

## Highways in a dire strait

*Superficial repair work is no answer*

**P**RESSURE has been mounting on the government to address the state of disrepair of many of the highways connecting different parts of the country. Reports have surfaced showing that as much as 50 kilometres of the Dhaka-Chittagong highway is very badly damaged, causing unbearable amounts of distress to commuters. The paltry state of the roads is a source of suffering for both the passengers, who are forced to sit through long tailbacks, and vehicles, which face the brunt of the damage. Many of the arterial highways of the country including the Dhaka-Mymensingh and Dhaka-Tangail highways remain badly cratered and potholed. With the outward rush from Dhaka expected before Eid, one can only imagine the amount of distress the homebound people will face.

Communications minister Obaidul Quader has promised to have all the roads in good working condition by the 20th of July, in time for Eid. However, in most of these places, the repair work is only superficial, with bricks and sand being used to fill up the potholes. The cosmetic repair leaves the highways prone to further damage from rain while the structural faults remain unaddressed. We urge the government to take the state of the roads into consideration seriously and to not try and alleviate it in a rush and half-heartedly, prior to festivities. Adequate repair work must be carried out to ease passengers' distress throughout the year and to create at least a workable infrastructure of communication around the country. The onus is now on the authorities to move away from seasonal hyperactivity and focus on long-term upkeep of the highways.

## Greatest show on earth passes

*Leaves mind lifting impact*

**F**OR nearly a month, the entire world has been held spellbound by the World Cup -- the biggest football extravaganza -- just ended in Brazil and, true to predictions, it mesmerised countless millions across the globe including Bangladesh. In terms of technical brilliance it surpassed all previous levels; newer technologies contributed in shaping the quality of decisions; feat of small teams against the bigger ones were outstanding and goal keeping was at its best.

Football has become a multi-billion dollar industry, and we expect that spin-offs from the World Cup will have uplifted the lives of ordinary Brazilians. With the Brazil World Cup we came to witness the colossal outlay of staging global sporting events as something of a concern. And that's why the 2020 European championship has been planned to be hosted by a variety of cities scattered across a continent, instead of a single country. They will use venues that are already in place. This template had already been shared between Japan and South Korea, and in 2018 with Russia being the host, matches will be played between cities as far as St. Petersburg and Vladivostok, nearly 6,000 miles apart. The sheer scale will add a new dimension to the tournament.

We congratulate the new world champions Germany for their display of systematic and organised football based on teamwork and collective skill rather than individual performance.

Given the fact of the game's immense popularity in Bangladesh it's time we take the cue to upgrade national football in all its aspects.

