

Question paper leak at BG Press

No mercy must be shown to those involved

HERE is little question that corruption in government is a sad reality we have lived with for years. Even so, there is in us that certain feeling that as governance improves and public sensibilities get to be more sharpened, such wrongdoing will be rolled back and the country can move on toward its desired goals. That being the sentiment, it comes as a shock for all us that some government staff have been involved in the crime of leaking question papers in return for dishonest financial gains. The crime we speak of concerns the Bangladesh Government (BG) Press taking place in Rangpur and involving a number of candidates for the position of assistant teachers at public high schools. As a report in this newspaper on Saturday notes, elements at the BG Press sold question papers related to an interview for the positions for a rather staggering amount of Tk. 25 lakh. The interview was, of course, cancelled as a consequence of the leak.

The manner in which the whole scam was organized speaks of the sophistication and strategic planning that were brought into the scandal. Those involved made it a point to have some candidates peruse the question papers, on payment of Tk. 2 lakh each, at a guest house in Gangachhara upazila of Rangpur. They were to pay an additional Tk. 3 lakh each once the examinations were over. They were forbidden to take out the question papers or to copy their contents. They were only permitted to commit the questions to memory, which again was a bizarre situation. In any case, what is jarring is the involvement of government employees in such a sensitive area as a government printing press. Besides, when the matter involves a public examination, it is shocking that some employees there could so easily and recklessly set up links with corrupt elements and in exchange for money agree to let them know the questions beforehand. In simple terms, departmental confidentiality, to say nothing of trust, has been undermined here. Of course, such leaks of questions have happened before, particularly at educational institutions. But now that it is the BG Press which is involved, one can only guess what might happen --- and on a graver and bigger scale --- in future if the problem is not tackled right away.

Altogether 167 people have been arrested over the scandal. The authorities have constituted a five-member probe body to inquire into the incident. We urge that the body go into the details of the scandal and submit its report by the July 19 deadline given to it. Moreover, it is important that the report be made public in the interest of citizens. We also think that a wholesale survey of all such institutions be conducted immediately in order for any gaps or loopholes to be plugged for the future. And it goes without saying that those found guilty of involvement in the Rangpur BG Press scam be given exemplary punishment as a deterrence for those tempted to commit similar crimes in future. No mercy should be shown here.

