

## Clogged arteries

New roads, waterway, railway, whatever, the city of Dhaka needs some immediate relief from the excruciating pain it suffers due to jamming of its arteries. Let the citizens see some effective solutions to the strangulating ailment while celebrating its 400 years as a capital.

MADAN SHAHU

AFTER years of expressing concern over the mounting problem of traffic indiscipline and jam through a series of seminars and media blowups, the situation on Dhaka streets has only worsened, to the dismay of the suffering public. Observance of scores of traffic weeks has simply failed to cause any dent in the prevailing impasse.

Meanwhile, a good number of vehicles are joining the existing fleet on the roads while few are discarded, and no new road space could be created to provide them passage. Apparently, things do not bode well -- leading to further congestion of traffic.

Roads in a city are like arteries in a body, which keep it alive by allowing unabated flow of necessary fluids. If the arteries of a city are gradually congested and choked, then how can that habitat survive? Are we heading for such a conclusion, ultimately? These questions perturb the mind more now because this year we are in the thick of celebrations of capital Dhaka's 400 years.

We celebrate the city's past and present (1), cherishing to live in its future. Its past 400 years inspire us to wish it many more hundreds of years of life. But have we

availed the ways and means for this? First, have we ever cared for its existing waterfront -- the Buriganga? For a constantly growing capital city of a small but populous country, the river that provides it the much needed waterfront should have been widened by excavation, not narrowed down by greedy encroachment.

Second, have we cared to leave adequate main road space in between blocks while expanding horizontally? The blocks will gradually extend vertically entailing increased movement of men and material, which only sufficient road space and not narrow passages can facilitate.

Third, have we cared to ever follow the building codes while constructing a multi-storey building or whatever? The building codes stipulate a free space on all sides of the built area of up to 40% of the plot measurement, among other things. Even this is not apparent in our building "boom," not to speak of "other things." And there are many "other things" mandatory for keeping a habitat liveable, but nobody is prodding us to abide by them.

Coming back to the point of the arteries of a city -- its roads -- that are supposed to keep the traffic flowing for its survival. Dhaka city has much less than the required road space in the first place. And

this imbalance is gradually increasing in the face of the indiscriminate construction spree without leaving any provision open for laying adequately wide roads. Traffic is brimming on the existing roads, which, in consequence, stalls its very movement.

The situation is worsened when a considerable portion of the roads is occupied, often at places more than 50% of the width, by parked vehicles -- creating virtual clots. These clots might cause thrombosis some day if not removed soon. To relieve the strained arteries some bypasses might be needed.

Well, it is easy to suggest but hard to get done. It is hard to carve out a thoroughfare through huddled up localities. There have been a hundred and one suggestions for flyovers, circular railway, circular waterway, metro, even overhead monorail. Most of us do not know what the authorities concerned are contemplating. But of late, talk of metro is more in the air. Whether it will be hard or not too hard to make it a reality, only time can tell.

Meanwhile, we have some reasons for feeling dismayed. A circular water route around the capital was opened to public in the recent past, but didn't remain operative for long. In fact, nothing was heard of it after the trial runs. Perhaps it lacked judicious and proper planning in the first place, and was rather started on a whim. Not long ago, the road linking Gulistan-Fulbaria (west of Bangabhaban) and the road off Hatkhola towards Jatrabari (east of Rajdhan Market) were cordoned off from traffic for construction of the Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover.



Sign of a cardiac arrest!

After quite a considerable time the machines and materials brought for the project were removed and the roads reopened to traffic. Perhaps another instance of whim taking the place of planning. It is really hard to accept such a trial and error approach to public (in)convenience.

Whatever, the capital city needs an immediate solution to its mounting traffic indiscipline and traffic jam problem. Whether it's circular water or road route or underground metro, something must be physically here soon to ease the clogging of its arteries. If we really think that circular water way is an answer, and if we mean it, then we should be sincere about the detailed feasibility study and a

proper design. We shall have to draw a budget and fix a time for its implementation because, although we have rivers all around Dhaka, they are not streamlined for utilisation.

