

Expressway: An alternative

ATIKUL H. KHAN

THE alternative idea for the proposed expressway suggested by Dr. Bosunia is no doubt innovative. However, it is necessary to look at certain basic issues before examining the technical details of the proposal.

The problem we are trying to solve is to ease the ever-increasing traffic congestion in Dhaka city, resulting in enormous loss of working hours. The basic cause of the problem is the rapidly increasing city population, resulting from unplanned urbanisation. We have filled up most of the water bodies, and parts of lakes and rivers for building housing

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and other structures. The concrete jungle is already posing serious difficulty in finding space for building roads to improve mobility.

In desperation, we have hit upon the rather queer idea of building an expressway over the railway track rather than the obvious choice of developing the city roads to suit the actual traffic needs. What we urgently need is to slow down the growth of Dhaka's population and to encourage migration to nearby cities/towns by developing an efficient commuter system. The obvious question, therefore, is whether the idea of building "high rises" over the railway track, running through the heart of the city, will not aggravate the problem rather than ease it.

Dr. Bosunia proposes that four underground railway tracks be built by vacating the existing two tracks to accommodate a roadway. Thus, we shall get only two extra rail tracks by actually building four highly expensive underground rail tracks (the value of

track materials released from the existing track will be a tiny fraction of this cost).

The proposal is, surprisingly, silent about the interfacing with the stations/terminals, which will be the most difficult part of the project. Many passenger trains move over the two existing railway tracks, requiring several reception/departure lines, platforms and other passenger facilities, especially at Dhaka (Kamalapur) station.

Moreover, quite a number of freight trains carry mainly food grain, POL and containers, which require additional lines at the stations and connectivity with the Inland Container Depot in Kamalapur, POL terminal at Dhaka

other, all placed on the railway tunnel, has to be very robust and expensive. The construction cannot be carried out without suspending/seriously interrupting railway service for several years, which we cannot afford.

Dr. Bosunia has rightly identified the need for two dedicated railway tracks for Mass Rapid Transit (MRT). We should, on an urgent basis, take up the construction of the third and fourth rail track for this purpose on the available railway land and at the ground level. This can be the shortest and most cost-effective solution for easing traffic congestion to some extent. Decades ago, BR submitted a proposal for such a project, which also



Cantonment Station and food siding for the central storage depot of the Food Department at Tejgaon. Dhaka station has repair and servicing facilities for locomotives, passenger coaches and freight wagons. Therefore, the existing stations have to remain at the present locations and level.

Given that the steepest gradient allowed on a railway track is 1 in 200, and the distances between the stations in Dhaka area are quite short, it is impossible to take the track deep enough underground to create the headway above for building the roadway at the ground level.

The foundation needed for high-rise buildings sitting over two roadways, one above the

includes doubling of track from Dhaka to Narayanganj and Joydebpur.

The problem of level crossing delays and hazards has to be solved by constructing flyovers/over-bridges.

Dhaka does need metro-rail, which the government is seriously considering. But the new system should follow a different alignment to extend the facility to other parts of the city and provide connectivity with airports, river ports and major bus terminals. The metro has to have its own terminals and servicing facilities.

Atikul H. Khan is a former Director General, Bangladesh Railway.



READERS' REACTIONS



Culture of finger-pointing

This problem can be minimised also by a group of educated panel of journalists whose main job description is finding real truths behind the apparent truth. Unfortunately that's not happening in the electronic media in Bangladesh.

Dr. Karim

Why a new airport?

Why not spend the money to upgrade all airports in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet? We are definitely not using these airports to their full potential. Chittagong and Dhaka airports can be developed to handle more international flights. How many international carriers are flying in to Dhaka at present? What would be our traffic growth in next 15 years? Where it takes more than 20 years to plan fleet renewal, having another airport near Dhaka will be a sheer waste. What we need urgently at this moment is more aircrafts for our own carriers.

M.N. Sarkar

It's a timely piece. I realise that the need of a new airport is not felt by the people. Only the sycophants in the PM's advisory body and some government or semi-government employees (who are virtually speechless) are speaking for this.

MAS Molla

We don't need anymore airports, we already have 5, of which only 3 are running properly. We don't need another airport in the next 100 years! If they want to make another one, they should re-open the Moulavibazar Shaomshor Nogor airport because 80% of the Bangladeshis live in UK and US.

Sam

BNP .. return to parliament

It would be the most shameful act on the part of big political party to show their faces to save their membership under the relevant article of our constitution. By this, they will qualify for all privileges including salary for each month without doing any work for legislation or parliamentary affairs. Keeping this outdated law into action, we should not expect democracy to survive and continue. Get up and stop enjoying the dream for democracy without first shaking up the politicians who disregard the people's democratic right to be protected by the elected representatives. We can no longer afford this shameful democratic drama.

