

Padma Bridge financing

We support Muhith's stance

COMMUNICATIONS Minister Obaidul Quader's comment on Finance Minister AMA Muhith's position being "unrealistic" and "obstructionist" on Chinese and Russian proposals has taken us by surprise. More so, when Quader makes a value judgment on the finance minister's stance indirectly blaming him for the delay in starting construction of Padma Bridge.

Muhith has dubbed the proposals 'unacceptable' based on what we find reasonable grounds. It has nothing to do with undermining any country, nor undervaluing the relationship with it. His reservations over bilateral proposals are premised on the unassailable fact that we have floated international tender inviting bidders for the project. Naturally, therefore, at this stage, bilateral negotiations for funding will have to be ruled out. Instead, interested companies of the countries concerned should respond to the international tender for an evaluation and assessment on a competitive basis of the terms on offer. The process needs to be brought to a conclusion, it cannot be short-circuited. Because the uppermost consideration is securing the best interest of the country.

We endorse the finance minister's views as follows: 'We need to waive off global tendering if we accept the Chinese offer or any such offer, but doing the project with a global tender is 'basic' for Bangladesh'. He added, 'I am not prepared to accept any fixed contractors, that is my view.'

Overall, we think the finance minister's stance merits wider support and little wonder, it has already found resonance among the experts

Workplace safety

Amend the labour law properly

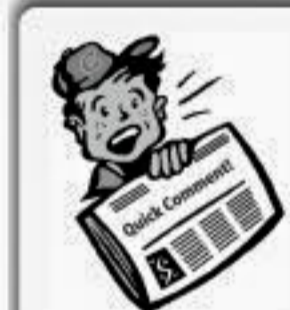
GIVEN that a working person spends one third of his or her life in the work place on the average, the implications of a safe workplace are very clear, more so in the context of Bangladesh. The figure of 1629 killed and 3900 injured in workplace related accidents between January and June 2013 as per the half-yearly report of The Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) puts the enormity of the problem in perspective.

In this regard the focus inevitably is on the RMG sector, which continues to bear 80 percent of the casualties sustained in workplace; and all this primarily because of lax implementation of the existing laws, rules and codes relating to building construction. This came out very clearly at a roundtable on "Safe Workplace: Recent Experience and Way Forward" organised jointly by BILS and The Daily Star on Saturday.

The major impediment in ensuring the overall interest of the workers including workplace safety is the labour law that is pending amendment and government approval. There is, however, a misgiving in the minds of the labour leaders and those working for labour rights that some of the contemplated amendments may not be favourable to labour interest.

Another reason why the workplace continues to be generally unsafe is those responsible for the accidents have avoided punitive measures. The fact that there have been 56 RMG factory accidents since 1990 and none of the guilty has faced punishment speaks for itself.

The recommendations of the RT are noteworthy which we entreat the government to heed.



Miscommunication!

IFFAT NAWAZ

OUR ministers are publicly up in arms again criticizing each other's work. Recently the communications minister Obaidul Quader blamed finance minister AMA Muhith's "unrealistic" stance for the delay in starting the construction of Padma Bridge. A Chinese company and Russian Ambassador to Bangladesh approached the communications minister offering to invest in the Padma Bridge, which was turned down by the finance minister for understandable reasons.

Though looking at this through dispassionate eyes, this seems to be nothing but miscommunication between the two. While the communications minister job involves tangible matters that affect the public directly it is important that he is in touch with the views and priorities of other ministries. The blame game in various issues only generate heat and from what we saw in the past, delays the actual work in hand and in turn it is the public that suffers.

For best results it is always better to keep reactions about each other private, frustrations are best dealt with



personally. Of course, we would like to think, our ministers are the authority in their respective areas, and it is rather disturbing when differences and disagreements between ministers are expressed in public. It only exposes lack of coordination within the government.

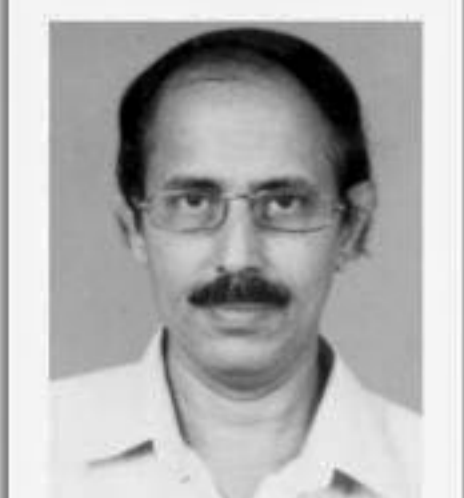
We, the people of Bangladesh, wait for actions, not words. We are good at picking up empty promises from our history. Dear Ministers, please give us a well coordinated and well planned development programmes. We hope our ministers can cross these delicate bridges first and move on to building the one over Padma.

