowledge the crimes it has committed only reinforce the sense of impunity that it operates with in dealing with the Rohingya. And Myanmar’s lackadaisical attitude towards the repatriation of the Rohingya, which has resulted in two failed attempts, and satellite images that shows that the villages in Rakhine state had been levelled, clearly indicate that the country has no intention of taking its people back. Suu Kyi’s assertions to the contrary at the ICJ, with blatant disregard for eye-witness accounts and independent investigations, point to the apathy of the Myanmar regime and its leaders towards the sufferings of the displaced Rohingya. Myanmar has pursued a state policy of decimation of an ethnic minority and it continues with its genocidal policies. We strongly urge the ICJ to issue an interim order on Myanmar to stop all genocidal activities.

## Congratulations CRP!

*We would like to see more such initiatives*

THIS week, the Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) celebrated its 40th anniversary. During these four decades, the CRP has worked tirelessly for the rehabilitation of the paralysed in Bangladesh and we would like to congratulate its founder Valerie Ann Taylor, as well as everyone associated with the organisation, for the terrific effort they have all put in towards the wellbeing of others.

We agree with the statement of Gowher Rizvi, the prime minister’s international affairs adviser, that the dedicated service of CRP staff has been a great “sacrifice”. It is a sacrifice that has enriched the lives of countless people, most of whom were suffering and neglected.

Valerie personally has been serving the people of Bangladesh for 50 years and her organisation CRP had started off small, in two store-rooms of Shaheed Suhrawardy Hospital in 1979. Today, however, it provides an extensive range of services to persons with disabilities through 13 CRP sub-centres across Bangladesh. And its history provides a great lesson for anyone who wants to serve others, especially those who are less fortunate.

The example set by the CRP has been inspirational. It has already inspired many to pursue similar initiatives that could help people with disabilities to overcome adversity and become strong and self-dependent, and we believe it will continue to inspire many more.

We hope that the government and other segments of the society, too, will find inspiration from CRP, and assist the organisation as well as work towards achieving its larger ambitions in every other way that is possible.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Our banking woes

The banking sector is in dire straits. According to reports, more than 60 banks are operating in Bangladesh, which is a relatively small country. And every year a good number of these banks are expanding operations across the country.

And the amount of default loans is also increasing by the day. And instead of clamping down on the defaulters, the central bank is making things easier for them by making repayment terms of bad loans easier.

We are concerned by this attitude of the central bank, because the increasing amount of defaulted loans is going to hurt the economy in the long run. The central bank should immediately look into this matter and take stringent measures to recover the bad loans; otherwise our banking sector may collapse and the damages will be irreversible.

**Md Zillur Rahaman, Dhaka**



# Unveiling the limits of anti-corruption drive



IFTEKHARUZZAMAN

MEDIA interest on the recently launched high-profile anti-corruption drive appears to be on the wane thanks to many competing issues. The drive against a few ruling party affiliated student and youth leaders, some procurement lords and kingpins of casinos is in some ways unprecedented and has raised wide public interest and many expectations. The booties of illegality around casinos, public procurement and other instances of abuse of politically linked power are scandalous, though not surprising at all. The way

power for private gain and personal enrichment. This mandate has been treated as normal, unrestricted and all-embracing. Over the years, it has been blessed, protected and promoted by beneficiaries among power-holders and duty-bearers in political, business, administrative, law enforcement and indeed the whole of institutional space of the state.

Against this backdrop the head of the government and leader of the ruling party made three highly meaningful pledges: a) zero tolerance against corruption; b) nobody will be spared; and c) cleanse own house first. What has happened so far may be broadly viewed somewhat consistent with this framework. The main challenge, however, lies in enforcing these without fear or favour. The extent to which it will be truly implemented

further has happened since the removal, nor is there any indication whether or not the removed as well as other actors in the supply chain of the deal would be held to account. Notably, student and youth leaders are elected and fired not by students or youth but by their political guardians. Not many vice chancellors of public universities are appointed without political connections either.