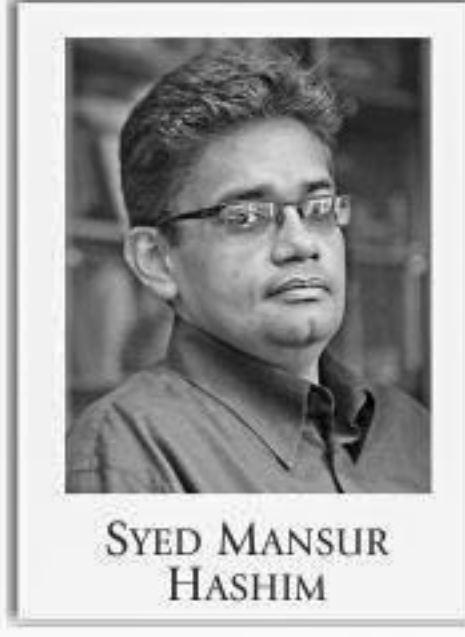
## Reward for Amit Shah

EDITORIAL: *The Hindu*

**I**N electing Amit Shah as its president, the Bharatiya Janata Party seems to have lost sight of its special responsibilities as a ruling party at the Centre. There are many sides to Mr. Shah, but the BJP Central Parliamentary Board chose not to look beyond his organisational skills, and his success as the political strategist for Uttar Pradesh in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. An accused in the case of the extrajudicial killings of Sohrabuddin Sheikh and Tulsiram Prajapati, two persons who were facing charges of extortion, Mr. Shah had a controversial tenure as home minister in Gujarat under the chief ministership of Narendra Modi. During his term, there were allegations that the law and order machinery of the State was misused for political ends. Reports of his direct involvement in a case of illegal surveillance of a woman also seriously dented his political image, but both Mr. Modi and the previous BJP president, Rajnath Singh, thought his campaign management skills trumped all the negatives. Senior BJP leaders and Prime Minister Modi obviously wanted to reward Mr. Shah for winning 71 seats for the BJP from Uttar Pradesh. For the ruling party to have someone accused of engineering fake police encounters as its president, reflects poorly on the government it heads. Mr. Shah's elevation in the BJP will surely send the wrong signals to all levels of the Modi administration. The real worry is that Mr. Shah, already known for his proximity to Prime Minister Modi, might emerge as an extra-constitutional authority in the government.

Within the BJP, the change at the top marks a generational shift. At 50, Mr. Shah is the youngest BJP president, and his rapid rise is yet another indication of the sidelining of senior leaders such as L.K. Advani and Murlis Manohar Joshi. Effectively, Mr. Modi will have a greater say in the affairs of both the government and the party. While party-government relations might get to be smoother than they were under the United Progressive Alliance government, this could be at the cost of democratic decision-making. Instead of the UPA's dual centres of power, which saw a politically weak prime minister and a powerful party president trying to work in tandem, the National Democratic Alliance government seems to be pushing for a centralised decision-making structure with power concentrated in Mr. Modi. With a powerful PMO and a loyalist party president backing him, the prime minister seems to have everything going for him. But the real concern is not about Mr. Modi interfering in BJP affairs, but about Mr. Shah leveraging his access within the government. Mr. Modi will have to ensure that Mr. Shah as BJP president will not be interfering in the working of the government.

# Can there be peace?



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

**T**HAT'S the 24 million dollar question staring in the eye for President Abbas, Premier Netanyahu and the world at large today. There are those in the Middle East who believe that the Palestinian cause is a lost cause. This is a notion that is shared by many beyond the Middle East and the hawks in Jerusalem. Looking at the facts as they have happened over the preceding weeks and months, what do we have? Three Jewish teenagers murdered. A Palestinian young man murdered by Jewish extremists, the abysmal failure by the leadership of Palestine and the Jewish state to agree on the broad points by a peace process brokered by the American administration. And it is back to business as usual. Bomb them back to the Stone Age so that they never pluck up the courage to cross the line again. Of course, no one is asking whether it was the Palestinians who killed those teenagers in the first place. The mantra remains the same: Kill, maim, bomb, period. But will it bring peace?

It took the Security Council *three days* to agree on the wording of the statement addressing the latest flare-up. Three days, whilst the Israeli war machine went into action against crude rockets. Bombing and strafing, killing and maiming the old and the young, especially the young. If you take PM Netanyahu's recent statements at face value, we can expect shortly, a ground offensive to take care of "terrorists" in Gaza. What terrorists? The Hamas leadership who were voted into power by Gaza residents, are we talking about those "terrorists"? Probably; as estimated by the United Nations, more than 160 people have been killed, of whom nearly 80% are civilians. Civilians are not combatants, they are unarmed civilians. So precisely why they are being targeted remains the big question; and where is the hue-and-cry one associates with Western media and public reaction when confronted with murder of unarmed civilians when it comes to Gaza?

Leaving aside lukewarm reaction of the "free world" to what is happening today in the Palestinian territories; the fact is that the present Israeli coalition government believes that the only way to eliminate Hamas is through reoccupation. But let us face the facts, ladies and gentlemen. That is not possible and history will testify to it. Back in 2008, during the standoff between Israel and Hamas, everything between the baby cot and the kitchen sink was thrown against Hamas. Eventually a ceasefire came into effect -- by Israel, which announced a ceasefire on its own. In the 2009 flare-up, Egypt acted as negotiator and a ceasefire came into effect. In each case, Israel stopped short of full-scale military invasion with the intent to occupy, hunt down and exterminate with extreme prejudice the political leadership of Gaza.