An MP sued by police sergeant

'Unprecedented' maybe, but fully justified

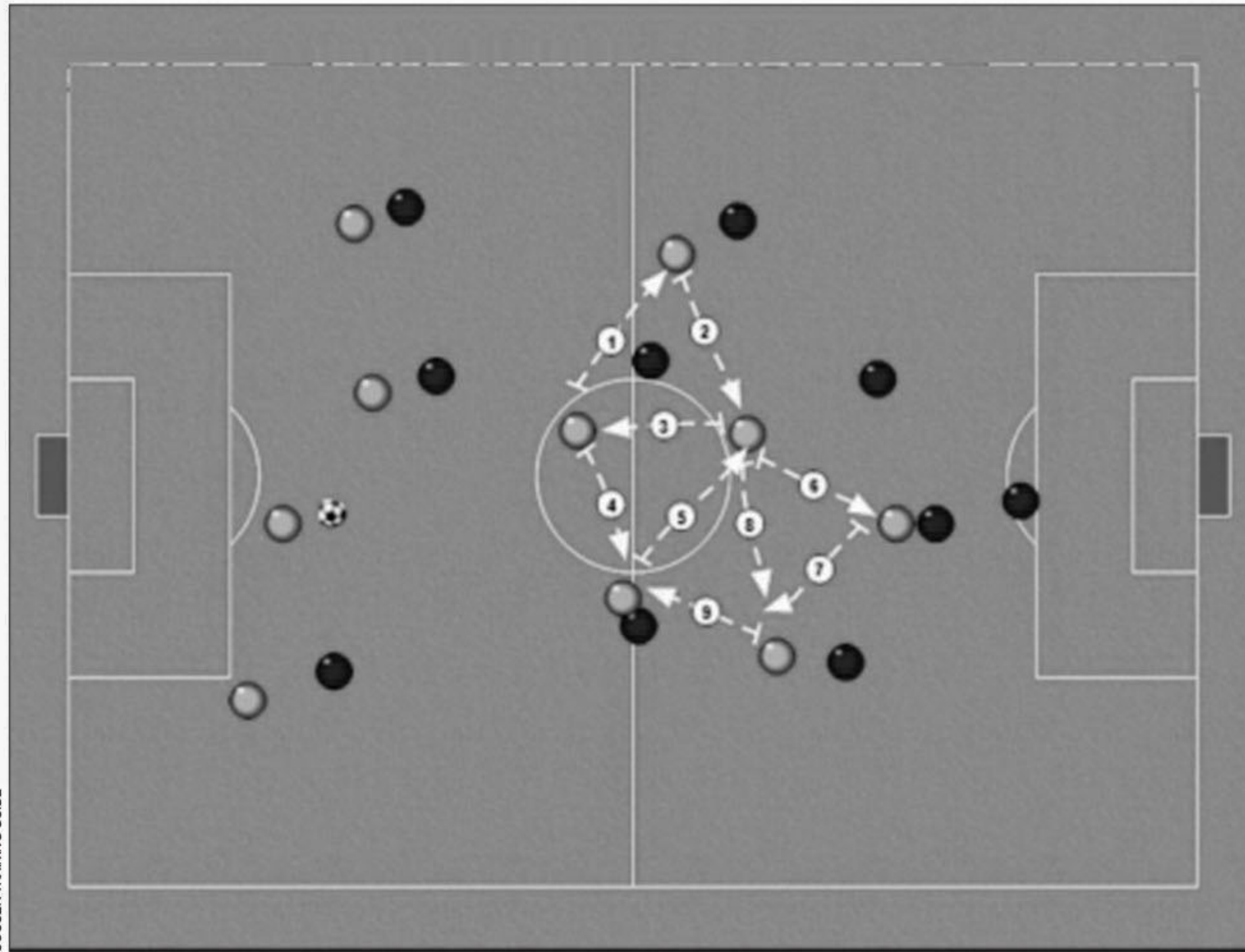
JUST because one is an elected law-maker from the ruling party, one is not entitled to manhandling a police sergeant on duty, no matter what was the latter's perceived omission or commission, if any. It was a traffic jam in which the MP's car was stuck and he demanded an explanation from the policeman for something that was hardly of his own making. Even if it was, that would hardly have been a justification for any person, far less, a member of the incumbent party, to rough up a police man by slapping him in the face or otherwise hitting him. Apparently dissatisfied with what the policeman had to say, he reacted physically in a manifest arrogance of position. Mind you, this was done in wanton disregard for public norms, not to say placing hindrance in the way of a policeman at work. Or was he expecting that the sergeant would let his transport pass in breach of rules?

That the police authorities, and by reflection, the home ministry have played a proactive role in letting the case be filed against the MP must earn them plaudits. What, however, we would expect to see now happen is that law would take its own course and that none should come in its way by touting 'privilege', or resort to wire-pulling to get off the hook or pass it off as something of a frame up.

Let us not forget, when rules are imposed on the high and mighty, it is public confidence in and respect for the rule of law that is enhanced. It is a hundred times more effective than application of law against common criminals when incumbent set examples of abiding by law, particularly in varying and testing circumstances. If they should take law into their own hands, what would then be their difference with common offenders? Real power with the people comes from dignity and self-righteousness and not by an arrogant display of position.

If the case that has been lodged against the MP is allowed to be thrown off course before producing a conclusive outcome, then an invaluable opportunity of asserting the supremacy of law will be lost. That will be drawing a big blank.

Pass to win



Football is about making swift passing triangles, over and over again.

Once the tournament ends, most reviews will focus on the biggest stars. Instead they should have focused on passing cultures. The Messis, the Ronaldos and the Kakas are all on holiday. And of the four sides who remain, three adhere to the ideology of one stony-faced Amsterdammer.

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

TODAY'S World Cup final between Spain and Netherlands will see an eighth champion enter the pantheon of greats. And in that, either or both of the men, who have masterminded their team's run to the final, will be hailed as great managers and toasted across their respective countries.

It is all fair and good, since Bert van Marwijk and Vicente del Bosque are both fantastic managers and deserve to be lauded. But both men and the imperious Joachim Loew, whose Germany side made it into the semi-finals, will secretly owe a huge debt of gratitude to a poker-

faced man in a leafy suburb in Munich.

And somewhere out there, Louis van Gaal will surely be toasting his ideology with a glass of the finest available champagne.

The image of van Gaal and his burning ideology is stamped like a watermark upon these teams. His shadow hangs heavy over all three and all have managed to make it into the final four of the biggest show on earth.

So what is this ideology? What do the Dutch, the Spanish and the Germans have in common, in this World Cup of contrasts?