The urgency of the Padma Bridge admits of no unnecessary wrangling and speaking with too many voices.

The writer is Senior Editorial Assistant, The Daily Star.

When fear paralyses reason

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

The toxicity of this protein is not expressed until some specific receptors in the gut of the pest insect act on them. This happens only after the moth larvae called FSB ingests the protein while feeding on Bt brinjal plant.

What is poison to an insect may not always be toxic for

OUR native brinjal or begun in Bangla, has been genetically modified by introducing an alien gene into its DNA (genetic material). The modified version of this popular vegetable called Bt brinjal has the ability to fight its worst enemy, a pest called Fruit Shoot Borer (FSB).

The prefix Bt comes from the name of a soil bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis*, in short, Bt, which has been in use by farmers since long as a pesticide. Bt's pesticidal property comes from an endotoxin, which is a crystalline protein stored in its body.



Caution is necessary. But over-cautiousness should not paralyse our senses in making informed and intelligent choices.

humans, like aerosol kills mosquitoes but not us.

Human gut does not function in the same way as that of the FSB. So, Bt protein cannot harm humans.

This transgenic variety of brinjal promises to do away with farmers' woes; they will no more have to fear the pest that destroys most of their brinjal crop in the field before it is harvested. Obviously, it should be a good news for both the grower of this staple vegetable and its consumer.

So far so good. But questions remain.

Is this GM brinjal completely foolproof without any negative consequence, if not on human health, then on the plant environment? For there are people who are afraid of unforeseen fallouts of tinkering with nature and so are against the use of such transgenic products in the real world beyond the four walls of laboratory.

The conservatives range from religious quarters, traditionalists, environmentalists as well as political groups, the latter being suspicious of multinational companies that produce and trade in GM crop seeds. In Bangladesh, anti-GM pro-Green lobbies have been voicing their concerns vehemently opposing cultivation of Bt brinjal on a commercial scale. Their argument is that the alien gene from a bacterium used in Bt brinjal may be a potential monster. Though we have already tried to explain why the endotoxin in the GM brinjal may not

harm humans, they are not going to buy it so readily. Then there are other kinds of fear, too. What would happen if this pest resistant gene of Bt brinjal passes horizontally to other plants making them also pest-resistant and creating the dreaded super weed? Or opposite may also happen; say, the pest itself becomes resistant to Bt brinjal's power to kill it!

Scientists who work in the field of genetic engineering are aware of these fears and concerns. They know the risks involved in uncontrolled handling of genetic materials that contains the hereditary information about an organism and the instructions for its growth. They know exactly where the dangers of any biological pollution lie and know how to reduce or eliminate those risks. Genetic engineering is a new tool in the hands of scientists and they have been working hard to perfect it. Meanwhile, they have made great strides in mapping the genomes of different plants, animals and humans.

Fears associated with a new science and its discoveries are also nothing new. Sceptics have strong points against technology, industry and new inventions of science and many of those are justified. Industry has polluted environment, fertilisers weakened soil's natural fertility, and pesticides have poisoned soil and water and wreaked havoc on the delicate ecosystem in which traditional farming thrived. But then we cannot also reverse history and return to the horse and buggy days.

Despite its negative sides, we cannot dismiss the fact that it is this fertiliser, the chemical pesticide and mechanical irrigation that enabled our farmers to feed a population that has more than doubled since independence. And this is true also globally. The world population now at 7 billion will increase to 9 billion within the next four decades. By 2030, the global demand for food is going to increase by an estimated 40 per cent. Neither the traditional, nor the current level of non-GM scientific agriculture can hope to face these emerging challenges of feeding humanity.

We have a new scientific tool in hand that promises to make crops resistant to pests, weeds, salinity, drought, floods and other kinds of natural threats. Since 1997, China's farmers, for example, have been able to reduce the use of chemical pesticides by 80 per cent in their cotton fields through introduction of GM cotton. So does Bt brinjal promise to reduce farmers' dependency on chemical pesticides to a marked degree.

