

# VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: ICJ ON ROHINGYAS

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***A weekly look at the public conversations shaping ideas beyond borders — in the Subcontinent. Curated by Asad Ali***

The grim situation of the Rohingyas in Myanmar and the decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), The Hague — ordering Myanmar to urgently take “provisional” measures to protect the Rohingya from violence — is highlighted in an editorial in Daily Star. It recounts the ICJ verdict to justify “what Bangladesh has been saying at the top of its voice”. The editorial, right at the outset, says, “We hope the whole world is listening at last.” It then goes about putting into perspective the Rohingya crisis and Myanmar’s inability to deal with it in a humane manner: “Declaring there is prima facie evidence of breaches of the 1948 genocide convention, the court found that the Rohingyas remaining in Myanmar were “extremely vulnerable” to violence at the hands of Myanmar’s military. And, therefore, the panel of 17 judges, in its unanimous ruling, asked Myanmar to report back to it within four months on the actions it has taken to prevent any serious harm being done to the Rohingyas and every six months thenceforth.” The editorial goes on to say that, “We owe a debt of gratitude to Gambia for bringing this matter to the attention of the ICJ. Despite the fact that the ruling dealt only with the Gambia’s request for so-called preliminary measures, the equivalent of a restraining order for states —not the court’s final decision — it nevertheless could pave the way for Myanmar to finally be held accountable for its atrocities against the Rohingyas.”

It again pointedly ends by saying that since “What Bangladesh has been saying has found a voice at the World Court, we once again appeal to the entire world to step up its effort to assist Bangladesh in protecting the Rohingyas, and to hold Myanmar accountable for its many crimes that must not be ignored any longer.”

The old chestnut, India-Pakistan ties, has been explored editorially, again: This time in a Dawn editorial. Although the editorial starts off by saying “while this country has made several peace overtures to its eastern neighbour, these have nearly all gone unanswered”, the main thrust remains on how “perhaps the international community needs to do much more to facilitate a positive dialogue between Islamabad and New Delhi that can help defuse tensions, and usher in an era of amity in South Asia.” It acknowledges “the current testy times” and how mere “proposals may be far-fetched”, but insists that “it is in the face of such challenges that true statesmen rise above the din and make efforts for peace.”

The editorial talks about India’s stubbornness on a bilateral solution: “While India, stubbornly, has always insisted on settling all matters with Pakistan bilaterally, in the world of realpolitik, when powerful actors ‘advise’ others, it is difficult to ignore their suggestions, especially regarding strategic and economic ties.” The editorial then goes on to cite the example of France and Germany to shore up the argument that fraught ties can be mended with enough political will: “It is a fact that the French and Germans — mortal enemies during the Second World War — managed to move beyond a bloody history and create a close relationship under the EU umbrella.” It ends by hoping for positive intervention: “Perhaps the Europeans can make better use of their good offices to promote peace in South Asia.”

Bhanu Bhakta Acharya, an academic associated with the University of Ottawa, has written in The Kathmandu Post on how press freedom in Nepal is being clipped at an alarming pace in

recent times: “Looking back at the past year from the perspective of press freedom and freedom of expression, the Nepal Communist Party-led government appears to have become more aggressive and hostile with its attempts to control the freedoms guaranteed by the constitution.” Acharya highlights how the year 2019 in Nepal “saw more incidents related to press freedom violation than in the past seven years, according to a report of Freedom Forum Nepal. There were 111 incidents affecting 163 journalists, including 49 physical attacks, 38 arrests and 33 threats.” The editorial ends on an alarming note: “When the government is involved in giving systematic political orientation to journalists as pro-government media cadre to cultivate a media environment favourable to it, darker days can be expected ahead with further attempts to curtail press freedom and control the political environment.”

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