Independent investigation of the transaction and other reported irregularities in connection with some development projects of the university have been the main demand of the striking general students and teachers. Instead of responding to the call for accountability, the striking students were subjected to intimidation including harassment by security agencies, a standard means of suppressing

equipment and illegally employed foreign staff formed the backbone of the lavish facilities which also raise concerns about accountability of officials of quite a few other government departments.

Question remains whether such stakeholders of corruption will be brought to justice consistent with the pledge of zero tolerance and no one to be spared. The same is true for actors in the network of corruption in public procurement, which has been exposed as the source of filthy enrichment by some of those under investigation, facilitated by a win-win game involving collusion and protection by the proverbial big fish.

Another dimension of abuse of politically linked power is the accumulated brutality in student politics manifested by the killing of the BUET student Abrar Fahad, which exposed the brute face of intolerance of the constitutionally mandated exercise of freedom of expression. Remedy to the problem was found in banning student politics which the BUET authority resorted to. But the ban, if anything, is unlikely to be anything more than chopping off the head to cure headache. The right of non-partisan general students to free speech appears to have become the easy scapegoat. The ban may indeed be conveniently used to deny the students the right to independent views, exactly the cause for which Abrar had to pay by life. On the other hand, there is no indication yet that the proper lesson has been taken—delink student and youth politics from mainstream politics, criminalisation of a section of which is the role model for student fronts in their own way.

Delivery of the Prime Minister’s pledge of putting own house in order needs a paradigm shift in values, norms and practices in political parties for retransforming themselves into genuine political institutions, as disruptive and implausible as it may appear in the abiding context. The same is true for nearly every other relevant institution of the state, rendered almost dysfunctional mainly by partisan influence. Therefore, it is hard to expect the much-hyped anti-corruption drive to be a magic bullet, nor will it be surprising if it remains limited to only a few spent forces and at best prove to be palliatives for some selected syndromes while the deeper and structural problem stays on.

Iftekharuzzaman is Executive Director, Transparency International Bangladesh.



Police raids a casino in Dhaka during the recent crackdown on gambling businesses.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

corruption and its impunity have been allowed to be institutionalised, this was inevitable.

What has so far been exposed are just the tip of the iceberg, at best symptoms of a much deeper and multi-layered disease caused by a long-nourished feature of Bangladesh’s political culture, e.g., possession of power or status through direct, indirect or even manipulated political links is a mandate to abuse

depends on the capacity and commitment of those who are entrusted and authorised to do so, many of whom are among beneficiaries, promoters and protectors of the institutional structure of corruption.

Take the removal of the two leaders of the ruling party’s student front in Jahangirnagar University, allegedly for collecting a stunning amount of bribe in the name of Eid gift in a transaction in the presence of the vice chancellor. Nothing

dissension.

That the casino business flourished in Dhaka could be no surprise for those who were authorised to enforce the law against this illegality. It is no petty crime that escaped police and other relevant authority’s attention by chance. It thrived just before the eyes of the law enforcement agencies, administration, political leaders and public representatives of various levels. Imported

## CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT BILL 2019

# A little more than just an ‘internal’ issue?



TASLIMA YASMIN

THE controversial Citizenship Amendment Bill 2019 (CAB) has been finally passed through both the lower and upper houses of the Indian Parliament this week amidst protests and questions being raised regarding its constitutional validity. What is unfortunate for Bangladesh is that the very foundation of this amendment bill had blatantly endorsed the so-called religious persecution of Hindu minority community in Bangladesh. What is more unfortunate is that Bangladesh almost ignored the issue on the excuse of it being simply an “internal” matter of India.

Time and again BJP leaders including the current Home Minister Amit Shah had expressed the desire to remove the “infiltrators” allegedly coming from Bangladesh—the consequence of which was the NRC process completed in utter disregard of international law norms and standards. The CAB is now thought to be yet another political move designed to protect the Hindu inhabitants in Assam who were denied citizenship under the NRC, thereby singling out the Muslim inhabitants. The CAB was introduced to amend the Indian Citizenship Act of 1955 declaring that persons belonging to specific minority communities, namely Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsees and Christians from three specific countries namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan will no longer be treated as illegal migrants and shall be eligible for Indian citizenship.