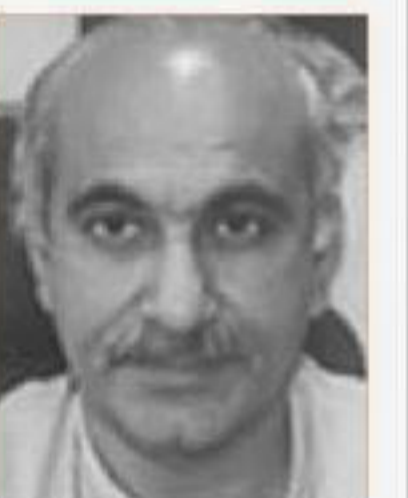
The fears associated Bt brinjal or any other kinds of GM crops are many. And we cannot also instantly allay all those fears.

Caution is necessary. But over-cautiousness should not paralyse our senses in making informed and intelligent choices. And sheer fear cannot be any good reason for rejecting outright a product of scientific advancement.

The writer is Editor, Science&Life, The Daily Star.

A history of the future

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

LIFE'S most traumatic cemetery is surely the memory of pain, for it is buried but not dead. Neither amnesia nor vengeance is a solution, although the timid find solace in the first and the violent seek options in the second. Individuals, communities, nations have to find the spirit that can liberate them from the bonds of past anguish, to discover a future in a new perspective that is something far more than a distorted reflection of fear.

It is not often that a Bollywood film can lay claim to that cleansing experience called catharsis, but Bhaag Milkha Bhaag is a film made by Indians inspired by a vision of the future from the countless narratives of that terrible past called partition. They recognise the great dangers in single-tunnel truth, for it can so easily turn a script into a game of vindictive flames. But Milkha is not just another Friday release; its bleak landscape blossoms with many shades of subtlety woven into events and characterisation.

The box office is always tempted by simplicity. Good and evil must be caricatures. The formula is uncomplicated. Laugh in the beginning, cry in the middle, find relief at the end, go home happy. But this is a film about reality, not exaggerations. Nothing is overdrawn, nothing is underwritten.

Milkha's childhood is destroyed by the slaughter of most of his family in the Punjab that went to Pakistan. Out of this holocaust emerge real people, not saints and sinners. Milkha runs, reaches a refugee camp in Delhi and finds his way through loneliness, despair and a lost first love, before discovering that unfathomable elixir of indomitable spirit that turns a child who might have become hardened criminal into an international athletic superstar. His best childhood friend, a Hindu boy who trudged to a Maulvi's school with him, finds survival through another process, and who can say that this was less agony? The Hindu lives through 1947 by converting. The point is made simply, without fuss, without accusation or praise, as a choice human beings make when torn between life and death. One of the great tragedies is that nearly seven decades later, the few Hindus left in Pakistan are still sometimes forced into such an awful debate with their conscience.

There is no difference between Indians and Pakistanis; we are the same people, with the same weaknesses and strengths. If the two partitioned neighbours have evolved differently, it is because they are influenced by their root ideology. The ideologues who inflict violence within Pakistan have not understood a very simple truth: if your mission is to search for someone to hate, you will continue

to find them. Yesterday they were Sikhs and Hindus, today they might be Shias or Barelvis or whoever interferes with some fantasy of an artificial purity.

Filmmaker Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra's sensitivity and genius is at its nuanced best when, almost surreptitiously, he depicts violence in all its myriad evil, including the many forms which we compartmentalize into "lesser" categories. The tight, ringing slap of a husband across the face of a wife who did not respond to a demand for instant sex in a refugee camp is also madness mixed with hatred. Milkha's girlfriend is dragged, screaming, into an arranged marriage while he is away, trying to prove that he can succeed in something more than petty crime. When he discovers his loss, his old friend from the mohalla puts it plainly: you know how we Indians treat women. Sonam Kapur, in

the role of girlfriend, appears briefly, perhaps spanning fifteen minutes of a film that exceeds 180. Any commercial movie which stars a missing heroine is blessed with calm self-assurance. I will not mention the denouement, except to indicate that it will surprise those who enter the theatre with pre-conceived notions. Those who believe are all, in a sense, convicts of their conviction. The ideology of a humane spirit, soaring towards the unbelievable, is also infectious, and it lifts every aspect of this film. Farhan Akhtar has put in a performance that is beyond mere awards. The lyrics of Praseon Joshi, the music of Ehsan-Loy are transformative. Both might work better in the film than outside, in cafes or radio, but that is an asset, not a liability.

