

SUNDAY POUCH

Deaths at construction sites

Brazen defiance of building code

THE frequency of deaths at construction sites in Dhaka should set many heads rolling. Either it is the worker falling from dangerous heights due to complete lack of precaution or it is the vulnerable pedestrian hit by a missile of a brick or lethal piece, the horrific incidence goes on.

The latest in the series of mishaps comes with the sad death of four workers ascending on a make-shift lift loaded with 25 packets of tiles each pack weighing 28 kilos when it plunged to the ground from the 13th floor in a terrifying free fall, killing all four. The question is, was the makeshift lift ever tested for its capacity ever?

As many as 97 people were killed between January and June this year. Neither the incidence were probed nor to our knowledge the responsible were held to account or brought to book.

What brings to the fore for the umpteenth time is non-compliance with safety rules by the owners and contractors of the high rise structures. Most of the private construction firms do not comply with provisions of Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) that stipulates conditions to be met in regards to safety of the workers in particular and the public in general. When deviation in approved designs and manipulation with the engineering aspects go unnoticed, obviously concerns over worker safety or hazard posed to public are ignored with impunity.

The construction companies are reported to be reluctant to supply basic safety gears to the workers. Some under-construction buildings do not have safety nets to protect the people passing underneath or provide cushion to the accidentally falling workers.

Given the hectic pace at which high-rise buildings are being erected in Dhaka, Rajdhani Unnayan Katiripakha (RAJUK) should be staffed with adequate manpower including qualified building inspectors and provided with regular supply of logistics.

Usually, RAJUK takes refuge in manpower shortage to explain away its lapses, which may have some foundation, but how can they justify the level of corruption they have been allegedly indulging in at some level or the other to turn a blind eye to infractions of law.

The carnage in Norway

Terrorism must be stamped out everywhere

THE carnage which has left as many as ninety one people dead in the Norwegian capital Oslo and on the nearby island of Utøya has sent shock waves around the world. The force of the blast in Oslo, which killed seven and injured scores, left buildings in ruins in an area housing the prime minister's office and other government establishments. But a far bigger tragedy occurred within two hours of the explosion in Oslo when a gunman, suspected to belong to the political far right, shot down eighty four people. The fear is that the casualty figures may rise. More to the point, there is the very natural suspicion that the gunman may not have been acting alone. An eyewitness to the tragedy on Utøya island, himself injured, has spoken of the gunman wearing a uniform that gave him a Nazi-like appearance.

We in Bangladesh are as saddened and shocked as people elsewhere. That Norway has generally been a peaceful country where extremism of any kind has been conspicuous by its absence has always been a political truth. There is, however, the matter of the threats lately held out against the Norwegian government by a Muslim extremist group over Oslo's role vis-à-vis Afghanistan and Libya. But the tragedy which has now engulfed the country points strongly to a different kind of extremism at work. Should it turn out that neo-Nazis or similar fascist groups have been behind the attacks, it will only add to the worries of governments in the West as also elsewhere. One clear conclusion that can be drawn from Oslo and Utøya is that Norway and Europe overall have been immeasurably scarred by this gruesome tragedy.

The Norwegian government has gone into swift action to deal with the ramifications of the tragedy and unearth the truth behind it. It is important that the job be done with the urgency it deserves. Terrorism, of whatever kind, must be condemned and stamped out wherever it rears its sinister head.

Our condolences to the bereaved families.



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

NOW that we have agreed in principle to allow a shorter road passage for Indians to reach North East India through

Bangladesh, let us see how we are likely to also benefit.

- As things stand, it will be a small fee that we can expect from the Indian vehicles that will pass through;
- We will enjoy greater connectivity with a part of India which has been closed to the world for practical purposes for so long;
- We hope for more trade between Bangladesh and the states of North East India;
- We look forward to invest in North East India. This could be to produce goods and services for the people of that region;
- We hope to be able to travel to some of the beautiful spots in this extraordinary part of India. We would get to know the various tribes, their languages, their customs, their cultures and their ways of life.