Faqru, US.

Irreconcilable differences

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

THERE are hardly any major differences between the two leading political parties of our country. Both the parties are basically centrist parties. The party in power is slightly left of centre, with emotional ties to the country that supported us during the War of Liberation. On the other side, the party in the opposition is slightly right of centre and sees that country as a bargaining opponent.

The emotional moorings of both the parties are anchored in their leaders -- Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the founder of the country and late President Ziaur Rahman. The course of politics is such that most of the political parties have their own leaders to lionise and cheer for. They argue, they debate and they criticise and in bizarre cases they create pandemonium.

After the storm is over, they engage with each other socially and talk like partners sharing a common process. They understand that each without the other becomes a part of a dull show. Even irreconcilable differences are resolved into a constructive cooperation. There is a saying by a sage: "Hold your enemy closely to your heart, he no longer can indulge in more mischief."

Yet, our two major national leaders will not rise above their personal mindset, and address and treat each other as political fellow travelers and not as personal adversaries. This antagonism is holding them back from engaging each other in goodwill building dialogue and working towards uniting the country in promoting agendas of national importance.

Our national politics has seen many opportunities when this unbridgeable distance could have been overcome. The first opportunity came when General Ershad called an election in 1986. Gen. Ershad wheeled his way into breaking the unity of the opposition. He got away with democratic legitimacy in a farcical election. The entente lasted two years. His mischievous suavity got a rubber stamp parliament in 1988 until his fall came in 1990.

The prime minister, then a front ranking

leader of the democratic movement, was holding a public meeting at Chittagong on January 24, 1987. The meeting was indiscriminately fired upon, even endangering her life, killing some party workers attending the rally. A joint protest rally was called for the next day, which was to be led by both the ladies. The rally was held, but only Mrs. Zia was there.

What is prompting the AL chief to abhor

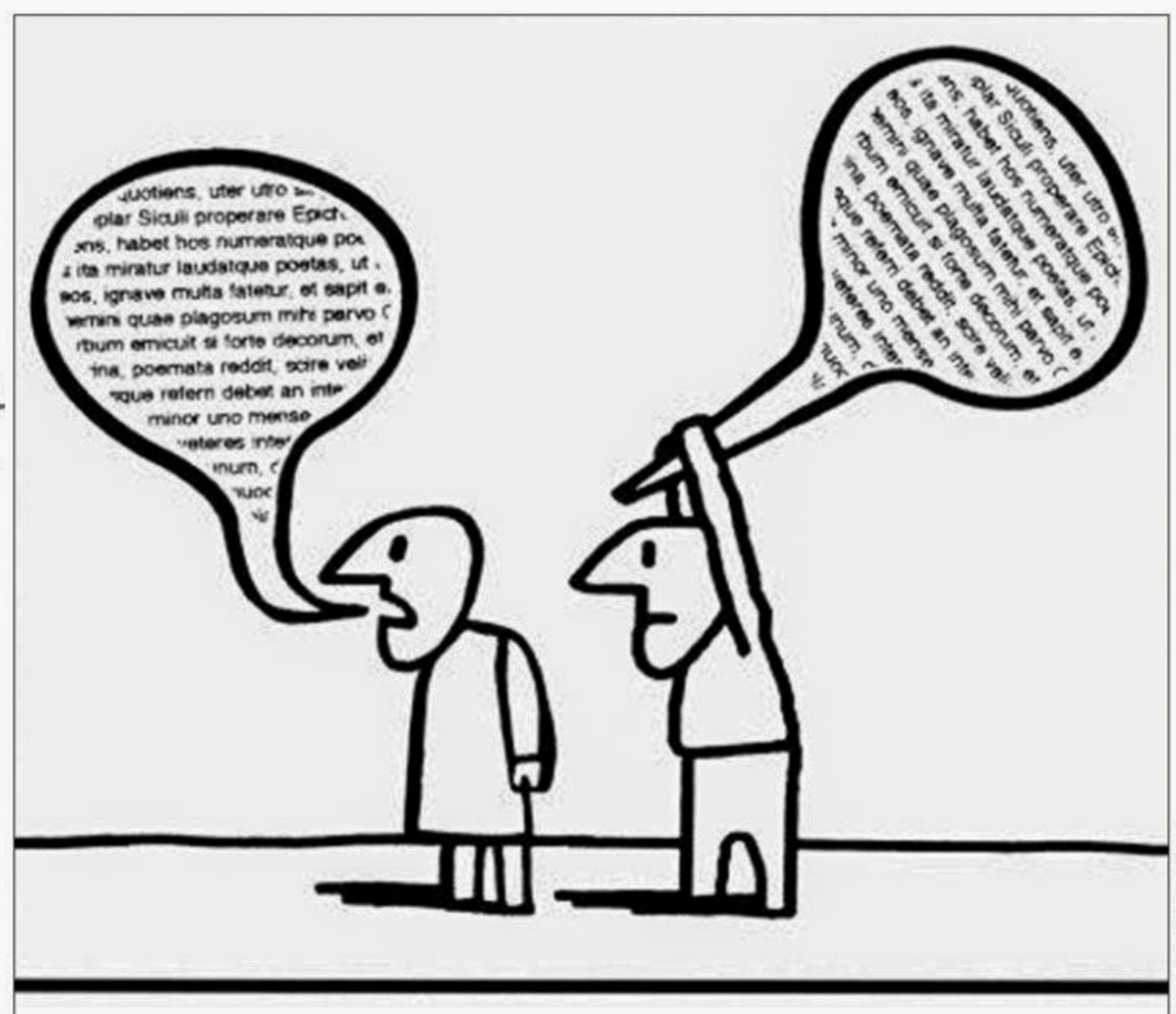
After all, politics is the art of the possible. Statesmanship is all about rising above differences and building a concord that lasts through time. It takes two to build a lasting peace.

