

Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover

Milestone in city infrastructure

THE inauguration of the Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Friday is surely a matter of relief for citizens not only in the capital but across the country as well. Given the acute traffic congestion that people have repeatedly endured between Gulistan and Jatrabari, both while going out of Dhaka and coming back to it, the flyover gives us hope that the old worries associated with travelling will not be there any more. The completion of the flyover has taken a rather long time, but now that it is finally open to the public, we are happy.

The new flyover comes in addition to a few others that have in recent times been opened, to the general satisfaction of the public. One cannot but record one's appreciation of the efforts put in by the authorities into the building of these flyovers, the result of which has been an easing of tension on the part of citizens who for long have had nightmares every time they have contemplated journeys on the long haul. That said, one cannot but suggest that there will be a need for more such flyovers not just in the capital but also elsewhere if traffic movement is to be brought up to modern standards.

We would like to note that the Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover is a culmination of the efforts made by local expertise, in the form of design, layout and construction. That says a lot about the indigenous skills that we can from here on apply to developmental schemes in the country. We thank our architects, engineers, contractors, builders, workers and, of course, the government for a stupendous mission accomplished.

Homebound journeys

Frightening tailbacks as usual

WITH Eid-ul-Azha approaching, thousands of outbound passengers hoping to celebrate it with their loved ones in home districts are spending hours stuck on highways leading out of Dhaka. One of the main culprits is the Dhaka-bound trucks and other transports laden with sacrificial animals. To add salt to injury, the setting up of both authorized and unauthorized animal markets all over the place is having a detrimental effect on vehicular movement. The situation is not much better on river routes. Going by newspaper reports, launches are overloaded with people and baggage.

But the situation on the highways is particularly deplorable. Going by newspaper reports, a 30km tailback was created on the Dhaka-Tangail and Mymensingh road when a truck experienced engine trouble. On the Kaliakoir-Chandra crossroads, traffic can be seen for miles on any of the three roads that converge there. All this is causing untold suffering for passengers as travel times are nearly doubled.

What is apparent is that every year we see the same scenario ahead of or in the immediate aftermath of Eid. It is expected that vehicles will either derail or stop functioning on the roads. Why then cannot road transport authorities have sufficient vehicle-removal equipment stationed on some key roads leading out of the city? Why must thousands of passengers suffer the same fate on the roads because authorities fail to predict the predictable? A few simple measures taken ahead of time could reduce the sufferings of the huge multitude of people who move out of the city every year.

Leave no one behind

MOHAMMED NORUL ALAM RAJU

OVER the years, Bangladesh, as one of the disaster hotspots in the world, has significantly improved its disaster management capacity both at national and local level. Surprisingly, needs of socially excluded and marginalised groups, e.g. persons with disabilities (PWD), women, aged citizens are yet to be addressed in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policy instruments, particularly in implementation plans although women alone constitute 49.40% population of the country (World Bank, 2012) and 15 % of the populations are living with the different forms of disability (WHO).

In Bangladesh, DRR policy instruments limited the definition of 'inclusion' by addressing some of physical disabilities and other trendy issues (like autism) while the importance of addressing the needs of women, PWD, aged and children has clearly been ignored, which is a clear violation of the constitution and of international commitments signed by the country.

Meeting the constitutional demands, the government developed National Policy on Disability 1995, Disability Welfare Act 2001, Women's Development Policy, Disaster Management Act (2012). However, mainstreaming of marginalised groups in DRR efforts is yet to be achieved.

The Disaster Management Act (2012) stipulates that disaster management should be nondiscriminatory and prioritise vulnerable groups, but DRR programmes targeting people with disabilities remain rare, perhaps because disability programming is perceived as both technically challenging and costly; and because of traditional mindset.

