The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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Transparent Corruption

Corruption grew out of the days of its veiled existence long ago. In fact, we have become so familiar with its presence in every area of our quotidian experience that no revelation nowadays seems to have the power to outrage us.

Transparency International's report on the presence of this toxic derivative of civilisation in various professional groups does not contain any new elements of shock except that the proportion is so high among practitioners in this country of professions supposed to be its avowed enemies. The report which was made public Wednesday last put police on top of this opprobrious list followed by judiciary. It says nearly half of the complainants made prior arrangement with the police for disposal of their cases. This is citing just one angle of the survey, there are many more equally sharp reflectors of the reality projected by public opinion. Corruption would not be easy to fight in a huge sprawling institution like police. But we would not even be making any attempt to fight it if we do not take steps to reform the service right now. At present, it is not only study in antiquity when it comes to the training method but inadequate when taken in view its pay structure. Specially at the lower level the payment is ridiculously low and one cannot really blame a police for being such an easy prey to corruption.

No less dim is public view of judiciary. Despite our highest regard for the people in the legal profession public faith in them is eroding fast. It is time our legal professionals took this trend seriously and did some soul-searching. It is for their own interest that they would do well to think about ways to do a bit of house cleaning. This is where our former Chief Justice and Chief Adviser of the second caretaker government Habibur Rahman comes so readily to our mind. He said it quite unequivocally that for the sake of democracy it is imperative that judiciary be subject to press criticism. We believe the cause of a meaningful democracy together with this stigma of corruption make it a compelling case for giving accountability utmost importance in our state system.

A Fine Mess?

The first South Asian Music Festival ended in the city yesterday. How was it? Well, a fizgig at best and a mess at worst. Originally a grand idea of assembling artistes from the seven SAARC countries it never lived up to enthusiasts' expectations mainly because of managerial mess on the part of Shilpakala Academy, the organisers. The want of preparedness among the organisers was evident as soon as the opening ritual was over. The only thing they seemed to know for sure was the price of ticket. But even that seemed such a pointless exercise in the hindsight as at one stage, casual saunterers had to be 'invited' to give a look of justification about the whole arrangement. The organisers had no answer when queried by the concerned newsmen about the number of artistes really turning up. Little better was their idea about the programme schedule. There was hardly any schedule though. Almost every programme ran behind the schedule much to the vexation of the few aficionados who braved this disorder. In fact the whole festival would have been an abject failure were it not for the presence of the noted and popular Indian vocalist Manna Dey who turned out to be the only saving grace. Runa Laila on the last day added some colour and partly saved the situation.

Why did Shilpakala Academy make such a hash of it? Did not it get sufficient time for proper logistical distribution? What is the point in wasting public money in such cultural gimerackery?

The occasion, first of its kind, could have been a truly memorable only if the ministry concerned had gone about it more seriously from the very outset. It was for its ineptitude that a grand idea fell flat at the implementation level — a feature that has so far been the hallmark of almost every initiative of this government.

This Needs Follow-up

RAJUK, short for capital development authority, has hit the nail on its head. In survey going the extra-mile to get to the bottom of traffic congestion and water-logging problems it has pinpointed the reason behind them or there exacerbation: 12,665 unauthorised constructions in the city that encroach on roads and drains. Already the sprawl of an approved construction boom has constricted the limited open spaces there were in the metropolis; and here we are accused now by the added burden of so many illegal structures. The question inevitably arises for the umpteenth time: who governs the capital city?

Rajuk deserves to be complimented for the revelatory focus on a rather remote issue which, as we understand, was being handled by the DCC on the ground level. The latter has stumbled against a wall of opposition from vested quarters. Lack of cooperation from several agencies that had surreptitiously, it seems, permitted such illegal building exploits to be carried out was a big impediment towards their demolition. We do not know the proportion in which the illegal structures have been the handiwork of private engineering and that which are gallingly standing on the lands owned by the Railways, WASA, T&T and other government or semi-government organisations. Such institutions should take upon themselves the responsibility of dismantling the illegally set up structures within their compounds without ado. If they don't, they also ought to be liable for their conduct to the ministries concerned, pain of punishment.