It would be simply unique to have a waterfront all around the capital city. And for that the water bodies have to be linked and dredged where necessary, and cleared of encroachments first. Then there should be a circular road all along the bank, with pontoons at station points and necessary link roads with the existing city network.

The task is not easy but, of course, feasible. And when implemented properly it will yield revenue, not only from regular commuters but also from tour-

ists. Only, we shall have to be sincere with implementation of all its components.

Next, if we think flyovers and metro are proper answers to the problem, we must be serious about their feasibility and budget before embarking upon either one, because these are very hard tasks, perhaps harder than other options. Erection of flyovers will entail requisition of land, compensating the possessors, and clearing the route. This will take considerable time. The construction, obviously, will not be an overnight affair.

Building a metro may be the most expensive and time consuming of the solutions. Construction of an underground rail route covering whole city is likely to cause more public inconvenience than the construction of flyovers will. This will entail extensive digging area by area and above-ground blockage for quite some time. However, most cities of the world have metros, so why can't we?

Anyway, what if we think of a surface peripheral railway running beside the proposed circular road along the waterway round the city? It may not be as hard and costly to build as other facilities, and can provide some ease to commuters.

New roads, waterway, railway, whatever, the city of Dhaka needs some immediate relief from the excruciating pain it suffers due to jamming of its arteries. Let the citizens see some effective solutions to the strangulating ailment while celebrating its 400 years as a capital.

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## The sorrows of Swat

It is up to the Pakistani people to provide the appropriate answers, not just up to Asif Zardari or Nawaz Sharif, or the army or the intelligentsia, but on the entire nation acting in concert, responsibly addressing the threats of Talibanisation, of underdevelopment, and of national disunity.

IFTEKHAR AHMED CHOWDHURY

As early as the sixth century B.C., the Chinese traveler Huang-Tsang praised the "forests, flowers, and the fruits" of the rugged mountains and the beautiful valley of Swat. So did Alexander the Great who arrived there a couple of hundred years later. Thus, visitors from the East and the West were agreed on that land's idyllic ambience in the ancient ages.

Even in modern days Swat has been called the "Switzerland of Pakistan" for the same scenic splendour. Alas, the comparison with Switzerland ends there, for unlike that "playground of Europe" Swat today is a stage where a Grecian tragedy of Olympian proportions is being enacted.

Here, too, even with regard to Greek drama, the comparison must conclude. To the Greeks, a tragedy on stage resulted in catharsis, or an emotional healing and cleansing of the audience and the actors through their experience of the sufferings of the characters in the drama.

The sorrows of Swat and the recent mayhem in the larger Malakand Division, of which the former princely state is now a part, do not seem to be having any healing effects on the perpetrators of the pain, both the Taliban and the Pakistani troops, and as the size of the hapless refugee population burgeons, both Islamabad and the international community appear to have been rendered unmoved spectators. But this cannot last long, for out of this tumult may emerge a deluge that could sweep away a state structure that has failed to deliver.

In the intervening period between the ancient and modern times Swat was the cradle of Buddhist culture. The Muslim period began with the invasion by Mahmud Ghazni in the eleventh century. The Islamic State of Swat was established in 1849, with Sharia law in force, which had ramifications for later.

Winston Churchill penned his first novel romanticising fighting in the region. The British recognised Swat as a princely state in 1926, and in 1947 it acceded to Pakistan though, even there-

after, the ruler, the Wali, enjoyed considerable autonomy and popularity. In 1969, the martial law government in Pakistan absorbed it fully. While there was no overt resistance, a simmering resentment was palpable among the tribes.

Another fact of contemporary relevance is that, sporadically, nineteenth century Swat had also been ruled by religious leaders who took the title of "Akhund." The English Victorian poet Edward Lear wrote a comical ditty, "The Akhund of Swat," seeming to indicate a faraway near-mythical place and per-

son -- much like Coleridge's "Kubla Khan of Xanadu."

He wrote: "Who, or why, or what is the Akhund of Swat? Is he tall or short or dark or fair, does he sit on a stool, or sofa or chair, or squat? The Akhund of Swat?" In many ways the Akhund may be seen as the forerunner of the present day Sufi Muhammad or his son-in-law the Taliban connected nemesis of Islamabad and the West, Mawlana Fazalullah.