To meet this, some measures should be taken immediately. A provision in 'D Form' should be made for counting disability and gender data, investment in DRR for the needs of persons living with disabilities, mainstreaming disability in DRR policies, non-discriminative policy and planning that reflect the needs of persons with disabilities. In addition, participation and representation of PWD are required at all levels of disaster management committees. Special attention should be given for protecting them against any form of violence in shelters and collective centres, and against trafficking. Most of the flood and cyclone shelters are not accessible to PWDs. Consultation and participation with PWD in planning and implementation of shelter and housing programmes must be ensured.

DRR requires long-term commitment from policy makers and right policy instruments. The International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR) encourages every citizen and government to take part in building more disaster resilient communities and nations, which can give us a disaster resilient planet. This means everyone must be a part of solution.

The writer is Program Officer, Urban DRR, Oxfam in Bangladesh. Email: Nraju@oxfam.org.uk

Funding of political parties

FAIZ A. CHOWDHURY

POLITICAL parties need money to carry out their day to day political activities and they spend a lot of money in their campaigns and other purposes. But the sources of political parties' funding are far from transparent in Bangladesh. The sources of political parties' funding should be transparent and accessible to the citizens for the sake of democracy, good governance and the security of the nation. It is very likely that the lack of transparency in political funding might lead to corruption and practices inimical to the interests of citizens. In reality, the political parties in Bangladesh, irrespective of their size and ideology, hardly keep any account of their funding sources and expenditures.

There are plenty of debates in our political arena regarding the legislation on financing of political parties, particularly funding of election campaign expenses and so on. In the western democracies, the political parties and candidates raise a substantial part of their election expenses from different sources which include personal fortunes and donations but these are generally well accounted for. Contrary to this, political parties in Bangladesh hardly bother to maintain accounts of their funding sources and expenditures. In absence of any accountability mechanism, millions of taka get transferred to hands without any accounting in the name of political donations.

The process of fund raising by political parties in Bangladesh is generally kept undisclosed. It is quite clear that the fund raising activity in the country normally takes place in a non-transparent manner. The political parties in the country collect individual, local and overseas donations from the supporters, admirers and business and industrial financiers. It is now an open secret that the major political parties raise funds through selling nominations to the well-off candidates of the parties in exchange of a hefty sum. This seems to be the modus operandi of funding of all the major political parties in Bangladesh.

Political funding is more opaque when it comes to electoral finance. Sources of political party finance can hardly be traced as there remains no audited balance sheet. Moreover, the reporting on finance within the party or to the Election Commission is quite inadequate. Whatever reports are submitted to the election commission, are far from comprehensive and lack in-depth details. Disclosure of election expenses by parties or candidates in election is too meagre compared to real expenses and thus not reliable. The candidates barely follow the Representation of the People's Order (RPO). There hardly remains any functional system of monitoring, including state oversight and civil society oversight.

Now-a-days, it seems that the process of candidate selection has turned out to be a money making mechanism in Bangladeshi politics which allows wealthy business people to take the centre stage in politics depriving

veteran politicians. All the major political parties have the culture of buying and selling nominations. The trade off of candidates for money seems to be an outcome of the centralized control on decision-making process and lack of internal democratic practice within the political parties in Bangladesh. The culture of money making in politics is the result of mal-practices and non-transparency in internal party financial transactions. Political leaders are not held accountable for financial transactions or donations by members.

Till now, the question of political party funding has been seen as an extremely sensitive matter. The political parties never disclose their funding sources. Hardly any party discloses financial information even within the party. Political party funds are usually collected directly from businessmen and industrialists. Such funds are often donated voluntarily out of vested interest, and in many cases through extortion.

According to a new legislation, the political parties have been registered with the Election Commission and have to submit their audit reports annually. Such law regarding audits of party funding remains only in papers and are yet to become operational. Reporting on electoral financing is a new phenomenon in Bangladesh. Political parties in Bangladesh hardly abide by the rules and regulations of EC.

After the 1996 elections, nearly 95% of the MPs did not submit the individual expenditure report, and after the 2001 elections none of the parties submitted reports of electoral expenses. Interestingly, after the 2008 elections most candidates and parties submitted their electoral accounting reports before the EC.

