

ENIGMATTERS

Violence after road death

RMG workers' mindlessness

IT seems that we have been endlessly caught up in the vicious cycle of death and destruction. The latest incident occurred on Dhaka-Gazipur highway when an RMG worker was killed after being run over by a passenger bus and the inevitable followed. Dozens of vehicles were smashed and many shops damaged. And the three major road links saw massive tailbacks. While we have all the sympathy for the dead and the injured, we find the automatic violent reaction rather incomprehensible. The grief is only but natural but the anger vented on hapless passers by and business establishments cannot be condoned.

And it is quite coincidental that a large number of RMG manufacturing factories straddle the main highways, and indeed in Dhaka city they are situated alongside the major roads, making movements on these extremely hazardous. And this brings us to the fundamental question of how to put an end to this.

First and foremost, it is essential to bring to book the culprit driver to book, and do so quickly. We have hardly come across news of an offending driver punished for running over a person. This is time to legislate mandatory minimum punishment for causing death due to negligent driving. And we feel that the situation calls for speedy disposal of road accident-related cases. The role of the police is no less important in ensuring that speed limits are maintained, particularly near the crossings and built up areas. And equally important is the role of the management who must encourage their workers to desist from violence in such an eventuality.

A splendid invention!

Local research must be patronised

IN a country where incidents of acid attacks are highest in the world, where thousands die and thousands more are permanently disabled by burn injuries every year, the news of a Bangladeshi scientist's invention to soothe such wounds is heart-warming.

Dr. Azam Ali, based in New Zealand, has invented a bio-based wound dressing which cures severe wounds more effectively and 40 percent faster than any other medicine currently available. The scientist has expressed hope that, due to the availability of natural raw materials in Bangladesh, the product has bright prospects in our country and talks are on with a local pharmaceutical company concerning launch of the product here.

Ali's winning the Bayer Innovation of the Year Award for 2010 -- along with Hawaii-based Dr. Maqsood Alam's jute genome sequencing, USA-based Dr. Ahmed Salahuddin's cyclone prediction technology and USA-based Dr. Anis Rahman's winning of the NASA Innovator Award, all in the last few years -- obviously raises questions about the state of scientific research in our own country. While there is potential, as is proven by Ali's local public university background, significant inventions have been few and far between. The reason lies in the failure to patent our inventions, due to lack of funding, specifically, government sponsorship. Related to this is the little value placed upon scientific research in our country, resulting in our own brains seeking and finding research opportunities abroad where their work is supported by foreign governments and academic institutions.

Market development opportunities, favoured access to export markets, abundant supply of skilled labour and high quality, low cost of manufacturing makes the pharmaceutical industry in Bangladesh a budding one with great potential, but without research and innovation, its growth remains restricted. We hope that the government will rightly value and patronise scientific research for human development and betterment.



MOHAMMAD ALI SATTAR

EVERY year when we celebrate our Independence Day, we come to learn new detail of atrocities committed by the Pakistan army during the nine months until December 16, 1971. New documents and revelations emerge to give us newer pictures of conspiracies and plans and the macabre killings carried out by the Pak hordes.

A number of books have been authored by retired army personnel of Pakistan. Gen. Rao Farman Ali Khan, author of 'How Pakistan got Divided', Gen. AAK Niazi author of 'The betrayal of East Pakistan' and Siddiq Salik, author of 'Witness to Surrender' have one thing in common in their books, that is, "there was no commonality between the two wings except the religion, the eastern wing was deprived of their economic and political rights and that East Pakistan was impoverished..."

You also get information on detailed plans of the genocide that they carried on the Bengalis. The books narrate the meetings and reactions of the high military officials about events in East Pakistan. The intense hatred that Yahya Khan and others harboured against us is evident from the narratives. We were called "black bastards" by some of the high officials.

The American consul-general in the former East Pakistan, Archer K. Blood, wrote "The cruel birth of Pakistan," giving us some interesting information about events in those days. We get first hand knowledge of the political tension that prevailed in both wings of Pakistan. How Mujib went on tackling the notorious West Pakistani military power and the politicians alike. How the concept of "free Bangladesh" took shape and how the notion of Pakistan began eroding.

Locally, we have many books, journals, articles coming out every year to remind us of the dark night and orgy

of killing that also maimed so many minds and bodies. Members of the unfortunate families take you back to the times of bullet and blood.