Against this historic backdrop, it is not surprising that, even prior to the absorption into the North West Frontier

Province of Pakistan, a system based on nizam-e-adl, a version of Sharia far milder than that of the Taliban, prevailed in Swat. With the extremist momentum gaining ground in Pakistan, for two years Mawlana Fazalullah's men fiercely fought the Pakistani army, which, exhausted, signed a peace accord on February 16.

The accord, brokered by Mufti Mohammad, established cease-fire and imposed Sharia throughout the Malakand, where the Taliban had wreaked mayhem. To carry out checks on implementation on the ground the Taliban descended as far south as Buner in the Malakand, only 65 miles from Islamabad.

Both Islamabad and Washington panicked. President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton severely criticised the accord and called it an "existential threat" to Pakistan. Under pressure, the Pakistani government, blaming Fazalullah for the Buner incidents, cancelled the agreement.

Fighting resumed and the refugees swelled in numbers. Another kind of pressure was mounted on Pakistan to bring relief and succour to the displaced persons. Notably, the newly adopted UN principle of "Responsibility to protect" enjoins the task first on the Pakistan government and, that failing, on the international community.

So what is to be done? First and foremost, Pakistani authorities must address the problems of the refugees. If

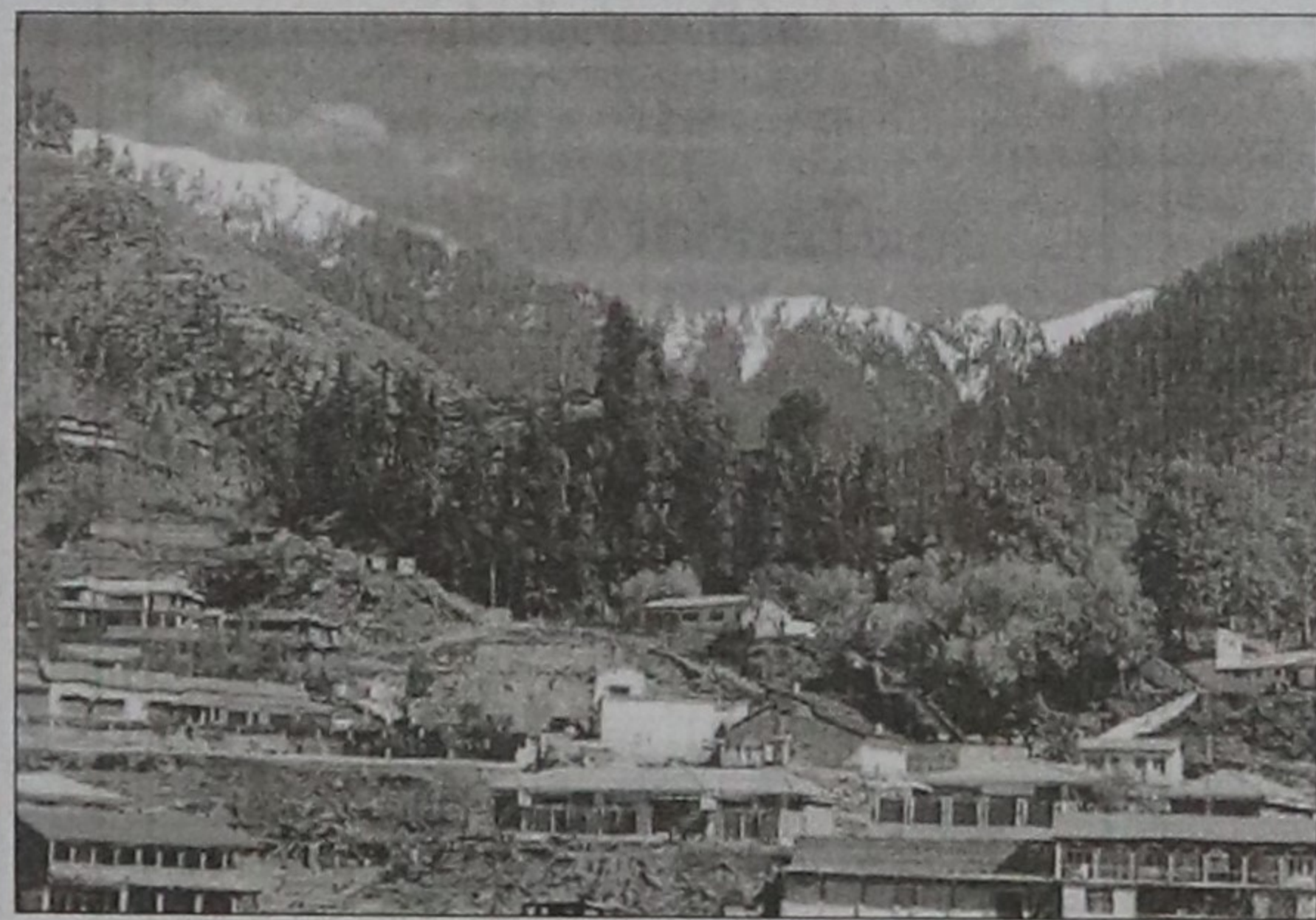
they fail, pro-Taliban relief agencies would most likely step in to fill the void. Secondly, a commission of eminent persons could be set up to examine how "good governance" could be brought to Swat.