The answer is that all three teams have an undying devotion to a common phi-

losophy: The need to develop a culture of passing.

Over the course of the last month, much has been made about the spirit, fight and mental bottle of the teams that made it thus far. What has been consistently missed is that all three have an infallible commitment to a passing game that was first developed by Johan Cryuff and more universally applied by Louis van Gaal.

Consider just the players in the final equation. Van Gaal currently coaches Bayern Munich, a club who provided the likes of Bastian Schweinsteiger, Phillip Lahm and Thomas Mueller to the tournament. And that is just from the Germany side. The Netherlands have Arjen Robben and Mark van Bommel, who work with van Gaal at Bayern and both have been irreplaceable in this team.

And there is more. The Spanish have Xavi and Iniesta and both men received their big breaks under Louis van Gaal in his tenure at Barcelona.

On face value, these are all different players in different positions. But what

they all have in common, is the unique van Gaal trait; the ability to pass the ball. Under van Gaal, nothing is more important than this. You don't have to be physically domineering, or prodigiously skilled. Lahm, Xavi and Iniesta are all under six foot. Mueller is hardly the most skilled player in the world.

Individual brilliance too is strictly optional; for all of Robben's selfish forays, his ability to make swift, sharp passes is one his biggest strengths. Under van Gaal, the rule is simple. If you can pass the ball, at speed over distances, you make his team.

The van Gaal catechism is simple to learn, but hard to master. Do not pass into a team-mate's feet, it stresses, but always ahead of him to keep the ball moving. When the first man passes to the second man, the third man must already be moving into space ready for the second man's pass.

In short, football is about making swift passing triangles, over and over again.

Which is why kids at Ajax, Barcelona and now Bayern Munich are stuck in eternal games of four on four; two touches allowed.

It is a formula stereotypically identified as Dutch. And it is true that the Dutch pioneered it, but the Spanish perfected it and the Germans have just recently partaken it.

Van Gaal's (and for that matter Johann Cryuff's) influence over the biggest clubs in these countries is well documented. He oversaw the great explosion of Dutch talent from Ajax, perfected Johan Cryuff's university of passing at Barcelona and at Bayern this season revolutionised their structure of play. On the way, he tweaked things here and there, but the basic remained the same.

And Ajax is where half of these Dutch players got their start, and Barcelona and Bayern contribute the largest quota of players to the top four teams.

The metamorphosis between the three is such that German, Dutch and Spanish football has crossbred to become almost indistinguishable. The Germans pass like Holland in disguise. The Dutch defend and counter-attack like Germans used to. Spain play like Holland circa 2000.

Once the tournament ends, most reviews will focus on the biggest stars. Instead they should have focused on passing cultures. The Messis, the Ronaldos and the Kakas are all on holiday. And of the four sides who remain, three adhere to the ideology of one stony-faced Amsterdammer.

Anyone else doubt that Van Gaal deserves that toast?

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Delhi's Terminal 3 syndrome

For India's ruling elite, modernity doesn't mean freeing society of religious superstition, casteism and gender discrimination so all citizens can equally develop their potential as free, rational human beings. Rather, it considers gigantic energy-intensive, high-capital-cost projects as symbols of progress, modernity and prestige.

PRAFUL BIDWAI

CONSIDER the irony. Britain's Conservative-led ruling coalition has just abandoned plans for a third runway at London's Heathrow airport, which Prime Minister David Cameron was keen on. In India, the supposedly pro-aam aadmi United Progressive Alliance government has built a lavish, Rs.12,700-crore, nine-level, chrome-and-glass terminal at Delhi airport.

Terminal 3, to be opened soon, will be the world's fifth-largest airport terminal, bigger than Heathrow's Terminal 5. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh euphorically described T-3 as signifying the "arrival of a new India, committed to join the ranks of modern, industrialised nations."

It's tempting to see T-3 as a manifestation of a global power shift: China, India and Brazil are ascending while the long-affluent Western economies decline. But this over-reads the truth. The Heathrow runway wasn't abandoned primarily because Britain cannot afford it, but because environmentalists opposed it. Spurred by it, greenhouse gas (GHG) aviation-related emissions alone would exceed Britain's entire 2050 GHG ceiling.

For India's ruling elite, modernity doesn't mean freeing society of religious superstition, casteism and gender discrimination so all citizens can equally develop their potential as free, rational human beings. Rather, it considers gigantic energy-intensive, high-capital-cost projects as symbols of progress, modernity and prestige.

