

## Bridge building anomalies

*It is the government that must bear the final responsibility*

EXPERTS of Accident Research Institute (ARI) of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology has made a ringing pronouncement on our pathological indifference to safety concerns pertaining to designing of Salehpur bridge over the Turag river and its construction on Dhaka-Aricha highway. Two major structural deficiencies of the elevated bridge came to glaring light five years ago: lack of crash barriers and raised walkways on either side of the approach to and exit from the bridge. Experts wanted these defects redressed urgently.

Yet, all these five years the suggestion went unheeded by the design and safety wing of the Roads and Highways Department, which is why, in a large measure, the latest human tragedy struck near Amin Bazar.

It's a shame that the safety wing of the Roads and Highway Department despite being formed some ten years ago, has started the rudimentary work of identifying defects in highways and bridges only since last year going by the admission of a R&H top official. More appalling is the fact that even deficiencies pin-pointed by experts have not been corrected. Furthermore it's a great pity why in designing a bridge which has already caused 50 accidents in two decades, adequate safeguards were not built into the structural design and into the eventual construction.

Indeed, a countrywide survey will have to be immediately undertaken to spot all the accident-prone highway bends and bridges and corrections carried out through a time-bound comprehensive plan of action.

Actually, the study should be inclusive of all bridges, at least two categories of which make a scandalous spectacle: the large number of those across the rivers around Dhaka which fall short in height so much so that standard cargo vessels risk being hit by the undersides of the bridges, particularly in monsoons. The least said about misplaced or half finished bridges stringing out as corruption memorials and reminders of waste of scarce resources the better. But nobody is held to account for these extant monuments of mal-governance.

We conclude on a very important note. There is a fundamental flaw in the human resource provision as far as the Roads and Highways Department goes. It is primarily manned by civil engineers dealing with highways and bridges which have to do with an expectedly modern, dynamic and safe transportation system. Transport engineering, a much-needed specialty devoted to road, highway and bridge engineering as linked to safer public transportation and mobility being the vital tool of economic development is conspicuous by its absence in our context. We must have transport engineers inducted into the Roads and Highways Department.

## Happy Bijoya Dashami

*Let good triumph over evil*

THE observance of Bijoya Dashami is something more than bringing the Puja season to an end. It is, for the followers of the Hindu religion, a reassertion of faith, a restrengthening of the belief that in the epic struggle between good and evil, good emerges ultimately triumphant. Durga Puja, in that broad manner of speaking, is not only an invocation of the gods and goddesses who exercise their omnipotent influence on the lives of the Hindu community. It is at the same time a celebration of the historical culture which has shaped the religion and by doing so has drawn scholars and students of history to attempts toward an understanding of it.

This morning, on Bijoya Dashami, it is the old and yet living story of Rama's victory over Ravana that we go back to. It is, in equal measure, the powerful legend of Durga's defeat of Mahisha that is recalled --- and for reasons that are as valid today as they were centuries ago. Every faith is a call to nobility, to the idea that a shaping of character to the highest degree of morality and ethics ought to be the goal of humanity. And yet there are the many and difficult tests that humankind is constantly put to as men and women confront the forces of evil in their diverse manifestations. It is through ceaseless struggle against overwhelming odds that humankind triumphs against the forces of darkness and by doing so inaugurates a new, happy phase in the pursuit of life, underpinned as it is by faith.

The end of the Puja is thus the beginning of a new journey, not only in the sense of physical reality but also in dimensions of the spiritual. It is a truth symbolised by the immersion of Goddess Durga in the river, a clear sign of the end of the old struggle, a patent indication of how the shadows of darkness may be put to flight by a strenuous striving for justice waged by the forces of good.

We wish our Hindu fellow citizens a happy Bijoya Dashami.

## Political bankruptcy

While the opposition party leaders are busy capitalising on the miseries of ordinary people, the ruling party big guns are constantly providing ammunition to the fire by ill-advised invectives. While the opposition is failing in its duties to inform and sensitise the people properly, the ruling party big shots are severely exposing their flaws in governance.

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Life is precious. However, the recent mud-slinging centring round the train tragedy in Sirajgonj and the upazila chairman murder in Natore very clearly point to the bare fact that the life of ordinary people is the least important thing to our all-powerful and all-important leaders. The tragedies also betray the political bankruptcy of our leaders in a very clear manner.

In Sirajgonj, a number of BNP supporters sitting on the train tracks got killed as a train ran over them. Consequently, the mob and the opportunists beat the train driver and a guard to death and beat up innocent passengers along with looting at their will. It was indeed a tragedy for the families of the dead persons. The train was also set on fire, causing more damage to this resource-constrained country.

Painfully, however, the tragedy has also turned out to be a rallying for our political leaders. Both the ruling party and the opposition stalwarts have been involved in an orgy of blame-game ever since instead of trying to get to the root of the train tragedy, which requires a clinical inquiry to get the real facts.

Apparently, this was an accident that could have been averted. It has been learnt that the train was unknowingly headed towards disaster. Anyway, the government should go for an objective investigation as to why and how the train ploughed into the mob. Why did the police allow the throng to stay on the train track that was used frequently?

Meanwhile, the BNP, too, has to share the blame because its leaders allowed the party supporters to stay on the tracks and did not caution them regarding the frequent coming and going of trains along that track. Does it not imply



Nowhere lower to go to.

that the leaders care little for the workers' lives, or else why did they send the supporters onto the rail tracks other than opting for a safer place?

I reckon, even the ones who died should have known they were only courting death by sitting on the rail tracks. While they will not get the chance to rue their death, their hapless families are now left to lament the tragic loss of

their near and dear ones.