In turn, the people of North East India would travel to Bangladesh. They would also trade with us, perhaps invest here. But the important thing for them would be that they will be able to bring goods from mainland India to the north eastern states at reasonable cost.

They would also move to the Indian states west of Bangladesh at low cost. Finally, they may use our transports to move their exports and imports using Bangladeshi ports. Thus, they would be able to save time, energy and costs.

So, as a good neighbour to North East India we can look forward to a better morrow. But before we count the blessings, let us look closely at the North East Indian states.

The first thing to know is that North East India is not a homogenous area. It is not a single geographical whole. The mountains and the valleys sepa-

rate regions and peoples. The people also do not necessarily share a common heritage.

Due to geographical isolation of the area as well as its "burden of history," particularly its economic severance from the rest of India at the time of Partition (1947), there is poverty and therefore discontent among the people. Whatever communication links it had with Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) were also snapped during the 1965 war between India and Pakistan.

The North Eastern states of India border China, Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh, and cover a total area of 255,000 sq km. Before the British came to India, these states were integrated politically and economically with the rest of the sub-continent.

Putting the right policies in place will usher in an era of peaceful engagement between the people of the two regions. It is time we work on the basis of a vision that conjures prosperity for the teeming millions in this part of South Asia.

Hence "North East" as a concept only emerged after India became a colony of the British.

But this happened over a period. The British first established their rule over Assam in

1826. In 1830, they took Cachar. The Khasi Hills came under their control in 1883. The Naga hills in 1885, the Garo Hills in 1872 and the Lushai Hills in 1890.

In 1947, when India became independent, the region was tenuously connected with the rest of India by a 21 km wide Siliguri corridor. Thus, less than 1% of the external boundaries of these states remain contiguous with the rest of India. The rest 99% of these states have international borders.

It is curious to note that the nationalist struggle for a Free India did not touch the people of the North East. As

one Indian scholar has noted, they "remained immune to the process of Indianness."

The North Eastern States of India are endowed with abundant natural resources. There are oil reserves, stones, tropical forests, hydro-electricity, tea, coal, timber, rubber, fruits, silk and jute.

But due to high population growth, labour immobility, restricted land market, a disturbed political and social environment and a subsistence economy, development did not take place.

There are eight states in the North East of India. They are Sikkim, Arunachal, Mizoram, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura. In each of the states there are several ethnic groups. There are also

adopt pragmatic approaches while interacting with individual states. We need to advise the private sector of Bangladesh to move cautiously, in collaboration with the state governments and the local Chambers of Commerce as well as our government agencies, into these areas.

We must not be overly ambitious and go for big projects or industries at the initial stage. We should proceed incrementally and see what succeeds. Then we can move on to bigger projects. Each state may or may not even have laws in place to protect foreign investments. We suggest that India may also think initially of setting up a Special Economic Zone for Bangladeshi entrepreneurs in the state of Tripura, where we can park our investments.

But before that starts both the governments need to work on "trade facilitation" measures. Local infrastructure must be upgraded both on the Bangladeshi side and in each North Indian state. Border customs and currency exchange systems must be established, non-tariff barriers removed and, for ease of movement of Bangladeshi entrepreneurs, visa procedures simplified. Standards for goods and services also need to be "harmonised" between the two countries as well within the Indian states.

Bangladesh needs to set up consular posts in the region. At present there is one consular outpost in Agartala, Tripura. We could consider setting another one soon in Assam. These posts should also disseminate information about Bangladesh. India may not insist that these offices have to be set up on a reciprocal basis.

Thus, putting the right policies in place will usher in an era of peaceful engagement between the people of the two regions. It is time we work on the basis of a vision that conjures prosperity for the teeming millions in this part of South Asia.

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The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

A very British press scandal

ANNE APPLEBAUM

IT is Sunday afternoon, preferably before the war. The wife is already asleep in the armchair, and the children have been sent out for a nice long walk. You put your feet up on the sofa, settle your spectacles on your nose, and open the News of the World. In these blissful circumstances, what is it that you want to read about? Naturally, about a murder.

I am not the first person to quote the opening lines from "Decline of the English Murder" this week, and no wonder: George Orwell, who composed that droll little essay in 1946, placed the now-defunct News of the World in its historical and cultural context as no one else could.

Orwell's mid-20th-century British tabloid reader first eats a lunch of "roast pork and apple sauce, followed up by suet pudding." Then he settles down to drink tea and read scandalous stories, preferably involving the "chairman of the local Conservative Party branch," a "strong Temperance advocate," or someone equally respectable. British tabloid readers spent many Sunday afternoons that way in the decades before Orwell wrote those words. They have gone on doing so ever since.

Over the next few days, many pundits will lament the decline of the press, the rise of sensationalism, and the rampant commercialism that led News of the World reporters to hack into the telephone voicemail accounts of murdered schoolgirls, divorcing celebrities, and grieving parents. But in truth, there is nothing new about

any of this. Although the technology has changed, the practices in question -- paying the police for stories; the use of subterfuge to obtain personal information; the persecution of celebrities, politicians, or victims of violence -- are, in the tabloid world, very old. Certainly they predate Orwell.

Until now, no one has been especially shocked by them. I worked for British newspapers in the early 1990s and remember very clearly the lack of surprise when transcripts of private telephone conversations between Diana, the Princess of Wales, and her lover were made public, followed by

Here is the bottom line: British newspapers pay the police for scandal because the British newspaper-reading public has such an enormous appetite for scandal -- especially scandals that bring down the rich and respectable.

transcripts of private telephone conversations between the Prince of Wales and his lover. Nobody ever quite got to the bottom of either story. Some versions said that they came from ham radio operators, who picked them up by accident. Other versions said they came from MI5, Britain's internal security service.

Either way, they wound up in print, and in tabloid newspapers that surely paid somebody for them. Either way, the recordings were illegal. But few cared at the time. The Prince and Princess of Wales were rich and famous, the public enjoyed watching

them squirm, so why should they be allowed to have private conversations?

Nobody seemed especially bothered by police collusion with tabloid reporters, either. Also in the early 1990s, British criminal detectives searched the house of an acquaintance of mine. They confiscated documents as well as private photographs. Later, a few of those photographs appeared in the press, even though they had no relevance to the case. Nobody I knew seemed especially bothered by this. My acquaintance was a well-connected person on his

minor additional transgression.

After all, Glenn Mulcaire, the private investigator who hacked Dowler's telephone, was acting out of precisely the same motives as the spooks who recorded Charles and Camilla or the police officers who search private houses looking for private pictures. All were in search of information that they intended to sell. And all knew very well that there would be plenty of willing buyers, whether at the News of the World, the Sun, the Daily Express, the Daily Mirror, the Daily Mail -- or even at the grander offices of "up-market" newspapers, many of which (we may soon discover) may also have been eager purchasers of illegally obtained information.

And yet -- they were in the market because they knew there was a demand. Here is the bottom line: British newspapers pay the police for scandal because the British newspaper-reading public has such an enormous appetite for scandal -- especially scandals that bring down the rich and respectable. Here is the irony: The downfall of the News of the World fits this narrative beautifully. And here is a prediction: The public apologies of its owner, Rupert Murdoch, and the public humiliation of News International's chief executive, Rebekah Brooks, are going to please the British newspaper-reading public more than anything else it has read in a very, very long time.

The writer is a Washington Post and Slate columnist. © The New York Times. Distributed by The New York Times Syndicate.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 24

1148 Louis VII of France lays siege to Damascus during the Second Crusade.

1943 World War II: Operation Gomorrah begins.

1959 At the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev have a "Kitchen Debate".

1974 Watergate scandal: The United States Supreme Court unanimously ruled that President Richard Nixon did not have the authority to withhold subpoenaed White House tapes.

1977 End of a four day long Libyan-Egyptian War.

1990 Iraqi forces start massing on the Kuwait-Iraq border.