

Water-logged capital

System overhaul necessary

HARDLY has the monsoon begun, city dwellers are already suffering the consequences. Rainwater leads to severe water-logging in most areas of the capital including Shantinagar, Mouchak, Maghbazar, Rampura, Badda, Jatrabari and even posh residential areas such as Gulshan. Following heavy or even not so heavy rains, water rises knee high, preventing many modes of transport from plying the roads, and clogging up in water and severe traffic, those that do. Water-logging damages infrastructure, destroys vegetation and aquatic habitats and gives rise to waterborne diseases from the overflow of sewerage polluting the water. And driven by sheer necessity, people wade through the contaminated water, but it is a hygienic nightmare.

Inadequate drainage sections and outlets, a dated drainage system with low capacity and gravity and lack of proper maintenance, natural siltation, absence of inlets and outlets, and, perhaps most importantly, the disposal of solid waste into the drains and drainage paths are the prime causes of water-logging in the capital. Canals and wetlands have been filled up at will on the pretext of real estate development, depriving the rainwater of its natural outlets. The drainage system as it now stands lacks proper maintenance and needs renovation, if not a complete overhaul. While measures are sometimes taken to clear the sewerage, it is often left on the roadside, only to flow back into the drains and back onto the roads during heavy rain, thus carrying on the vicious cycle.

Dhaka City is in dire need of proper planning and coordination, not least, of proper inlets and outlets for its water flow. Collaboration between the public and private sectors in developing the urban drainage system may be in order. So far, the Detailed Area Plan (DAP), which was approved to deal with the city's physical and environmental issues, is still on paper. We urge the authorities to implement it with a firm hand as a first step towards easing the woes of the city dwellers and making life in the capital a little more bearable.

Pavements under siege!

Restore them to pedestrians

IF pictures speak a thousand words, than the one carried in the Metropolitan page of this newspaper, last Monday, speaks many more than that. It was a picture of Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, a so-called VIP road, where the pavement has been commandeered by parked cars, and one can also see that it is also being used to repair cars, among other things.

In other words, the footpath is being used for everything except for the purpose that is built, which is, for use by the pedestrians. And the helpless pedestrians are forced to use the main road instead, being left with no other alternative.

The consequence of this is that vehicle movements are being hampered by pedestrians who are forced to use the road that is impeding normal flow of traffic, apart from the fact that they are also putting their lives at risk.

We find it hard to believe that of all the roads in Dhaka City a major thoroughfare like the VIP road would be plagued by a problem that is pervasive all over the capital. Frankly, one hardly gets to see a stretch of footpath of any definition here. They are either occupied by hawkers and vendors, or they are covered under pile of sand or bricks or other construction materials, or have been occupied by police box or by offices of appendages of political parties.

We are surprised that a public service facility is being misused with impunity and the authorities concerned are least bothered to do anything about it. Or perhaps they are turning a blind eye for whatever reasons. The sorry state cannot be endured any longer. Is it asking too much of the relevant authorities and the police for the footpaths to be retrieved completely and restored to the public for their use?

Turkey as a model

IRENE KHAN

TURKEY has been undergoing a quiet transformation over the past decade which is even more significant than the Arab uprisings.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) recently won the national elections for the third time, making Prime Minister Recep Erdogan the most influential Turkish leader since Kemal Ataturk. But what the AKP represents is a far cry from Ataturk.

In an election victory photo, Erdogan is seen flanked by his wife who is wearing a head scarf -- which had been banned from public buildings in Turkey as part of Ataturk's modernisation of Turkey as a secular state in the first half of the twentieth century. Flaunting a bright black and white polka-dot head-scarf in the photo, she looks self-assured and successful, proud of her Islamic identity and yet quintessentially modern -- much like the Turkey of today.

Under nine years of AKP rule Turkey has changed radically, shedding its military past in favour of liberal democracy and combining strong economic growth and social development with Islamic conservatism and an assertive foreign policy.