Now is the time to settle accounts. We have our grievances still intact. We have unhealed wounds that we carry in us. We see our mother shedding tears for her son who was brutally bayoneted by the Pak army. We still bear the ignominy of our sisters who fell prey to the lust of the Pak beasts; we still wheel our brothers around who were maimed during the war. We

That crime is committed by the invading army during war times is nothing new. In every war, the victors carry out violation of human rights in some form or the other. Tales of brutal killings, perverted acts of violating the women, inhuman treatments to the prisoners of war or untold sufferings meted to the locals are only part of a regular war. It has been happening ever since the concept of war and human rights came into being.

Goths, Vandals and Barbarians overran the Roman territory (5th

ship and the people.

The Pakistan army unleashed a reign of terror. The mindless officers like Tikka Khan, Rao Farman Ali and countless others who were assigned here from time to time during the nine months enjoyed the blood and flesh of the Bengalis. The continuous murder and torture reached such a point that it was truly hard to draw any analogy.

Little did Yayha Khan and others realise that the task they undertook was impossible to achieve. The Pakistani power grossly misunderstood the pulse of the Bengalis. For them it was silencing the dissenting voices and getting on with business as usual. For us it was the battle of survival. This huge difference was not visible even to the international powers. The US and China sided with Pakistan until they saw the reality.

The Pakistan army murdered some three million people, maimed scores and humiliated many more -- for this the Pakistan political leadership and the army must apologise. The present generation of Pakistanis should feel guilty of the crimes that their predecessors committed and should take pride in making them apologise to us. This should have come in 1972.

The admission of guilt is long overdue.

Our government should stand up firmly on this issue. It has formed a War Crime Tribunal to try the war criminals. Now, its time the government should go all out to get the Pakistani culprits who are still alive and bring them to face trial for committing genocide. And simultaneously demand unconditional apology from the government and people of Pakistan for the crimes their army and politicians committed against us. This should be our test of patriotism and show of respect to the martyrs and the living victims.

I was a young boy then; I stand witness to the atrocities committed by the men in Khaki and their lackeys. I, on behalf of the millions, demand an apology from them.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

An apology is overdue

A few Pakistani politicians and former military officers have been stressing on the importance and moral responsibility of Pakistan to apologise to Bangladesh.



have orphans and widows crying to see the murderers brought to book.

We want an apology, we want a trial.

In a rare development, a few Pakistani politicians and former military officers have been stressing on the importance and moral responsibility of Pakistan to apologise to Bangladesh for the grave sin that it committed against the innocent people of this country. An apology will largely appease the restless minds here and help restore some dignity of the present leadership of Pakistan. Although the damage done is irreparable,

century AD) and carried out widespread killings, lootings and violation of women at will. It happened then and it's happening till now. Of late, in 2003, the Anglo-US invading forces committed willful murder, torture and rape in Iraq.

The master plan of eliminating the nation was crafted by a handful of politicians and military men. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Yahya Khan were the masterminds. Yayha soon realised that the Bengalis would not listen to anything other than freedom and their rights. He then finalised the military option to silence the leader-

Natural disasters do not destroy economies

ROBIN CHAN

AS Japan grapples with its triple disasters of quake, tsunami and nuclear fallout, one thing is clear: The cost of reconstruction will be daunting.

Beyond that, however, the impact on Japan and the regional economy is uncertain.

Finance minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam warned last Monday that the Japan disaster could weaken the global economy in the months and quarters to come, hurting confidence and dampening consumption and tourism.

Japan is the world's third-biggest economy and the centre of many electronic and automotive production chains. A slowdown there will have an impact regionally.

A few economists warn that the disasters in Japan will have more impact than most natural disasters tend to have on the global economy. After all, East Asia -- albeit more China than Japan -- is increasingly viewed as a demand locomotive pulling global growth. Japan's crisis also comes at a time when the Middle East is in turmoil, affecting oil supplies and prices, while the Western industrialised world is seeing insipid growth.

But of the forecasts coming from leading institutions so far, many say that the crisis in Japan will not unduly affect the world's growth trajectory.

Economists from the private sector to the World Bank have seen no need to revise down their growth forecasts for the Japanese economy, or indeed those of Asia or the rest of the world.

A World Bank study released on March 21 estimated that Japan's disaster toll would shave just 0.75 per cent to 1.5 per cent off overall exports.