the idea of associating in any way with the party now in opposition and its leader? From what we understand from her remarks BNP had been baptised in the military cantonment. Rationality is one of the most trusted friends one can have. It says that if Zia's BNP was born in the cantonment, what is to be said about Ershad's Jatiya Party? Didn't General Ershad remove the democratically elected Justice Sattar and his government through a military coup?

History has many examples of the oppressed sitting down with the enemy. In politics and diplomacy even irreconcilable differences submit to greater good and to settlement that may look like defeat but holds out success for the wise and the patient.

Indeed, the last BNP regime is tainted by a number of brutal incidents that traumatised Awami League, the party in opposition, at that time. The August 21, 2004 carnage and the look of consternation on the face of the AL leader has become an iconic image of inextinguishable rage. This was followed by

conditions. This will dissipate the smoldering fury in our politics. I understand that they will have a torrid time facing cutting barbs and blistering swipes. But they can rise above the testing time by remembering that those who throw some muck lose some ground.



the assassination of A.S.M. Kibria.

BNP, the party in power at that time, cannot absolve itself of the neglect of ensuring the highest security for the opposition rally and its leaders. The least one can say is that the government in power and the ministry concerned were slack in tracking the network and the activities of the terrorists in the country. This can be a genuine cause of disaffection that stands in the way of rapprochement.

BNP may be able to repair the damage by returning to the parliament without any

Among the four heroes of our time, Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi is a shining example of unbowed resolve, kindness and accommodation. She suffered 15 years of confinement under the tyrannical military regime of Gen. Than Shwe.

Her National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in a democratically held election. It was nullified. Her terminally ill husband came to see her in 1999 but was not permitted to see her. She was not allowed to mobilise her party and to take part in the recently held election under

a restrictive law that bars Myanmar nationals marrying a foreigner from taking part in national election.

She has been released but she treads with moderation, expressing her willingness to sit down with the military junta if the situation demands. She holds no rage. In a recent interview she said: "I value kindness over love. Love comes and goes but kindness remains."

No pain can be more devastating than to live under occupation. Yasser Arafat and his people tried everything, armed struggle, plane hijacking, suicide bombing and Intifadeh, nothing succeeded in prevailing over the brutal Israeli leaders in giving them their homeland. The differences weigh heavily on the hearts of the Palestinians and their leaders, yet Arafat settled for Oslo Accord and sat down with Yitzhak Rabin.

More than a decade has gone and Israeli settlements are being built defying world opinion, yet Mahmud Abbas is sitting with hawkish Benjamin Netanyahu. This is because of the logic that without contact you remain in the dark about the mind of your adversary.

There never was a better time for the leader of the party in power to free herself from the constraints of what appear to be irreconcilable differences between our two national leaders. Her party has the largest majority ever, after the first national election held in 1973.

The perpetrators of the August 1975 tragedy have been executed after a fairly held judicial process. Her political adversary no longer enjoys the advantage of her vantage operational headquarter. It is a level playing ground. She can be kind without being compromised. She can build the bridge without giving the politics.

After all, politics is the art of the possible. Statesmanship is all about rising above differences and building a concord that lasts through time. In a digital world, which is very dear to our prime minister, this is even more important. It takes two to build a lasting peace.

Maqsud Jamil is a contributor to The Daily Star.