In order to make further details available on illegal construction activities and to sensitise people against the grabbers of public property, the print and electronic media need to be pressed into ser-

vice on a fresh gear. However, the Bangla daily which reported on the revealing survey has suggested that most of the 12,665 unauthorised constructions owe their origin to Rajuk's own systemic flaw in passing construction plans. If the clean-up strike root at home, it will branch out better outside the four walls of Rajuk.

Creativity and the Hunter Trait

Storms may rage and thunder growl, but the rainbow is still there — the inherent right of every human being to create and shape freely his/her own life and environment.

II DUT Alice had got so Bexpecting nothing but out of the way things to happen that it seemed quite dull and stupid for life to go on in the common way." And so continues the journey of Alice through the maze of the wonderland. All the time the guard is looking at her "first through a telescope, then through a microscope, and then through an operaglass." At last he says. "You are travelling the wrong way" and shuts up the window. Alice marches on like the spring breeze and plunges into the unknown. A flipped over stone, a tiny foot-print, a distant sound, an odd smell in the air, the direction in which the flowers point or moss grows. All these things have meaning to Alice. She scans everything going on around and behind her and picks up the unexpected when she chooses. The ordinary dissolves into extraordinary, the mundane into absurd.

"Put cats in the coffee and mice in tea And welcome Queen Alice with thirty times three."

Thus the dream child moves through a land "of Wonders wild and new,

In friendly chat with bird or And half believe it true."

Call it fanciful or what you like, without this playing with fantasy, no creative work has out into unknown territory is almost by definition a creative effort. It is always a risk to try something new. Yet risk-taking is essential to the creative process. So also the ability to let the mind wander among seemingly ambiguous paths. Einstein points out that the theory of relativity did not come to him as the result of tedious mathematical equations. Rather it was a flash of insight that struck when he was considering the apparent ambiguity of natural forces. Coleridge

yet come to birth. Daring to step

than a mode of memory emancipated from time and space." Or as John Keats puts it, "The genius of poetry cannot be matured by law and precept but by sensations and watchfulness in itself."

That precisely is the differ-

puts it picturesquely when he

says, "The secondary imagina-

tion dissolves, diffuses, dissi-

pates in order to recreate.....

The fancy is indeed no other

ence between "linear" and "random" ways of viewing the world. When a person with a linear view comes to a door that is stuck or locked, he will push harder and harder, banging on it, knocking on it and ultimately kicking it in. Conversely a creative mind with random views will scour alternatives to enter the house, may

be through a latch-door at the

back or a half open window, somewhere around.

I recall an anecdote from the memories of Lord Keynes. Keynes was in Washington for the Bretton Woods conference. He thought, he should use this opportunity to meet some movers and shakers in the American polity — Senators and house representatives. He tried to set up appointments through normal channels and

something up and finding out that you do not have what you sought but it fits somewhere unexpected.

A good analogy for the creative mind is perhaps that of the hunter and here I am plagiarising from Thom Hartmann's The Hunter in a Farmer's World

A creative hunter constantly monitors his or her environment. The rustle in the bushes could be a lion or a coiled



that he should try and phone up directly. Because returning a telephone call is a must for the American psyche. So he did and his mission was successful. Lord Keynes adds a foot-note to the story that since he could not get in by the front door, he walked in through the French-

window. Neither hemmed in by order and structure, nor willing to trudge along the same path over and over again, the creative mind travels in myriad ways. It is like looking for one elusive piece of jigsaw puzzle, picking

snake. Or, that sound or flash of movement might be the animal the hunter was stalking. Noticing it could mean the difference between a full belly and hunger So, even when walking quickly, the hunter notices everything. And when the hunter sees the prey, he gives chase through gully or ravine, over fields or through dense foliage, giving no thought to the events of the day before, not considering the future, simply throwing himself into the one pure moment of the

hunt and immersing himself in

On the other hand, if the prey, say wild boar, disappears into the bush, and a rabbit appears, the hunter is off in a new direction. A hunter, not unlike the quintessential of all hunters, the lion, can throw an incredible burst of energy into the hunt. But he/she is also flexible, capable of changing strategies on a moment's notice. A hunter is the hare of the Aesop's fable, not the slow and steady tortoise. A hunter loves the hunt, but is easily bored by mundane tasks such as having to clean the fish, dress the meat or show up for work at a certain time, do a task for a certain number of hours, and end the day in time to rest and prepare for another repetitive day. As Dave de Bronkart puts it, "The idea of putting seed into dirt and walking away can seem pretty silly to a hunter. But for a farmer who experiences time move in step by step sequence, it is exactly the right thing to do." If the hunter is the hare, the

farmer is the tortoise. Unfortunately, the huntertrait of risk-taking, so necessary to creativity is a anathema in today's world of linear thinking. Sartre and Picasso. Dali and Hemingway all struck out in profoundly new directions and they all faced derision and ridicule until the unconventional and the abnormal became fashionable in the su-