Transparency of political party funding must be ensured so that the money is not spent on anti-state activities. There are allegations that some of the political parties receive funds from abroad and are said to have their foreign backers. Most of the political parties in Bangladesh are divided over the question of identity, with either pro-Islamist or pro-secular agendas.

Our nascent democracy would be more consolidated if the Election Commission is strengthened to the extent that the political parties and candidates are bound to abide by the rules and regulations of EC. With the upcoming parliamentary election knocking at the door, it is expected that the EC would be sturdy enough to compel the political parties to conform to the RPO. The EC should consider stern action against the political parties and candidates if anomalies are found in their submitted reports of electoral expenses. Ironically, at a time when the incumbent government was trying its best to convince the opposition that it had made the EC strong and independent enough to hold a free and fair parliamentary election without the installation of the caretaker government, some impressions have been created to the contrary.

The writer is a researcher with the Institute of Governance Studies (IGS), BRAC University.
E-mail: faiz.c Chowdhury1981@gmail.com

Celebrating sacrifice

MUHAMMAD ABDUL MAZID

EID Ul Azha is celebrated worldwide to honour the willingness of Hazrat Ibrahim (pbh) to sacrifice his dearest son Ismail as an act of obedience to Allah, before He intervened to provide him with a sheep to sacrifice instead. The basis for Eid ul Azha is the 196th verse of second Surah, Al Baqara (The Cow), and the word 'Eid' appears in the fifth Sura al-Mai'da (The Table Spread) of the Qur'an, meaning 'solemn festival.' In the Indian sub-continent the festival is known as Bakr-Id because of the tradition of sacrificing goats.

Eid ul-Azha has an impact on our socio-economic arena. It corresponds with the performance of Hajj by the financially able Muslims, and the national economy has to transact a substantial amount, mostly in foreign currency, on this occasion. This year 1,10,0576 pilgrims from Bangladesh have gone to Saudi Arabia for performing Hajj. Each pilgrim is expected to spend, on average, Tk.300,000, which adds to around Tk.33 billion (\$415 million) in all. The Hajj has been a major source of foreign currency income for the Saudi economy and an important foreign exchange expense for other countries. Bangladesh economy has to handle banking transactions along with foreign exchange and job creation to help Hajj performers.

Sacrificing cattle is the central purpose of Eid ul Azha, leading to huge financial involvement and economic activities. According to Bangladesh Tanners' Association (BTA), about 35,00,000 cows and 50,00,000 goats will be sacrificed this year. This will involve transaction of around Tk.160 billion. India exports about 10 million cows to Bangladesh annually, out of which around 4 million are sent during the Eid (both formally and informally). Bangladesh government should earn Tk.2 billion revenue at Tk.500 taka per cow.

Eid ul Azha is also the main season for procuring hides and skins. 60% of total export of hides and skins is made following the celebration of this festival. Markets for spices and refrigerators witness bumper sales, hovering around hundreds of billions of taka ahead of Eid. The money

market, which usually gets volatile during the Eid festivals, has remained calm in a fairly liquid position this time.

The performance of Hajj and the sacrifice of cattle during Eid ul Azha generate money supply, are expansionary in nature, promote trade and business, create jobs, and are a boon for the economy. The cost-effectiveness of Hajj management could be better for the economy if we had our own infrastructural facilities to accommodate our pilgrims in an efficient manner.

The Eid cattle market has been left to the three Ss -- syndicated traders, smugglers and snatchers. It is reported that syndicated traders have targeted a market of Tk.320 billion from Bangladesh this time. They will earn this money by exporting cows on credit and importing raw hides at lower prices through unofficial channel. For smuggling of cows, they are receiving rawhide and bone, fuel, edible oil, gold, silver, cigarettes, jute. Thereby, the Bangladesh economy loses huge revenue and its own prospect of exporting leather and leather products abroad.