Despite Japan's extensive trade link-

ages to countries such as China and the Philippines, both large exporters of electronics, the Bank is sticking to its 8.2 per cent forecast for growth in the developing part of East Asia.

There is, however, one big caveat: The forecasts do not take into account a nuclear disaster.

And if nuclear radioactivity were to spread further across Japan, an Allianz report predicted there would be major economic difficulties and a drop in overall production levels in Japan, damaging not only the Japanese economy but also spilling over to the rest of the world.

Nuclear risks aside, however, many studies in the past have shown that natural disasters have little impact on a country's

Mississippi, its effect on the national economy was muted. The United States economy grew 4 per cent in 2005, and 3.2 per cent in 2006.

Some studies even suggest natural disasters boost economic growth in the long run. An oft-cited 2002 study is by Michigan State University economics professor Mark Skidmore and Nagoya City University's Hideki Toya, who wrote that disasters create an impetus for the economy to adopt new technology and make new capital investments.

A Chinese government think-tank estimated that China's investments in Sichuan province following the 2008 earthquake raised national economic growth by 0.3 per cent overall.

Natural disasters grab headlines and cause massive destruction in human lives, the environment and a nation's infrastructure. But in fact they have smaller economic impacts in the mid to long term than might be feared.

economic growth in the long term.

For Japan, the consensus point of view is that growth will slow in the short term due to shortages in production capacity, from damaged factories and equipment to logistical and power disruptions.

But these losses will be made up for by reconstruction demand when new buildings, roads and railways are built and repaired, creating new jobs and spending.

This is consistent with previous natural disasters around the world.

Hurricane Katrina was estimated to have cost some US\$81.2 billion in damage in 2005. But while it hurt the economies of southern Louisiana and

Similarly, Japan's Kobe earthquake in 1995 saw its economy grow faster than expected, at 1.9 per cent in 1995 and 2.6 per cent the following year, driven by a rise in public spending and investment.

After just a year, factory activity was back at 98 per cent of its pre-quake levels, according to a 2000 paper by Purdue University professor George Horwich.

Another study found that natural disasters tend to hurt developing economies more than developed economies, as less developed countries tend to be less prepared and suffer more damage from such disasters. Developed countries, on the other hand, have more resources and better institutional capacity to bounce back.

A more recent study led by economist Eduardo Cavallo of the Inter-American Development Bank last year went further in downplaying the economic impact of a natural disaster. He declared that a natural disaster has an impact on economic growth only if it triggers a radical political revolution.

But while many economists and studies predict a quick recovery in Japan, what can vary is the regional and global economic impact after a natural disaster.

Some economists play down the regional impact this time, noting that Japan has been mired in slow growth for more than two decades, and is less economically significant than it was in 1995.

But Japan, home to Sony, Toshiba and Toyota, is still at the head of many massive global production chains.

One outcome, Citigroup economists have argued, is that Japan's affected production capacity could actually benefit regional economies in the supply chain through Japanese firms relocating their manufacturing elsewhere. Not only would China benefit, but also Singapore, Malaysia and Viet Nam, they say.

The outlook thus appears mixed. For Japan, if nuclear disaster is averted, prospects for a recovery are good.

In the region, despite the dark clouds looming for the world economy, there might be a silver lining if regional production gets a boost from Japanese firms seeking alternative production bases.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 29

- 1799**
New York passes a law aimed at gradually abolishing slavery in the state.
- 1831**
Great Bosnian uprising: Bosniak rebel against Turkey.
- 1849**
The United Kingdom annexes the Punjab.
- 1857**
Sepoy Mangal Pandey of the 34th Regiment, Bengal Native Infantry revolts against the British rule in India and inspires a long-drawn War of Independence of 1857 also known as the Sepoy Mutiny.
- 1886**
Dr. John Pemberton brews the first batch of Coca-Cola in a backyard in Atlanta, Georgia.
- 1936**
In Germany, Adolf Hitler receives 99% of the votes in a referendum to ratify Germany's illegal reoccupation of the Rhineland, receiving 44.5 million votes out of 45.5 million registered voters.
- 1973**
Vietnam War: The last United States combat soldiers leave South Vietnam.
- 2004**
Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia join NATO as full members.
- 2004**
The Republic of Ireland becomes the first country in the world to ban smoking in all work places, including bars and restaurants.
- 2008**
Thirty-five countries and over 370 cities join Earth Hour for the first time.