He/she, a Jean Paul Sartre observes belongs to a community and a specific linguistic-cultural milieu. Society makes demand on the creative mind. sometimes imperious, quite often sly and invidious and occasionally rational. Thus impinged upon, the essence of creativity is in transcending the conventional mores that repress, the dogma and orthodoxy that inhibit. Anchored in social reality, the creative mind takes the rainbow of hope apart, piece by piece, colour by colour and still believes in it. Storms may rage and thunder growl, but the rainbow is still there — the inherent right of every human being to create and shape freely his/her own life and environment. That implies both an immersion in the immediate environment and transcending it. Also, an almost athletic energy to resurrect what is forgotten or routinely swept under the rug, to plunge deep into unchartered water and yet dare to

perficies of aesthetic discourse.

or intellectual is a social being.

True, a creative writer, artist

The best expression of this daring and immersion comes from John Keats. In his letter to James Hessey, he writes: "In Endymion, I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks than if I had stayed on the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea and comfortable advice.

dia on November 9 last indi-

cated that Sonali Bank, a pre-

dream.

Vices Eating into the Vitals

by Md Asadullah Khan

With most of the populace in distressing situation worrying about their economic future, resentment against the nouveau riche is building up.

PEAKING at a press conference on the occasion of the Aid Group meeting recently concluded in Dhaka Ms Meiko Nishimizu, World Bank vicepresident for South Asia, discussed issues relating to impediments to development efforts in Bangladesh. She made no secret about the malaise the country has long been suffering

The WB vice-president for South Asia stressed the need for bringing about political stability by avoiding confrontational politics, efforts to ensure a fair return of investment made by the entrepreneurs, improvement of the law and order situation, and curbing terrorism. extortionism and hijacking in the country. Most important, she called for waging a relentless war against corruption and bureaucratic bottlenecks and red-tapism that run rampant in this part of the world. She called for measures to extend legal aid to investors and expansion of the purview of the Notably, she asked the government to withdraw from the business activities.

Shockingly true, the country could not as yet salvage, restore and do anything to attract investment, and had only pursued an ethical and moral vacuum based on flawed and suicidal path in the name of politics and democracy. We can still observe here — possibly the worst of human society — the widening gap between the rich and the poor, burgeoning unemployment situation. exploitation of women and children, spiraling crime and ecological destruc-

We still suffer terribly in many sectors. For example, agriculture. Despite the fact that food production has increased substantially and food import bill has not cost the financial exchequer as much as it did in the past years because of high breed seeds developed in the country's research institutes, farmers are still using an antiquated system far from the innovations pursued in the developed countries. They are still farming based on rain and water from the canals if at all available. They lack the opportunity to raise their quality of life — their plight has been often ignored by the governments.

Such shocking economic situation can be attributed to a group of people who are seemingly out to destroy the country. They are mostly politicians. a new cultural elite - a group of opportunist businessmen and high ranking officials. They are playing dirty and selfish games with the plight of our people. They deposit their money in foreign countries, travel abroad effortlessly, wantonly purchase

expensive merchandise and, in

the process, breed crimes and

other vices. To remedy the pre-

sent situation, we must get rid

of the villains in the system. The second priority is to reorganize the educational system including its delivery methodology. We must get rid of, if necessary, unqualified teachers and administrators. and motivate and produce more students in the disciplines of science and engineering. We permanent law commission a must get rid of corrupt officials. who are primarily responsible for the system's present shocking state of affairs. The greatest priority be given to the promotion of researches in the realm

of science and technology.

incidentally, if the country can invest only even 1 per cent of its proposed fund in the energy sector in the ADP in research and training, this shocking state of the sector could be totally reversed. In most cases, the disruption of power stems from the poor maintenance of the units allegedly due to lack of qualified engineers and technicians with practical training in the field level works. Reports have it that the unit No 5 of the Ashuganj Thermal Power Plant with generation capacity of 150 mw, despite the fact that it is free from any fault at the present moment, could not be made operational because of the breakdown of the emergency channel that remained without repair for the last two months. Lt Gen (retd) Nuruddin Khan, Minister for Energy and Natural Resources who visited the plant on September 16, after the said unit was shut down, asked the personnel concerned to complete the repair work within one month. But even after two months, as reports sug-

gest, it is still in limbo. Reports reveal that this thermal power station with a generation capacity of 728 mw in eight units per day now produces only 424 mw daily with its 4 units opera-

Corruption is rampant in the whole country, more so, allegedly, among top bureaucrats. These days boys from the upper strata of society having a good family background are not coming to these jobs that call for merit, intelligence, tact, dynamism and honesty. These boys, as is evident, are going abroad to earn advanced degrees or taking high paying jobs with one of the many multinational companies elbowing into the economy of the country. The desertion of top jobs by the country's brightest is beginning to change the fabric of the country's bureaucracy. With meritorious boys shunning these jobs. the service has become increasingly politicised and in some cases increasingly dishonest. In many of the government organisations like police service, customs, engineering departments, taxation services, banking and some sector corporations many officers have been named for links in corruption scandals. Report carried by the media in the recent past revealed that a certain customs official in the city had stashed in one and half crore taka in bank accounts. Report carried by the media on November 6 last revealed that in Khulna six Sonali Bank officials had been sued for embezzling 5.29 crore taka through forgery and misuse of power. During the past regime, the energy sector in the country topped the list in the corruption scandal. Only in recent time political figures and officials involved in siphoning 56 crore taka in the North-South gas

of the past regimes. There is a total demoralization of the political class bureaucracy at the top level. These

pipe line project have been

charge-sheeted. People are so

incensed by the swindling and

bribe taking of these officials

that they demand, echoing with

the Prime Minister, exemplary

punishment to these corrupt

and undesirable public figures

bureaucrats were supposed to be close to the people but people would often find them hanging around ministers and party bosses and as reports have been gleaned, these top echelons of the administration, in the past regimes, allegedly amassed huge wealth through exploitation of the masses. The consequences have cost the country staggeringly high. The country's health, education and industrial infrastructures have almost crumbled down.

This top tier of bureaucracy constructed by the colonial rulers and often referred to as the "steel frame" has now turned into "rubber frame". They are always bending before their political bosses. And politicians often use the threat of transfers and punitive posting to bend the officers, and even make them comply with

unethical and illegal orders. Feeple also view that the near fruitless endeavour to curb terrorism, hijacking and looting in the country has mostly resulted from the interference of godfathers in the administration who receive their strengths from political bosses Refusal to comply with their illegal orders seals the fate of officers, often stalling promotions and leading to harassment. People still remember that during Ershad regime, orders from some lady bosses were deemed to be high state orders and inviolable! Official corruption and other abuses tend to sap people's faith in democratic governance and development programmes. People demand to know how much money the bureaucrats and ministers of the past regime have stashed depriving the masses of their legitimate share.

Report carried by the media on November 8 last about issuance of fake certificates in the cloth section of the Export Promotion Bureau has created ripples across the garments sector. Reports have it that take certificates of export performance in garments were issued by a section of corrupt employees in exchange of cash graft to the extent of 5 lakh taka for each certificate. Shockingly, all

these clandestine activities were masterminded by one export clerk who happened to be a relation of the chief of that cell. Happily, however, after reports of such corrupt practices hit headlines in the dailies the said executive of the cell has been relieved of his responsibilities.

Even the education sector that was once deemed to be sacrosanct and much above any malaise now appears to be steeped in vices of corruption. Reports have it that principals of about 281 private and government colleges under the Rajshahi Education Board have been found to be involved with malpractices relating to registration of students. Shockingly these teachers who are supposed to be adherents of morality and a code a conduct that their students would inculcate are now indulging in a type of clandestine activities that shame all in the country, bringing in its wake incalculable damage to the nation. Appallingly true, the results of more than 5000 students who appeared in the HSC examinations under Raishahi Board were withheld from publication because of the flaws detected in their registration. Without contradiction, the students were largely to blame for these unfortunate incident but teachers were squarely responsible for masterminding this episode and for luring these unpretentious students. Most alarming, this is a pointer to the ills, moral and ethical vacuum that plague the whole society, even the sacrosanct education sector.

And, unfortunately, this moral turpitude known as bakshish or salami or 'office expenses', extends to all levels of the society. Everything, it is said, from telephone to electric or gas or water connection, passports to business licence and even school or college certificates or admission can be had only in exchange of money Noticeably, public outrage has put the battle against graft at the top of the government agenda, and the press has been working relentlessly to expose the crimes and misdemeanours

but of no avail. Report circulated by the me-

mier banking institution in the country, faces a non-recovery of Taka 49 crore because of the breach of trust and a singular case of dishonesty on the part of one DGM of the bank supervising its activities in Narayanganj region. The importer-cumbusinessman who opened an L/C (letter of credit) through depositing savings certificate of Taka 36 lakh for importing soda-ash and cement did not take delivery of the goods from the bank godown and in the process huge amount of cement turned into stone chips due to long storage. The sad part of the story is that the said DGM released those savings certificates without the proper approval of the higher authorities. Besides he extended loan facilities of some crores of taka to some influential businessmen of that area against some bank accounts that did not prove to be viable after investigation. The report drew pointed attention to the limping state of the country's banking system. A good number of banks, as reports suggest, are not running well mostly due to corrupt practices of some officials in the hierarchy. This has, as a matter of fact, deprived the promising private entrepreneurs of much needed bank credit for boosting trade and industry in the country. Shockingly, people have neither heard about a bank loan defaulter being penalised for non-payment of loans nor any inept or corrupt bank official being brought to book for such gross violation of trust

Corruption flourished so much because opportunities have grown. The general rise in prosperity of a section of people has made officials increasingly greedy. Says a construction contractor, "Previously a few thousand taka would be enough for me to go through the channels, now it takes me about a few lakhs."

and responsibility

With most of the populace in distressing situation worrying about their economic future, resentment against the nouveau riche is building up. The World Bank, IMF and ADB — all these donor agencies have listed these unhealthy trends as the main impediments to economic emancipation of Bangladesh.

'An Unbeaten Century"

Sir, Mr Waheedul Haque's article, "An Unbeaten Century" (DS, 24-11-97), written as a tribute to Mr N C Chaudhury's talent, his cosmopolitanism and his urbanity is an excellent one. We also join Mr Haque and pay our tribute to this unique personality and to his unique

It is true that Mr Chaudhury writes English with a greater ease than a native English and he also writes Bengali with an equal ease. His mastery over the European languages and literature, art, architecture. music and culture is beyond doubt. His depiction of natural Bengal with its rivers, fish, boats, birds, green fields etc., is impeccable, but unfortunately the Bengal in his writings is inhabited by Hindus only and then again mostly by upper caste Hindus. And by reading his works, one gets the impression that about a thousand years of Muslim rule in India had failed to contribute anything tangible or remarkable or even mentionable to the Indian culture, art, architecture, religion and language.

Everything that is good in this subcontinent had started taking place with the advent of the British rule. In his unabashed pro-imperialistic zeal he even made Robert Clive look like a decent and acceptable empire builder, although it is well-known that he (Robert Clive) usurped the power in Bengal through worst kind of

treachery, deceit, bribery and

M D Hossain Dhaka-1100

Quite an activist!

Sir, I have always liked Mr Md Asadullah Khan's write-ups in the DS on problems that are most topical of the day. The articles on "educational crisis" "power sector dilemma", "political brinkmanship" and "terrorism" published in the DS are presented with a striking visual and a clear message. Mr Khan has spoken with clarity about the way the taxpayers' money are being wasted and national development efforts ending in a flasco. His write-ups are replete with probing questions and constructive suggestions. His portrayal of the barbarity of police personnel of Galachipa thana was splendid and we feel happy that the police personnel involved in the grotesque incident have been brought to book in the meantime.