The tragedy of Palestine is not merely due to Israel. The failure of the leaderships of the Fatah and Hamas

to cooperate remains an Achilles heel. There is no doubt that President Abbas is not in a position, for whatever reason, to confront Israel militarily. Nor he is able to control Hamas. The impotence of Fatah has only worked in favour of Hamas. But is Hamas prepared for an Israeli invasion? Equally important, are the Israeli people prepared for another prolonged occupation of Palestinian territory that will inevitably produce more violence rather than bring peace? It is curious to think about Netanyahu, called by some commentators as "the man stuck in the middle," as he sits precariously on a throne, beset on both sides by the "right" and "left" (of centre) political forces. The longer this conflict is played out, the higher the chances of military escalation -- but can Netanyahu afford another occupation?

So many questions, yet there is truly one answer. The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conundrum is cer-



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tainly not military, it is diplomatic. And in the final analysis of things, only Washington can deliver. Even if a ceasefire brokered by Washington is reached (and there is no reason to suspect otherwise), precisely how long will this breather last? As pointed out by Aaron Miller in an article recently: "Israel isn't prepared to pay the political, economic or psychological price that would come with occupying Gaza or launching a massive military intervention to destroy Hamas as an organisation. Indeed, there are no solutions, only another outcome that may buy Israel a temporary quiet but won't eliminate Hamas's rockets." That basically sums up the situation in a nutshell.

The writer is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

## American delusions Down Under



JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ SERIES

JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

**F**OR better or worse, economic-policy debates in the United States are often echoed elsewhere, regardless of whether they are relevant. Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott's recently elected government provides a case in point.

As in many other countries, conservative governments are arguing for cutbacks in government spending, on the grounds that fiscal deficits imperil their future. In the case of Australia, however, such assertions ring particularly hollow -- though that has not stopped Abbott's government from trafficking in them.

Even if one accepts the claim of the Harvard economists Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff that very high public debt levels mean lower growth -- a view that they never really established and that has subsequently been discredited -- Australia is nowhere near that threshold. Its debt/GDP ratio is only a fraction of that of the US, and one of the lowest among the OECD countries.

What matters more for long-term growth are investments in the future -- including crucial public investments in education, technology, and infrastructure. Such investments ensure that all citizens, no matter how poor their parents, can live up to their potential.

There is something deeply ironic about Abbott's reverence for the American model in defending many of his government's proposed "reforms." After all, America's economic model has not been working for most Americans. Median income in the US is lower today than it was a quarter-century ago -- not because productivity has been stagnating, but because wages have.

The Australian model has performed far better. Indeed, Australia is one of the few commodity-based economies that has not suffered from the natural-resource curse. Prosperity has been relatively widely shared. Median household income has grown at an average annual rate above 3% in the last decades -- almost twice the OECD average.

To be sure, given its abundance of natural resources, Australia should have far greater equality than it does. After all, a country's natural resources should belong to all of its people, and the "rents" that they generate provide a source of revenue that could be used to reduce inequality. And taxing natural-resource rents at high rates does not cause the adverse consequences that follow from taxing savings or work (reserves of iron ore and natural gas cannot move to another country to avoid taxation). But Australia's Gini coefficient, a standard measure of inequality, is one-third higher than that of Norway, a resource-rich country that has done a particularly good job of managing its wealth for the benefit of all citizens.

One wonders whether Abbott and his government really understand what has happened in the US? Does he realise that since the era of deregulation and liberalisation began in the late 1970s, GDP growth has slowed markedly, and that what growth has occurred has primarily benefited those at the top? Does he know that prior to these "reforms," the US had not had a financial crisis -- now a regular occurrence around the world -- for a half-century, and that deregulation led to a bloated financial sector that attracted many talented

young people who otherwise might have devoted their careers to more productive activities? Their financial innovations made them extremely rich but brought America and the global economy to the brink of ruin.

Australia's public services are the envy of the world. Its health-care system delivers better outcomes than the US, at a fraction of the cost. It has an income-contingent education-loan programme that permits borrowers to spread their repayments over more years if necessary, and in which, if their income turns out to be particularly low (perhaps because they chose important but low-paying jobs, say, in education or religion), the government forgives some of the debt.