The sense of marginalisation felt by Swati tribes must end. Finally, civilian collateral damage through military action must be avoided at all costs. It is not only exacerbating the refugee problem but is also fuelling deep resentment that augurs ill for Pakistan.

Questions have been raised in the media about whether Pakistan is a country or merely a space, and whether the best answer to what is Pakistan is that it is "not India." It is up to the Pakistani people to provide the appropriate answers, not just up to Asif Zardari or Nawaz Sharif, or the army or the intelligentsia, but on the entire nation acting in concert, responsibly addressing the threats of Talibanisation, of underdevelopment, and of national disunity.

Perhaps the expectations of Pakistanis remain less fulfilled than some other nations, and for fulfilling these, the government in Islamabad must take charge. As for its people, they may believe in the words of the popular refrain: "Sohni Dharti Allah Rakhye!" (May God protect the golden soil!). But in reality, man must also help.

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Beauty ruled by a beast?

## Can we reverse global climate change?

We must recognise our responsibility to our future generation, our moral obligation to them and the millions of species that will be affected by our choice to take, or not to take, needed actions.

JIM HANSEN

WESTERN governments are pretending to take actions against climate change. But their "cap-and-trade" approach is a minuscule tweak to business-as-usual. Cap-and-trade is a Temple of Doom for life on our planet, worshipped by lawmakers who are afraid to confront fossil special interests.

What is needed is a gradually rising fee on carbon content of oil, gas and coal, with proceeds distributed fully to the public. This will spur innovation in efficiency and carbon-free energy, while providing the public the funds needed to transition toward clean energy world of the future.

Cap-and-trade is supposed to answer climate change by setting targets for emission or capping it by issuing permits to emitting industries. To begin with, cap and trade is a misnomer. A "cap" increases energy price, like tax. It is wrong and disingenuous to try to hide the fact that a cap is a tax.

Other characteristics of the 'cap'

approach is that because of unpredictable price volatility it makes millionaires on Wall Street and other trading floors but offers the public little. Offsets are usually allowed and often poorly substantiated and verified, creating more uncertainty. The case in point is the European experience: they spent \$50 billion on carbon trading, their CO2 emissions actually increased, and the largest payment went to a German coal-burning utility! Cap-and-trade is fraught with opportunities for special interests, political trading, obfuscation from public scrutiny, accounting errors, and outright fraud.

As with any law, caps can and will be changed, many times, before 2050. The fact is that national caps have been set and are widely rejected. When caps are accepted, they are often set too high -- as happened with Russia. If a complete set of tight caps were achieved, global permit trading would likely result in a Gresham's Law effect -- "bad money drives out good."