Mahatma Gandhi is mentioned once, as a reason for a holiday. Perhaps this is deliberate, because Gandhi has now become synonymous with preachy, and no one has time for sermons. But Gandhi left us with a lesson that saved India in 1947 and the years beyond; and is now resonating through the world. Violence destroys both perpetrator and victim. Violence sucks compassion out of our heart, and turns it into a barren desert enveloped by the mirage of rage. Even violence in the cause of justice, which is necessary for order and civilization, can devastate beyond its purpose, as the final metaphor of Mahabharata tells us with unambiguous pain.

Gandhi wrote the history of the future, not a history of the past.

The writer is Editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Monitoring Ramadan market

The ministry of commerce has banned the export of chillies for the month of Ramadan which is really a praiseworthy decision. Every year we see a sudden hike in the prices of the essential commodities from the very beginning of Ramadan. Especially middle and lower income people can't afford to buy the necessary items because of high price. However, the government has fixed the prices of oil, dates, etc. Now, what makes it challenging, is the monitoring of the implementation.

Other necessary items like brinjal, spices, juice, fruits, etc., should also be priced fairly at least during Ramadan. If necessary, a special committee can be formed for price fixing and monitoring the market, in order to make sure that these are traded as per regulation. Any noncompliance should result in serious punishment.
Md. Mominul Hoq Mumin
Department of Finance
University of Dhaka

JUTA's questionable activities

Jahangirnagar University Teachers Association (JUTA) has been agitating on the campus to oust the present VC Professor Anwar Hossain for over a month now. JUTA activists forcefully stopped classes by locking the doors of the classrooms. Some teachers were compelled to take classes in the garden or in open spaces at the campus. Most of the teachers were opposed to this programme. So JUTA then launched a new programme of seizing the administrative building of JU, which is still in force. JUTA activists are not allowing the officers and other staffs of JU to enter the administrative building.

It is expected that JUTA will follow democratic norms and immediately stop their illegal programmes.

Prof. Dr. Khairul Bashar
Department of Geological Sciences, JU

Blessings of Ramadan

Ramadan comes once a year as a blessing to the Muslim community. In this particular month, one should restrain oneself from all kind of sins. Muslims should think of the great reward of this blessed month and obey the teachings of Islam properly.

Amina Begum
Barisal

Revive 'Forum'

Forum is not being circulated anymore. It used to contain well-researched articles on diverse current issues related to politics, society and culture. Among the English magazines of this country, 'Forum' could be tagged as the best one. But to our surprise, TDS has just ceased its publication. We hope that the people at the helm of this newspaper will revive 'Forum'.
Zabed Wali
Chittagong

Comments on news report "Sermon Shafi style," published on July 11, 2013

Niloufar Sarker

The Prophet (pbuh) said that seeking knowledge is essential for every Muslim, male and female. So this man is ignorant and delusional, living in the dark ages before the advent of Islam.

Amir

I cannot believe such a piece is on the front page posing as news and not on the opinion page.

MH Khan

What is Shafi's leader, Khaleda, doing?

Zman7

So his 'Islamic sermon' varies according to class or category of people and also from place to place! He compares women with tamarind and said "women are worse than that!"

Pen Muni

If women of Bangladesh really knew what Mr. Shafi and Hefajat-e Islam stood for, they would surely pull off their support for these religious bigots who pose threats to their livelihood.

"One demo brings city to a halt" (July 11, 2013)

Sirajul Islam

It's absurd that someone could qualify for a government job scoring just 50 while another person gets disqualified scoring 80. I'm a son of a martyr of Liberation War. I didn't do a government job, and even if my wards want to do such things, I always advice them not to lobby for such privilege that violates rights of others and the country faces brainlessness.

Shahin Huq

The quota system will destroy the country. Inefficient people are being recruited in various departments.

Nazmul Haq

If one demonstration, which resulted in closing the Shabbagh intersection, could bring the city to a halt, one wonders how the people of Dhaka fared when the same intersection remained closed for more than three months.