Turkey's economy is booming. A member of the G20 group of developed and emerging economies, last year its GDP grew by 9%. The Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD) predicts Turkey will have the fastest-growing economy in the OECD until 2017. Unemployment has fallen from 14.4% in 2009 to 11.5% this year, and social development programmes are beginning to tackle poverty in some of the more remote and troubled areas.

This economic miracle has spawned a new political class of Sunni Muslim businessmen from Anatolia, committed to global market principles but fiercely conservative and deeply religious. They form the backbone of support for AKP and have replaced the military-backed urban elite as the new ruling class of Turkey.

Giving Islamists more political

space within a democratic framework has produced interesting results.

According to a survey in 2006, about 46% of the Turkish population identified themselves by their religion, compared to 36% in 1999. During the same period, the number of Turks favouring the imposition of Shari'a law declined from 21 to 9%.

The combination of a strong Islamic identity with strong economic growth and a modern way of life has made "the Turkish model" particularly attractive for reformists in the Middle East. During my visit to Turkey

leadership is playing a key role in the turmoil in the Middle East -- as an inspiration for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, an honest broker between Gaddafi and the West, and as a strong voice calling for democratic change in Syria.

Erdogan makes no bones about his ambitions of regional leadership. In his victory speech, he said: "Believe me, Sarajevo won today as much as Istanbul, Beirut won as much as Izmir, Damascus won as much as Ankara, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, the West Bank, Jerusalem won as much as



Turkey's trajectory of change as a model of secular democratic development in a predominantly Muslim society holds lessons across the Muslim world.

as head of Amnesty International in 2004, I met with Prime Minister Erdogan and Abdullah Gul, then foreign minister now president of Turkey. Both courted Amnesty's support for Turkey's candidacy of the European Union, and talked at length about their foreign policy vision of Turkey as the bridge between the West and the Middle East.

Since then Turkey's bid for EU membership has stalled, but the cold shoulder from Europe has been compensated by the warm embrace of the Arab Spring. Turkey under Erdogan's

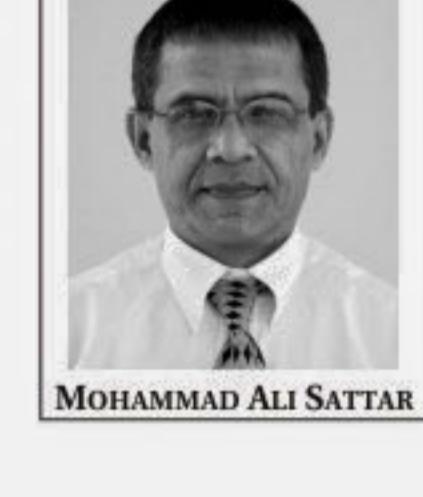
Diyarbakir." He was poignantly silent about Brussels or Washington D.C.

To what extent Turkey will become a regional powerhouse remains to be seen. Western governments are wary of Erdogan's flirtation with Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. Many people in the Arab countries on the other hand feel Turkey is too secular and Western for their tastes. As refugees flee the political crackdown in Syria, Turkey's relationship with the Assad regime is coming under stress.

Notwithstanding the volatility of

ENIGMATTERS

Not a wasteland yet



MOHAMMAD ALI SATTAR

HERE was no choice for the US but to engage itself in conversation with the Taliban. It is a good move but a delayed one.

Nevertheless, it could be a catalyst for some sort of peace in the region. Afghans should have been spared the suffering brought about by the egoistic muscle flexing of the Soviets and later by the US. In the post-modern era they have been pushed back to stone-age living.

President Hamid Karzai, a US favourite, has confirmed to the press in Kabul that dialogue between Taliban and US got underway and that the talks have been going on well.

Turning to Taliban for a possible peaceful solution to the enduring conflict is a much needed shift in US policy. The dialogue comes at a time when the US and its allies are planning withdrawal by 2014.