Some countries will issue too many permits or fail to enforce requirements. These permits, being cheapest, will find their way into the world market and

undermine the world cap. Caps are also extremely hard to enforce, as demonstrated by the Kyoto Protocol. In some cases, even with highly respected countries such as Canada, the extent of failure to meet commitments was enormous.

The biggest problem with a cap tax is that it will not solve the problem. The public will soon learn that it is a tax. And because there is no dividend, the public will revolt before the cap tax is large enough to transform society. For these reasons, and because they believe a cap-and-trade approach will continue to stymie international negotiations, many of the top American economists from across the political spectrum vigorously oppose cap and trade.

A successful plan must recognise geophysical constraints and economic reality. The geophysical fact is that most of the remaining fossil fuels must either be left in the ground or be used only where the CO2 is captured and put back underground. The economic reality is that we will not move to an era beyond fossil fuel emissions until a substantially higher price is applied across-the-board to all carbon fuels, such that efficiency and carbon-free energies rapidly increase. In addition, I will contend, public acceptance of the needed rising carbon price demands complete transparency and fairness.

It is easy to speak of a planet in peril. It is quite another to level with the public about what is needed, even if the actions

are in everybody's long-term interest. It seems they would not dream of being honest and admit that an increased price for fossil fuels is essential to drive us to the world beyond fossil fuels.

How can emissions be reduced? With policies similar to those being promoted elsewhere: mileage efficiency standards for vehicles; power-usage standards for appliances and electronics; retrofitting of residential and commercial buildings for efficient heating and cooling; urban revitalisation promoting walkable and bikeable communities; land-use policies encouraging proximity over sprawl; and wholesale conversion of the electricity energy source from fossil fuels to carbon-free solar and wind resources.

A higher carbon price is needed to transform consumer and life style choices, to make zero-carbon energy and energy efficiency cheaper than fossil fuels, to spur business investment, innovation and associated economic activity, and to move the nation to the cleaner environment beyond the fossil fuel era.

The carbon price will need to be significant, and the public and businesses must understand that it will increase in the future. It should be applied to all fossil fuels -- oil, gas and coal -- uniformly at the source (the first sale at the mine or port of entry).

A price on emissions that cause harm is equitable. Yes, a carbon tax. A carbon tax with a 100% dividend is needed to

wean us off fossil fuel addiction. A tax and dividend mechanism would allow the marketplace, not politicians, to make investment decisions.

Coal, largest fossil fuel reservoir of carbon dioxide, is the dirtiest fuel. Coal is polluting the oceans and streams with mercury, arsenic and other dangerous chemicals. The dirtiest trick that governments play on their citizens is the pretense that they are working on "clean coal" or that they will build power plants that are "capture ready" in case technology is ever developed to capture all pollutants.

A carbon tax on coal, oil and gas is simple, applied at the first point of sale or port of entry. The entire tax must be returned to the public, an equal amount to each adult, a half-share for children. This dividend can be deposited monthly in an individual's bank account.

A carbon tax with a 100% dividend is non-regressive. On the contrary, you can bet that low and middle income people will find ways to limit their carbon tax and come out ahead. Profligate energy users will have to pay for their excesses.

Demand for low-carbon high-efficiency products will spur innovation, making our products more competitive on international markets. Carbon emissions will plummet as energy efficiency and renewable energies grow rapidly.

The revenue shouldn't go to the government to send to favored industries. Will the public just turn around and spend the dividend on the same inefficient vehicle, etc.? Probably not for long, if there are better alternatives and if the public knows the carbon price will continue to rise. And there will be plenty of innovators developing alternatives. Of course, cost incentive alone is not sufficient -- efficiency and building standards also must be improved.

Marshaling public opinion and political will is a tremendous task, given the forces aligned for business-as-usual. In Washington there are four energy lobbyists for every Congress-person. Political leadership is desperately needed. We must recognise our responsibility to our future generation, our moral obligation to them and the millions of species that will be affected by our choice to take, or not to take, needed actions.

Cap-and-trade is the Temple of Doom. It would lock in disasters for our children and grandchildren. It would do nothing to preserve a planet resembling the one that we inherited from our elders, and to allow continued existence of the remarkable species that co-habit Earth with humanity.

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