This notion of modernity is perverse.

Saudi Arabia -- despite its spectacular palaces and wide expressways -- will never be considered modern while its sheikhs despotically rule over a primitive tribal society which crushes fundamental rights and keeps women in semi-barbaric conditions.

Malaysia's international prestige came from its firmness in resisting the IMF's pressure to open its financial markets during the 1997-98 East Asian crisis, not from the Petronas Towers, long the world's tallest building.

Beijing hosted the Olympics, and Shanghai built the world's fastest airport-city link. But that only drew passing admiration. China is respected for its manufacturing successes, following its land reforms and provision of social services which halved poverty.

Similarly, the halo over the Burj Dubai and Mumbai's 117-storey WorldOne (planned to be the world's tallest residential building) will soon fade.

So will Terminal 3's glamour -- but only after it gravely damages India's transportation policies and increases its vulnerability to climate change.

Clearance of the T-3 project was rushed just when Delhi airport's modernisation-expansion was well advanced. This included a new runway, a brand-new domestic departure terminal for private airlines, and considerable expansion of the domestic arrivals and the entire international terminal.

This Rs.5,000-crore-plus modernisation is creating an annual passenger-handling capacity of 30 million. (Delhi currently only handles 26 million.) This capacity can be gradually expanded to cope with increasing demand for many

years with better instruments-landing, all-weather radars and air traffic-control systems, faster movement through immigration, and more gates and aerobridges.

All this could have been done incrementally, at low cost. But T-3, with an additional 34 million-passenger capacity, was irresistible for its prestige -- and probably for huge payoffs and kickbacks from sweetheart deals totalling Rs.12,000 crores.

The contract was awarded to the GMR Group, which has no experience in airport construction.

T-3 follows the public-private partnership (PPP) model, based on private profiteering at public expense. PPP projects have led to huge and rising tolls even on rural roads, besides highways and airports.

Dr. Singh said T-3 "would be a window to India, the first impression of the country." But the visitor's lasting impression will be dominated by the general squalor and stupendous rich-poor disparities visible right outside the terminal.

T-3 is doubly obscene because 80% of it is glass. Glass loses 30% more warm or cooled air than insulated brick. Its production is expensive and emissions-intensive. It may have limited merit in a cold-climate airport which needs sunlight -- but not in Delhi.

T-3's designers mindlessly imitated the West. Similarly, the liberal use of energy-intensive materials like aluminium and marble invalidates the T-3's "green building" claim.

T-3's greatest absurdity is that it will add to Delhi's long-notorious airspace congestion. Few domestic flights take off or land in Delhi on time; most aircraft circle overhead for 30-60 minutes -- a tremendous waste of social time and costly fuel.

India is promoting projects like T-3 on the specious assumption that civil aviation is a public good and sign of progress. But globally, aviation is increasingly seen as a social liability and a major source of greenhouse emissions. Exhausts from airplanes, containing potent GHGs besides carbon dioxide, are 2.7 times

more harmful at high altitudes than on the ground.

Worldwide, sensible policymakers are seeking alternatives to planes, including trains, airships and waterways. The greatest alternative is reorganising cities to limit long-distance travel -- and thus carbon footprints and travel bills.

India should join such efforts before addition to air travel -- affordable only for 3% of the population -- grows within the elite, and private aviation lobbies get strengthened and capture policy-making. We must develop climate-friendly alternatives to flying.

Trains are an excellent alternative. Today, the Delhi-Mumbai Rajdhani Express takes 16-17 hours to cover 1,400 km. If it can be accelerated to the global mark of high-speed trains, it will cross the distance between the two city centres in about 4 hours.

This is less than current flying time (2 hours), city-to-airport transit time, plus check-in margins. Most travellers would prefer trains to planes -- as they do between Paris and Lyon, and Tokyo and Kyoto.

Trains consume three-quarters less energy than planes and emit much less GHGs. Speeding up trains will need large emissions-relevant investments. But this would be only a fraction of the cost of replicating White Elephants like T-3 and other emissions-intensive aviation infrastructure.

Dr. Singh boasted that Indian aviation can "absorb" an investment of Rs.564,000 crores -- 12% of India's GDP -- by 2020. India can better spend the sum on healthcare, education, and social security, or a need-based, first-class surface transport network. We shouldn't squander it on socially low-priority, super-expensive, ecologically unsound projects like T-3.

It's time to radically rethink our transportation and urban development policies in the light of equity, inclusiveness, energy efficiency, and climate responsibility.

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