In relation to Bangladesh, BJP’s political narratives prior to NRC were more along the lines of deportation of illegal migrants to Bangladesh. Contrarily, in the context of CAB, the narratives now are more along the lines of “protecting” the persecuted Hindu minorities from Bangladesh. Although during the Lok Sabha debate on the Bill, Amit Shah had reportedly expressed his gratitude and thankfully so, to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as there had been no atrocity against the Hindu minority during his regime, his assertion regarding continuance of the persecution of Hindu minority community by later political regimes were quite clearly spoken out.

Introducing the Bill in the lower house, Shah had been quoted saying, “In Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Parsees and Jains have been discriminated against. So, this bill will give these persecuted people citizenships.” Shah said the Citizenship Bill will give relief to those who have been living a “painful life” after facing persecution in neighboring countries and also pointed out how the religious minority population in Bangladesh has come down from 22 percent in 1947 to seven percent in 2011.

Such assumptions of continuing religious persecution in Bangladesh is unfortunate, especially because Bangladesh was born due to the very reason that it defied the notion of political divisions based on religion. No denial of the fact that there had been incidents of deprivations and rights violations against minority communities in Bangladesh. However, considering those incidents as “religious persecution” justifying awarding of citizenship under a law, essentially indicates that the threshold had reached such level that it would lead an entire community to consider taking refuge across borders—an assumption that at no point of time can be said to be true for Bangladeshi religious minority communities.

There had also been academics and researchers coming up with decreasing statistics of religious minority in Bangladesh as quoted by the Indian Home Minister. But such questions were raised and analysed for the very reason that Bangladesh identifies itself with the religious and cultural pluralism and the reported decrease in the number of religious minorities is to caution the political leadership to take timely steps to address it. Neither it can be said that the decreasing number is only due to the religious persecution of the Hindu community as there can be many other reasons and theories for population migration; nor it can be said that the Hindu population from Bangladesh had migrated only to one country, i.e. India. Thus, the very basis of BJP’s stance on why Bangladesh is to fall within the same classification with countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan for the purpose of CAB is clearly flawed.

Not only that the BJP leaders had debated on this issue of religious persecution in Bangladesh in the Parliament and elsewhere; this was also



Demonstrators burn a copy of the controversial Citizenship Amendment Bill in New Delhi, India, December 12, 2019.

PHOTO: REUTERS/ANUSHREE FADNAVIS

clearly stated in the Statement of Objects and Reasons (SoP) in the CAB itself. The SoP states that,

“The constitutions of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh provide for a specific state religion. As a result, many persons belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities have faced persecution on grounds of religion in those countries. Some of them also have fears about such persecution in their day-to-day life where right to practice, profess and propagate their religion has been obstructed and restricted. Many such persons have fled to India to seek shelter and continued to stay in India even if their travel documents have expired or they have incomplete or no documents.”

In the Lok Sabha, Amit Shah had expressly linked the BNP with religious persecution in Bangladesh during its regime, especially in 2001. However, the SoP has clearly generalised continuance of religious persecution in all three countries, irrespective of any regime

or time period; keeping Bangladesh, one of its friendliest neighbours, in the same category with Pakistan and Afghanistan where religious extremism and consequent persecution is known to be high.

Naturally, the narrative built around the context of the CAB is mostly about whether such classification of persecuted migrants is reasonable or not from the constitutional perspective; and is not so much about whether there is actual religious persecution happening in those countries leading to illegal migration in India. For Bangladesh, this narrative impliedly endorsing the assumption that religious minorities are being persecuted in Bangladesh, prejudices its inherent character of a secular state. It is at this juncture that the matter no more remains as “internal” to India, and demands Bangladesh to show its clear defiance against such faulty assumptions.

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