Although the government provides credit facilities to tanneries, no credit is given to hide merchants who face difficulties in running the business. Ultimately, they have to depend on smugglers who advance money for procurement of hides and skins. For preservation of raw hide salt is an essential ingredient. The government has been urged to allow duty-free import of 40,000 tons of salt in the interest of overcoming any ploy that the salt traders' syndicate might resort to in hiking price.

Cattle traders going from border areas to different cities, including Dhaka, have to pay toll at many places. It starts from the border guards of both sides, who are reportedly taking Tk.5,000 to Tk.7,000 for a pair of cows. Toll has to be paid to police when a truck crosses a district. Highway police have to be paid separately. There are many other points of toll collection. Thus, a prospective source of revenue is remains untapped due to management failure.

A special business spree starts for the transportation sector during the Puja and Eid festivals as a large number of people travel to their village homes to celebrate the occasion.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Read the writing on the wall

With its latest 'people's opinion survey,' the result of which was published in the Prothom Alo, this is the sixth such survey conducted by the ORG Quest Ltd during this Awami League government. The survey shows that if the general national election is held now, BNP will bag 50.3% of the votes against 43.7% going to AL. During this survey held in September, general people's opinion was taken also on other areas such as nonpartisan election-time government (yes 82%), how the nation is being led (right direction, yes- 40%), overall satisfaction about the government (yes- 43%) etc.

The overall survey results show a dismal picture and indicate failures of the present AL government in all aspects. This has also brought to light why the AL government's stance on the national election under a CTG is so hard to accept.

The anti-incumbency factor has a clear influence on the opinion poll. AL government must realise the hard truth, read the writing on the wall, bow to the people's will and thus save the nation from the fearful situation.

Engr. Md. Aminul Hoque
East Rampur, Dhaka

A request to PM

The students of SAU have been facing a great problem to immediately rush a seriously sick fellow student to a nearby hospital. This is due to the very limited number of university vehicles and non-availability of even rickshaws inside the campus. The students requested the university authorities to procure an ambulance. In fact, the university authorities have been trying to get an ambulance for the students, teachers, officers and staff. But it is yet to be arranged.

I wrote a letter to this column in April 2013, requesting honourable PM to kindly provide an ambulance for SAU. I sent copies of the published letters to the PM's press secretary requesting him to bring the matter to the kind notice of the PM. I again make my request to the prime minister to kindly help us with an ambulance.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Dean, Faculty of Agriculture
SAU, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "BCL men foil anti-VC demo," published on October 10, 2013

Deepjelejai

Both groups of teachers are working in favour of vested quarters. Nowadays teachers lack ethics and try to take political advantage. Dirty politics has been epidemic everywhere in the country and is pushing the educational infrastructure over the edge.

Shahin Huq

Obviously, these ruling party hooligans attacked the teachers with the tacit approval of Prof Anwar Hossain and of the government ministers. This is not the first time that Chhatra League thugs have attacked teachers. PM needs them to remain in power. She does not need public support.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

Assaulting teachers by BCL is nothing new. The VC is depending on the BCL thugs to stop the agitating teachers. He should have quitted his post to ensure smooth educational environment.

SM

Quite unexpected from such a learned and respected teacher.

"Terminator of Hindus" (October 10, 2013)

Truthprevails53

Alim deserves to die a thousand deaths.

Snr Citizen

Truth took too long to appear, but it did appear finally. The criminals must get their share of deserved punishment, yet we must not make them heroes by bringing them on the front page.

Anonymous

It is quite surprising how this war criminal was made a cabinet minister.

"Death in desperate fight against fire" (October 10, 2013)

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

The scar left by the fire would take long to recover.

Rupa

One more RMG fire! When will such incidents end?

Mijan

Such incidents will never come to an end in Bangladesh. Greedy garment owners will continue employing poor people in this sector without minimum compliance. That's the way to become rich overnight.