It's been ten years now since the US forces entered Afghanistan. Nothing came about. Allied forces are now thinking of a peace settlement and an honourable exit.

The US could have engaged itself in the dialogue long before. The men in the Pentagon knew well that the fight in Afghanistan is not winnable at any cost. It's a war without any cause, a war for which no strategy is effective, and a war which will not benefit the

US.

The idea of engaging with Taliban is a recent development. President Karzai actually mooted the idea to his friends in US. Or maybe the US dropped a hint to him and wanted Karzai to make it public. After Hamid Karzai expressed his government's eagerness to talk to the Taliban, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton earlier this year called on Taliban to split from al-Qaeda, renounce violence and accept the constitution so they can be reconciled with the soci-

other tribes do, and have a large following. Their overwhelming desire to be the vanguard of Afghan society is but natural. US learned about the spirit of the Taliban. Therefore, it can be surmised that US always had the Taliban in mind in its post-US planning for Afghanistan.

The al-Qaeda, or for that matter Osama bin Laden, was holding the US back. Now with Osama out of the way and al-Qaeda nervous, US finds it the right time to rope Taliban in and free them from the grips of al-Qaeda. With

Afghanistan, with its shattered institutions, broken economy and weak social composition, could well make a new start. Afghan society and government could be a new blend of convention and modernism.

ety. These two approaches (Karzai and Hillary) helped things to move forward.

it, other smaller groups might draw inspiration to follow suit and shun violence altogether.

US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates told his country's lawmakers that "the number of troops in Afghanistan will be significantly reduced by the end of 2014 in accordance with the president's and Nato's strategy."

But a concern remains. The withdrawals of Nato forces might expose the weaknesses of Afghan security forces and worsen the security situation of the country. Therefore, a meaningful reconciliation between the Afghan government, the US and Taliban is a must before complete withdrawal of Nato forces.

However, people who express con-

cern over the post withdrawal situation tend to forget that it is the presence of the foreign forces in Afghanistan that is the problem, and its withdrawal would rather help resolve the long drawn conflict.

His top priority is a new Constitution. The current Constitution, adopted in 1982 under military rule, is unsuitable for a modern democracy. In 2003, soon after the AKP came to power, the government undertook some constitutional reform, amending the Penal Code, limiting the military's influence on politics, and giving more cultural freedom to the Kurdish minority. But there are still major human rights problems related to terrorism, media freedom, fair trials, right to assembly and association, gender violence and minority rights. Much more fundamental reform is needed to dismantle the "deep state."

Getting a new constitution will not be easy as the AKP does not have the super-majority in Parliament needed for such change. In 2007 the AKP's attempt to draft a new Constitution failed for lack of numbers. It also failed because there was fierce opposition to AKP's proposal to create a constitutional right for women to wear the headscarf wherever they pleased.

The other big challenge for the government is reaching a political settlement on the Kurdish issue. A long festering insurgency has taken a heavy toll on human rights and human lives. The recent elections have brought into Parliament a strong contingent of Kurdish candidates who will put pressure on AKP to end the long-running conflict. But here again the government is likely to face resistance from the nationalists and the army.

Turkey's trajectory of change as a model of secular democratic development in a predominantly Muslim society holds lessons across the Muslim world.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

June 21

1307

Külüg Khan enthroned as Khagan of the Mongols and Wuzong of the Yuan.

1826

Maniots defeat Egyptians under Ibrahim Pasha in the Battle of Vergas.

1942

World War II: Tobruk falls to Italian and German forces.

1942

World War II: A Japanese submarine surfaces near the Columbia River in Oregon, firing 17 shells at nearby Fort Stevens in one of only a handful of attacks by the Japanese against the United States mainland.

1948

Columbia Records introduces the long-playing record album.

1982

Princess Diana gives birth to boy. Diana, Princess of Wales, gives birth to a boy in London.

2001

A federal grand jury in Alexandria, Virginia, indicted 13 Saudis and a Lebanese in the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers in