

Meeting the urbanisation challenge

Planning and management key to sustainable city

ACCORDING to the Bangladesh Urban Institute (BURI), the rate of expansion of the capital city is alarming. Primarily because authorities have not worked out a planned and systematic urban management scheme based on reliable statistical data to meaningfully tackle the problems associated with rapid urbanisation.

The continued ignorance of the issues accompanying the fast rise in population of the capital city is likely to have grave repercussions for Dhaka in the decades to come. Problems associated with need for urban healthcare, housing and employment remain a low priority for policymakers. Due to the absence of an institutionalised urban management system, public service authorities are fighting a losing battle against the steady inflow of rural migrants to the city. Consequently urban social indicators are not improving with time. The manner in which Dhaka city has been allowed to grow without planning and haphazardly, the first guiding principle ought to be bringing the whole process of urbanisation within a scientific framework of planning and management disciplines.

A large percentage of this sizeable population does not receive any city services. In an effort to build up a database of the populations of major municipal areas, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBC) has teamed up with BURI. The work, once completed, will provide city planners a detailed layout of urban issues in municipality corporations including that of Dhaka, Chittagong and five other cities.

This of course is a major step in the right direction. The unplanned expansion of the city, especially where knowledge gaps exist for policymakers has caused enormous damage in terms of failure to preserve important archaeological and historical sites. Other than structural damage to heritage sites, more pressing needs of urban population need to be addressed. Like rural populations, urban populaces too remain vulnerable to natural disasters. In case of urban centres, the fallout from natural calamities like flooding and earthquake remain significant. Hence, a detail map of urban populations available with BBS would undoubtedly go a long way in helping planners to make informed decisions.

Ban on guidebooks flouted

Schoolchildren at the mercy of mercenaries

OFFICIALS of National Curriculum and Textbook Board, NCTB, and CID police in a joint drive at some printing presses in old Dhaka on Monday have seized some 1.5 lakh banned guide and notebooks for primary and secondary students.

The detective branch and NCTB officials have no doubt done a commendable job. At the same time, the very size of the haul in a single drive also demonstrates that the underground network to print and market these illegal notebooks is very strong and widespread.

The seizure shows lack of monitoring by the education department over illegal printing and marketing of such banned books. Therefore, the Notebook Prohibition Act of 1980 remains only on paper.

Taking advantage of the government's delay in supplying supplementary English and Bangla grammar books for classes VI to IX introduced from this year, this unscrupulous network of printers and their accomplices have also flooded the market with unapproved supplementary textbooks.

Needless to say, these notebooks encourage students to set aside textbooks and resort to learning by rote. In this manner the process of their learning and acquiring knowledge is stunted. This denies the students the opportunity to apply their minds to their studies. Thus their creative and analytical faculties are not nurtured. But the very objective of banning notebooks through the said Act was to stop this self-destructive practice among schoolchildren.

Without any nexus with some corrupt elements in the education department and the teaching community, the underground network could not have operated with such freedom for so long and attain such a huge scale of operation.

The harmful nexus must be destroyed to protect our children from the devastating impact of these notes and guidebooks.

We hope the government will take the incident of unearthing the secret printing presses for printing textbooks for primary and secondary students with due seriousness and make every effort necessary to bust this

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 16

1929
Emir Abd-ar-Rahman III established the Caliphate of Córdoba.

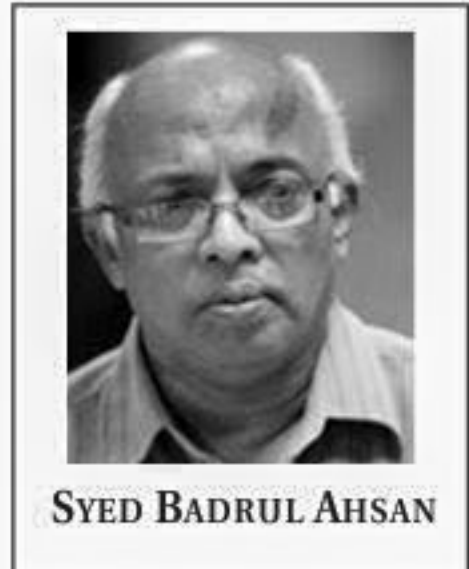
1707
The Scottish Parliament ratifies the Act of Union, paving the way for the creation of Great Britain.

1920
The League of Nations holds its first council meeting in Paris, France.

1979
The Shah of Iran flees Iran with his family and relocates to Egypt.

1991
The Coalition Forces go to war with Iraq, beginning the Gulf War.

2002
The UN Security Council unanimously establishes an arms embargo and the freezing of assets of Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda, and the remaining members of the Taliban.



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

INDIAN Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistan's President Mohammad Ayub Khan, after days of wrangling over the terms of a possible deal between them, signed the Tashkent Declaration late on January 10, 1966 in the capital of what was then the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan. The agreement signalled a formal end to the atmosphere of conflict that had lingered between their two countries since the end of the seventeen-day war in September 1965.

In broad outline, of course, the declaration was not a game-changer. It did not cause Delhi and Islamabad to turn a new leaf in their relations and so move ahead toward changing the entire gamut of their ties. What it did do, however, was to have the armies of the two countries go back to the positions they had held before the outbreak of the conflict on September 6, 1965 and to have the Line of Control restored in Kashmir.

The war, precipitated by Pakistani action through such moves as Operation Gibraltar, aimed at promoting an uprising in Indian-administered Kashmir, resolved nothing. The anticipated uprising, something Ayub, his foreign minister Z.A. Bhutto and the Pakistan army were sure would come about, did not happen. Worse, a complacent Pakistan did not expect India to move so decisively against it in order to give Islamabad a taste of its own medicine. The decisive move was, of course, the march toward Lahore. Pakistan's soldiers then scrambled to prevent Lahore from falling into Indian hands.

The war would not end before September 23, by which time considerable debate on the conflict would take place at the United Nations Security Council. India, represented by External Affairs Minister Sardar Swaran Singh,

presented its case before the global body. In Pakistan's instance, President Ayub Khan first despatched Law Minister S.M. Zafar to New York and, at a subsequent stage, Foreign Minister Bhutto. It was Bhutto's theatrics, coupled with his use of uncouth language against the Indians, which were more of a presence than any conscious demonstration of diplomatic finesse on his part.

The summit between the Indian and Pakistani leaders was brought about under Soviet aegis, but there was too pressure from the United States, Britain and the United Nations on Ayub and Shastri to arrive at a solution. Shortly after the agreement had been initialled, Shastri died in the early hours of January 11. A sleeping Bhutto was awakened by his foreign secretary Aziz Ahmed, who told him, "Sir, the bastard is dead." Bhutto's equally unsophisticated response was to ask Ahmed, "Which one?" For Pakistan's brash young foreign minister, both Ayub Khan and Shastri epitomised negativism. Besides, Bhutto was not exactly happy that the Tashkent Declaration had been signed. In the days leading up to the actual initialling of the agreement, he had been studiously ignored by Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, who made it obvious that they did not want him around when they met Ayub to thrash out problems that could arise on the way to a final deal.

In the aftermath of the Tashkent Declaration, politics would undergo sweeping changes in the Indian sub-continent, particularly in Pakistan. In India, following Shastri's death Home Minister Gulzarilal Nanda filled in as acting prime minister, until such time as the ruling Congress chose Indira Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter

and information and broadcasting minister under Shastri, as the new prime minister. Mrs. Gandhi's election was but the first sign of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty eventually taking control of India. Today, despite the tenuous hold of the Congress on power, it is the present generation of the family, symbolised by Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul, who hold sway in the country.

The ramifications of Tashkent were to be more severe in Pakistan. Almost immediately after Ayub and his delegation came back to Pakistan, Bhutto began to throw hints of a secret clause in the declaration the president had reached with Shastri. It was a lie, of course, but Bhutto was playing to the gallery. That was his way of keeping himself going after a war that was being blamed on the wrong advice he had given Ayub, to a point where Bhutto had told his leader that as Pakistan battled India, China would open a new front against India in the north.

Bhutto's grumbling finally led to Ayub Khan demanding that he either resign as foreign minister or go on leave. Bhutto had little choice. He went on leave in June 1966. A month later, under pressure from the president, he resigned and was replaced by attorney general Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada. More than a year later, in November 1967, Bhutto would form the Pakistan People's Party and launch an anti-Ayub crusade in West Pakistan. In November 1968, he would be placed under arrest under the Defence of Pakistan Rules.

The 1965 war demonstrated the inadequacy of national defence in East Pakistan, despite the glib assertions of West Pakistani politicians that the defence of the country's eastern province lay in its western part. Such terri-

torial vulnerabilities were not lost on the general secretary of the East Pakistan Awami League, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who on February 5, 1966 publicly announced a Six-Point programme of regional autonomy at a news conference in Lahore. Ayub Khan's immediate response was to threaten Mujib and his party with the use of what the president called the language of weapons.

Not even the political opposition, of which the Awami League was an essential component, would see eye-to-eye with Mujib. His programme was dubbed as secessionist and therefore aimed at a break-up of Pakistan. Much of the West Pakistani component of the Awami League, led by Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, went its own way and soon petered out.

Mujib was arrested on May 8, 1966, along with some of his senior party colleagues. On June 7, the Awami League, through the efforts of Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury and Amena Begum, enforced a day-long general strike in East Pakistan as a way of emphasising the significance of the Six-Point programme.

The 1965 war left Ayub weakened in office. And Tashkent placed him under siege. The very political process he had put the lid on in 1958 came back to haunt him and eventually drive him from power in March 1969. It remains an irony that in throwing in the towel, Ayub violated his own constitution, foisted on Pakistan in 1962: he did not hand over power to the speaker of the national assembly, Abdul Jabbar Khan, but to the commander-in-chief of the army, General Yahya Khan. Pakistan went under a second martial law.

In less than three years, East Pakistan would have a rebirth, under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as the independent People's Republic of Bangladesh. Whatever remained of Pakistan in the west would pass into the hands of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

The writer is Executive Editor, The Daily Star.
E-mail: ahsan.syedbadrul@gmail.com

Sino-US ties in times of fiscal cliff

DAN STEINBOCK

THE recent mini-deal to help the United States avoid the fiscal cliff is just another timeout. In the next few weeks, a highly divisive showdown is likely to take place in Washington.

Only 6% of the 234 Republicans in the US House of Representatives are from congressional districts where Barack Obama won in the last presidential election. Also, Obama won only one of the 13 states -- just 7% -- where 14 Republican senators will seek re-election in 2014.

In his second term, President Obama hopes to work on his legacy, whereas congressional Republicans have fewer incentives for compromise since they must worry about their re-election.

Nonetheless, in the next four to eight weeks, the president, the House and the Senate must agree on a compromise over a new debt ceiling, a deficit-cutting plan, the Bush tax cuts, automatic spending cuts, unemployment benefits, payroll tax cut, capital gains and dividend taxes. The outcome of such an agreement [or the lack of it] has vital implications for the world economy, especially China-US relations.

At the end of 2012, US debt exceeded the \$16.4-trillion ceiling, which led Standard & Poor's to repeat its warning that America could face another downgrade by 2014 or earlier. The debt burden translates to more than \$52,000 per American citizen [about \$15,000 more than in Greece]. Only a credible, long-term fiscal adjustment programme can ease this burden.

Like in summer 2011, the US Treasury Department is using "extraordinary measures" to borrow \$200 billion, which gives legislators two months' time to raise the official limit. As the US' largest foreign creditor, China owns about \$1.1 trillion of US Treasury debt. China's foreign exchange reserves total \$3.3 trillion, or more than 40% of its GDP, with 65-70%

companies in the US.

Apart from the debt and spending cuts, there is also the challenge of unemployment, which remains at 7.8%. Indeed, there is a temptation to perceive US structural unemployment in the context of "unfair" Chinese competition, innovation, currency and trade policies, and intellectual copy-rights issues.

Times of great risks are also times of great opportunities, however. If Washington can finally initiate the impending debt cuts and if Obama can build a legacy as the first multipolar US president, longstanding mistrust could gradually give way to a strategic reset in the most important bilateral relationship of the 21st century.

of these reserves in US dollars.

Therefore, any prolonged friction over the US debt ceiling is likely to fuel a debate among Chinese and foreign creditors over the prospects of America's economy and creditworthiness, the dollar and the need to gradually diversify away from holdings in the US.

Then, there is the issue of automatic spending cuts, which were instituted in August 2011 when Washington lost its triple-A credit rating. The Republicans demand large cuts in non-defence spending as part of any tax deal, whereas the Democrats demand substantial cuts in defence spending. As a result, Republican analysts and neoconservatives will fight the proposed defence cuts, arguing that defence cuts are a threat to national security, while trade hawks will seek to contain the expansion of Chinese

The US unemployment challenge is amplified by the debate over the Bush-era tax cuts for wealthy families making more than \$250,000 a year. In the absence of policy changes, the US debt burden will increase by another \$10 trillion in the next decade and more than 40% of it can be attributed to these cuts.

In reality, Washington cannot afford any tax cuts. In 2010, the federal government's revenue accounted for 15% of GDP, but its expenses were almost 24%. It is thus clear that the longer it will take to create a sustainable political solution, the greater will be the impasse for the US economy. If the bill for the impending fiscal cliff deal will amount to 1.5% and US growth is 2%, real growth will stagnate in 2013 -- and that's the benign scenario.

The US-China relationship suffers from mutual mistrust, which stems

from the two countries' different political systems, economic models and security interests. Also, the US leadership at the Sino-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue is about to change. Veteran Democrat John Kerry will replace Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Treasury Timothy Geithner plans to leave by the end of January. Though government-to-government dialogue is based on institutions rather than personalities, human relationships matter.

On the security side, the two countries should find deeper understanding on the US rebalancing in the Asia-Pacific region, regional maritime disputes, modernisation of China's military, international cyber espionage, Iran's nuclear programme and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

On the economic side, China and the US must come to terms with global rebalancing, trade and investment, intellectual property rights, innovation policies and commitments in the World Trade Organisation.

Times of great risks are also times of great opportunities, however. If Washington can finally initiate the impending debt cuts and if Obama can build a legacy as the first multipolar US president, longstanding mistrust could gradually give way to a strategic reset in the most important bilateral relationship of the 21st century.

The writer is Research Director of International Business at the US-based India, China and America Institute and visiting Fellow at Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (China) and EU Centre (Singapore).

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