We would request Mr Khan to continue his efforts. Abul Bashar Malibagh Chowdhury Para,

> The shoe and epilepsy

Sir, In my early childhood in Calcutta in the '30s, there was a washerman, Kanji, in our locality who was suffering from epilepsy. He could not afford to have medical treatment due to poverty. He carried on with local indigenous herbal treatment. He used to have occa-

sional epileptic fits while walking when he used to fall down all of a sudden on the ground being unconscious and lay motionless. On such occasions if someone from amongst the onlookers took off his shoes to bring it very close to Kanji's nostrils for about three minutes. Kanji by inhaling the smell of the shoes would regain his consciousness and pick himself up as if nothing had happened.

Just three decades after came across an almost similar incident while I was in Enfield. Middlesex, London, working as machine operator in a factory. On every Sunday I used to take a ride to Piccadily Circus and Charing Cross for spending my evening merry-making. On one Sunday in 1965, I was taking a stroll in Piccadily Circus. I found a small crowd on my way. Just out of curiosity I made my way through this small crowd. I observed that a man was lying on the ground motionless.

pulled myself up and gird up my loins and gingerly walked to the fainted person. To the utter surprise of the onlookers, I took off my shoes with my quivering hands and applied it to the nostrils of the man and kept it for about 3 minutes. With the inhaling of the soles of the shoes my formula worked and he sprang to his feet as if nothing has happened. As he got up, I told him all about my

mumboo-jumboo treatment.

N H Suft 17/6-C, Tajmahal Road Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Shalt thou support small investors?

Sir, Share prices have gone to a level that has become unbearable for tens of thousands of small investors. In the last one year, their hard-earned savings have slowly but painfully evaporated into thin air. Arguably, this can happen in a free economy. But even in these days of free economy governments of both developing and developed countries often step in to support whenever their currencies are under pressure. Perhaps our government can also take some similar steps to support the sinking share market.

The central bank could fund and government-controlled institutional investors like the ICB etc., could buy even more, if they are already doing it, to rescue the market which is falling apart. The government has, perhaps, a moral responsibility to rescue the market because some time earlier, it was hinted at a very high level that DSE Index is not likely to drop below 1500. But unfortunately, the Index is about 700 now less than half of what the government had estimated!

One can only hope that authorities concerned would be a bit sympathetic to the innumerable numbers of suffering small investors and take some positive steps to boost up the share market.

Farhat S A Roomy House No. 477, Road No. 32, New DOHS, Dhaka-1206

OPINION

Encroachment

Hamida Rahman

often come across articles in The Daily Star about Dhaka's road situation like traffic jam, broken and neglected roads, heaps of building construction materials by the roadside etc. These are very important issues and they should be brought to the notice of authorities concerned through newspaper writing, and in my opinion, The Daily Star is extremely efficient in this matter. One thing surprises me that nobody ever writes about encroachment of our roads which

are 'public roads'. Gulshan, Baridhara and Banani are supposed to be very posh areas and all educated people are presumably living there. What about 'their' civic sense? If you walk around these areas (specially Gulshan) you will find some palatial buildings having 4 to 5 feet (may be more or less) area in front of their front boundary wall completely taken in as their own land, may be in future they will wall it up.

Now, some of them with their vulgar display of wealth have done colourful mosaic right on the public road and some have grilled it up. There is usually a guard there who will not allow to even pass by that mosaic or marbled area - not to think of parking your car at all - if it is grilled up, that ques-

tion doesn't arise. But 'why'? This has narrowed the road where hardly two cars can pass. I just don't understand why doesn't anybody touch this topic — may be this will touch vested interest or are there people untouchable? I personally went to the municipality to enquire about it and they said it is Rajuk's are. This is another problem in our country, you simply do not know whom to approach. That's why I thought

of media help. I really wonder whether Rajuk or municipality or for that matter local MP, how can it avoid anybody's eye while passing these roads?

Some house owners have taken little land all around the boundary wall and they have fenced it up. That is perfectly fine, because firstly it stops street walkers from using that space as their public toilet and secondly with well trimmed fence and little garden, it helps beautification of the area and, if need be, cars can also park. This shows the civic sense of

these people. The Daily Star very effectively projects these issues and recent highlighting of Gulshan-Banani Lake project with the Singapore-based Indus valley case had such good public response and awareness that there has been a real shake-up at the Rajuk.

This is really encouraging and I congratulate the government from the core of my heart for taking such steps. With this hope, I am approaching the media highlight encroachment of public roads.