One should not forget about the equally tragic death of the train driver and the train guard at the hands of the angry mob. It is common knowledge that a train is not like other vehicles that can be stopped instantly with the help of brakes. The driver might not have been aware of the people sitting on the tracks. However, it should be an unparalleled lesson for the ordinary supporters of our mammoth political parties.

are totally untenable, and are very likely to draw flak from the general people.

Such moves by the ruling party will not only hinder the process of objective investigation, but will also further embolden the party goons. The ruling party policy makers cannot afford to forget the fact that its front organisations have already done plenty of damage to its image by being involved in tender-looting and extortion. Unfortunately, however, the people have not seen anything concrete, other than the party leadership being unhappy with the bad boys.

While the bad boys continue to turn many people's lives miserable, the leadership's admonitions only add to the woes of the sufferers. Ironically, while the objective media of the country keep on advising the government to take punitive actions against the miscreants masqueraded as ruling party activists, the ruling party incumbents continue to dish out lip-service only. One fails to understand for how long our leadership will take the common people for granted.

Interestingly indeed, the BNP is reportedly flexing its muscles to wage a strong movement against the government on the issue of its supreme leader's cantonment house. Was it not more logical for the party to wage a strong movement for seeking justice regarding the upazila chairman murder and the Sirajgonj tragedy, rather than heating up the political scenario for a personal issue of its leader?

Does it not expose the party's inclinations towards personal interests, rather than common and governance-related issues? The country is indeed going through a troubled period. It is an irony that our political leaders from both sides are persistently contributing to worsening of the situation.

While the opposition party leaders are busy capitalising on the miseries of ordinary people, the ruling party big guns are constantly providing ammunition to the fire by ill-advised invectives. While the opposition is failing in its duties to inform and sensitise the people properly, the ruling party big shots are severely exposing their flaws in governance.

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## China and the new world order

Chinese leaders are unlikely to be impressed by such talk, the language of an imperial power desperately trying to cling to authority it no longer has. A far greater threat to imperial dominance than Iran is China's refusing to obey orders -- and indeed, as a major and growing power, dismissing them with contempt.

NOAM CHOMSKY

OF all the "threats" to world order, the most consistent is democracy, unless it is under imperial control, and more generally, the assertion of independence. These fears have guided imperial power throughout history.

In South America, Washington's traditional backyard, the subjects are increasingly disobedient. Their steps toward independence advanced further in February with the formation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, which includes all states in the hemisphere apart from the U.S. and Canada.

For the first time since the Spanish and Portuguese conquests 500 years ago, South America is moving toward integration, a prerequisite to independence. It is also beginning to address the internal scandal of a continent that is endowed with rich resources but dominated by tiny islands of wealthy elites in a sea of misery.

Furthermore, South-South relations are developing, with China playing a leading role, both as a consumer of raw materials and as an investor. Its influence is growing rapidly and has surpassed the United States' in some resource-rich countries.

More significant still are changes in the Middle Eastern arena. Sixty years ago, the influential planner A. A. Berle advised that controlling the region's incomparable energy resources would yield "substantial control of the world."

Correspondingly, loss of control would threaten the project of global dominance. By the 1970s, the major



Shanghai: China's gateway to the world.

producers nationalised their hydrocarbon reserves, but the West retained substantial influence. In 1979, Iran was "lost" with the overthrow of the Shah's dictatorship, which had been imposed by a U.S.-U.K. military coup in 1953 to ensure that this prize would remain in the proper hands.

By now, however, control is slipping away even among the traditional U.S. clients.

The largest hydrocarbon reserves are in Saudi Arabia, a U.S. dependency ever since the U.S. displaced Britain there in a mini-war conducted during World War II. The U.S. remains by far the largest investor in Saudi Arabia and its major trading partner, and Saudi Arabia helps support the U.S. economy

via investments.

However, more than half of Saudi oil exports now go to Asia, and its plans for growth face east. The same may be true of Iraq, the country with the second-largest reserves, if it can rebuild from the massive destruction of the murderous U.S.-U.K. sanctions and the invasion. And U.S. policies are driving Iran, the third major producer,

threat is considered to pose the greatest danger to world order and to be the primary focus of U.S. foreign policy, with Europe trailing along politely as usual. It is officially recognised that the threat is not military: Rather, it is the threat of independence.

To maintain "stability" the U.S. has imposed harsh sanctions on Iran, but outside of Europe, few are paying attention. The non-aligned countries -- most of the world -- have strongly opposed U.S. policy toward Iran for years.

Turkey and Pakistan are constructing new pipelines to Iran, and trade is increasing. Arab public opinion is so enraged by Western policies that a majority even favour Iran's development of nuclear weapons.

The conflict benefits China. "China's investors and traders are now filling a vacuum in Iran as businesses from many other nations, especially in Europe, pull out," Clayton Jones reports in The Christian Science Monitor. In particular, China is expanding its dominant role in Iran's energy industries.

Washington is reacting with a touch of desperation. In August, the State Department warned that "if China wants to do business around the world it will also have to protect its own reputation, and if you acquire a reputation as a country that is willing to skirt and evade international responsibilities that will have a long-term impact ... their international responsibilities are clear" -- namely, to follow U.S. orders.

Chinese leaders are unlikely to be impressed by such talk, the language of an imperial power desperately trying to cling to authority it no longer has. A far greater threat to imperial dominance than Iran is China's refusing to obey orders -- and indeed, as a major and growing power, dismissing them with contempt.

(This is the concluding part of the essay printed on October 15.)  
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