The contrast with the US is striking. In the US, student debt, now in excess of \$1.2 trillion (more than all credit-card debt), is becoming a burden for graduates and the economy. America's failed financial model for higher education is one of the reasons that, among the advanced countries, America now has the least equality of opportunity, with the life prospects of a young American more dependent on his or her parents' income and education than in other advanced countries.

Abbott's notions about higher education also suggest that he clearly does not understand why America's best universities succeed. It is not price competition or the

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drive for profit that has made Harvard, Yale, or Stanford great. None of America's great universities are for-profit-institutions. They are all not-for-profit institutions, either public or supported by large endowments, contributed largely by alumni and foundations.

There is competition, but of a different sort. They strive for inclusiveness and diversity. They compete for government research grants. America's under-regulated for-profit universities excel in two dimensions: the ability to exploit young people from poor backgrounds, charging them high fees without delivering anything of value, and the ability to lobby for government money without regulation and to continue their exploitative practices.

Australia should be proud of its successes, from which the rest of the world can learn a great deal. It would be a shame if a misunderstanding of what has happened in the US, combined with a strong dose of ideology, caused its leaders to fix what is not broken.

The writer, a Nobel laureate in economics, is University Professor at Columbia University. His most recent book, co-authored with Bruce Greenwald, is *Creating a Learning Society: A New Approach to Growth, Development, and Social Progress*. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2014. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### UN must stop Israel

The recent aerial strikes of Israel on Gaza have killed many innocent Palestinians: nearly 172 people were killed in seven days. The Palestine issue has remained a raw wound for a long time. It appears Israel does not care about the dictates of the United Nations. They are going on with their belligerent attitude, not giving a damn about human rights or international laws. The death toll continues to rise every day. We hope the United Nations will come forward and put a stop to the killing spree of Israel.

Zabed Wali

Chittagong

### Pay wages, bonus to RMG workers before Eid

The Muslims' biggest religious festival Eid-ul-Fitr is around the corner. RMG workers are supposed to get their wage and bonus ahead of the Eid. This year BGMEA requested all the RMG factory owners to pay wages to their employees at least one week prior to the Eid.

In the previous years we have seen anomalies in paying workers their due wages before Eid. Many owners didn't pay bonus to their employees. As a result, workers got angry and held protest demonstrations against this. This time, the government and others concerned should pay special attention to this issue so that RMG workers get paid in time.

Samiul Raijul

School of business

North South University

### BCB should not change its decision

Shakib's arrogant attitude has led the BCB to take action against him. I came to know from different media reports that many people want the BCB to reconsider its decision. Some said the punishment is too harsh for Shakib. I think those who are making such comments should think twice and control their emotions. We all should respect BCB's decision as it is not only the legal authority of the cricketers but also the organisation which has brought these players from grassroots to the limelight. BCB has spent a lot of money (of course public money) and time behind players like Shakib-al-Hasan, which they should not forget. I request all not to request BCB to change its decision and thereby set a bad precedent for the future cricketers.

Milton

On e-mail

### Comments on news report, "Turag close to death," published on July 12, 2014

#### Bangalee1971

The river must have been encroached upon by the BNP-Jamaat politicians. The Awami Leaguers are saints!

#### Qamar Uddin

Very well said.

#### Abul Kashem

Ruling party leaders and their sycophants should tell us who the grabbers are. They are indulging in provocative speeches against the opposition politicians, but what about their own crimes?

#### MH Khan

Turag is already dead. Criminals grabbed and digested this river long ago.

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### "PM to attend Girl Summit" (July 12, 2014)

#### Bangalee1971

Here is another opportunity for friends and families of the prime minister to travel abroad with public money.

#### Aasfisarwar

Interesting summit, interesting invitation and interesting visit! Girls cheer up!!

#### Snr Citizen

Has Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany been also invited, and is she going to grace the summit?

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### "Act now to save rivers" (July 11, 2014)

#### Rezaul Karim

Land grabbers are backed by the local politicians. The politicians also collect sands from the rivers for their own construction work. They behave as if they are the owners of those rivers. The DCs can play a strong role to arrest such culprits without any fear of political pressure. Some people of the ruling party are involved in it.

#### MH Khan

No one will ever act. All the river and land grabbers are the men of the two political parties.