

# Zero tolerance to level crossing deaths

## Absence of accountability must be overcome

PERSISTENT indifference to guarding railway crossings is unforgivable. Due to this callous nature, people are killed and maimed, whereas these are avoidable fatalities. Darning statistics have revealed that out of the 2,541 level crossings in the country, 2150 do not have guards. There you have the bone-chilling revelation that accidents are merely waiting to happen. This is a deplorable state of affairs and one that needs to be rectified immediately. It beggars belief that many such poorly-manned level crossings exist inside Dhaka city also, where accidents are more likely to happen due to the concentrated population.

The root of the problem lies in the gap in communication between the respective authorities -- in this case, between the Railway Ministry and both the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) and the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) and everybody's business seems to be nobody's business. The planning authorities have failed to coordinate with each other on the construction of level crossings with as many as 1,100 of them violating rules, according to the Railway Secretary. The authorities now need to provide adequate numbers of guards at level crossings to make sure accidents are prevented, especially during the night when accidents are more likely to happen. At the same time, it is also imperative to work around the problem of being short-staffed by deploying guards efficiently, with each crossing having guards by rotation. If the latest series of accidents do not nudge the authorities to act, we wonder what will!

# Stop reckless trawling

## Save marine species and environ

EXCESSIVE and unregulated fishing at the Bay of Bengal is wreaking havoc on conservation of fish resources. The availability of some 15-20 commercially important fish species by now has significantly been depleted. It's happening because bottom trawling (trawling along the sea floor) goes on unchecked by any authority whatsoever. Let's not forget that, in addition to affecting fish resources, a large number of trawlers are likely to cause environment pollution.

According to Department of Fisheries (DoF) data there are currently 225 trawlers and 44,000 motorised and non-motorised boats engaged in catching fish. Many more vessels are suspected to be operating illegally. What's disturbing is that the number of motorised and non-motorised vessels keeps increasing by the year. What needs to be done at this stage is to bring all of these vessels and their operations under a common licensing and monitoring system. Some laws exist but only on paper.

This is happening since it's easy to obtain a temporary permit under the category of 'trial fishing.' Issuing of permits must be regulated. We fear that people who obtain temporary permit go beyond 'trial limits.' Trawlers of different categories should be assigned a fixed specified distance as well as depth for conducting fishing activities. We have to quantify our fish resources in the Bay for the purpose of feasible fishing consistent with breeding and growth cycles. Last but not least, for sustainable growth of fish the government should declare a zone of Bay of Bengal as Marine Protected Area (MPA), as it will help endangered fish species to breed without being caught.

# The rise of certainty and demise of humanity

MUAZ JALIL

PARADOXICAL as it may sound, greater level of certainty in our views and beliefs has had a detrimental effect on our level of empathy with others and our humanity in general. The first step towards any genocide and barbarism almost always starts with a firm belief in one's own views and an equally complete indubitable belief in the crassness and falseness of the opponent's view.

Aggressive self-righteousness has given us the massacre of Gazans at the hands of Israel, which obviously thinks killing thousands of 'petty' Palestinian civilians is a justified price to pay in order to dismantle Hamas. It is true many inside Israel are voicing severe criticism but they are far and in between, the vast majority are either indifferent to the plight of Palestinians or have been able to dehumanise the Palestinians and are certain that their path is the righteous path. It is worth remembering that the Holocaust was not only a tragedy because millions of Jews were murdered but because they were done so in plain sight of ordinary educated Germans; it is the latter that makes it horrific beyond belief.

Throughout human history the greatest bane to progress has been the unflinching illogical faith in one's own views and belief, the idea that one cannot be wrong. Richard Dawkins is probably wrong when he says religion is at the root of all evil; it is not, but dogmatism and certainty are. Unfortunately, it's not only the religiously fundamentalist like al-Qaeda and ISIS who are afflicted with this disease called 'certainty,' but a large swath of people. Ultra nationalist, staunch atheist, party loyalist, followers of certain theories (a few neoclassical economists comes in mind) are all who push us towards regress rather than progress.

It was doubt that made Copernicus question Ptolemy's astronomy and it was doubt that allowed a clerk working at the Swiss Patent Office in Bern to challenge and overthrow the mighty Newtonian mechanics. Bertrand Russell once said: "The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts." The solution is not for the wise ones to live in fool's paradise and aspire for certainty but for all us to be little more doubtful about our views, beliefs and what we think we know; in doubt we trust because doubt shall set us free!

The writer is a Graduate of King's College Cambridge.

# Barapukuria open pit mining: How feasible?

M. INAMUL HAQUE

AN article by mining engineer Mr. Mushfikur Rahman, titled 'Open Pit Mine Development in Barapukuria,' was published in The Daily Star on July 14. Mr. Rahman referred to an interim report of the Institute of Water Modeling (IWM) on 'Hydrological study and ground water modeling for the northern part of Barapukuria coal mining,' and indicated that approximately 344 million cubic meters of water per year would be required for the de-watering process. Also, the study findings show that the de-watering can be managed for developing an open pit mine and for operation in the Barapukuria coal field. According Mr. Rahman, this is the first attempt by the government to seriously try to assess the much talked about water management issue for a coal mine operation using open pit technology. The optimism expressed by Mr. Rahman on coal management is appreciated.

We, the activists in the field working for the people who may suffer because of such a project, often express doubt about water management for open pit mining at Barapukuria or Fulbari. State Minister for Power Energy and Mineral Resources Mr. Nasrul Hamid disclosed on July 10 that the government has decided to start a "small open pit coal mine" in the northern part of Barapukuria Coal Field, Dinajpur. The mine may feed a 1,300 MW mine-mouth coal fired power plant. The minister wishes to commence building the open pit mine within three months.

This attempt seems to be very pragmatic at first glance, but we know that an open pit mine deeper than 100m is not economically feasible. The bituminous coal layer at Barapukuria and Fulbari lie 118m to 503m deep in the shape of boats. There, the underground water pressure on the Dupi Tila formation is so heavy that consultant Wardell Armstrong, in May 1991, suggested well and tunnel method for extraction. Experts in our country often cite the example of Hambach Cologne open pit mine in Germany. But there, coal of lignite quality lies at a 100m to 500m deep slope. They open a pit at 100m and then extract the rest by tunneling. Underground water pressure is also not very strong there, so it can be managed by pumping. At Barapukuria, two 6m diameter metal shafts were dug at depths of 326 and 320 meters; roadways in several directions were built from their bottom for coal extraction by Long Wall Top Coal Caving method.

After expiry of the contract with the Machinery Export and Import Company (CMC) on August 31, 2011, a new contract for Management, Production, Maintenance & Provisioning Services (MPM&P) was signed with the consortium of CMC and Xuzhou Coal Mining Group Corporation (XMC). The Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Limited (BCMCL) website has the following extraction figures.

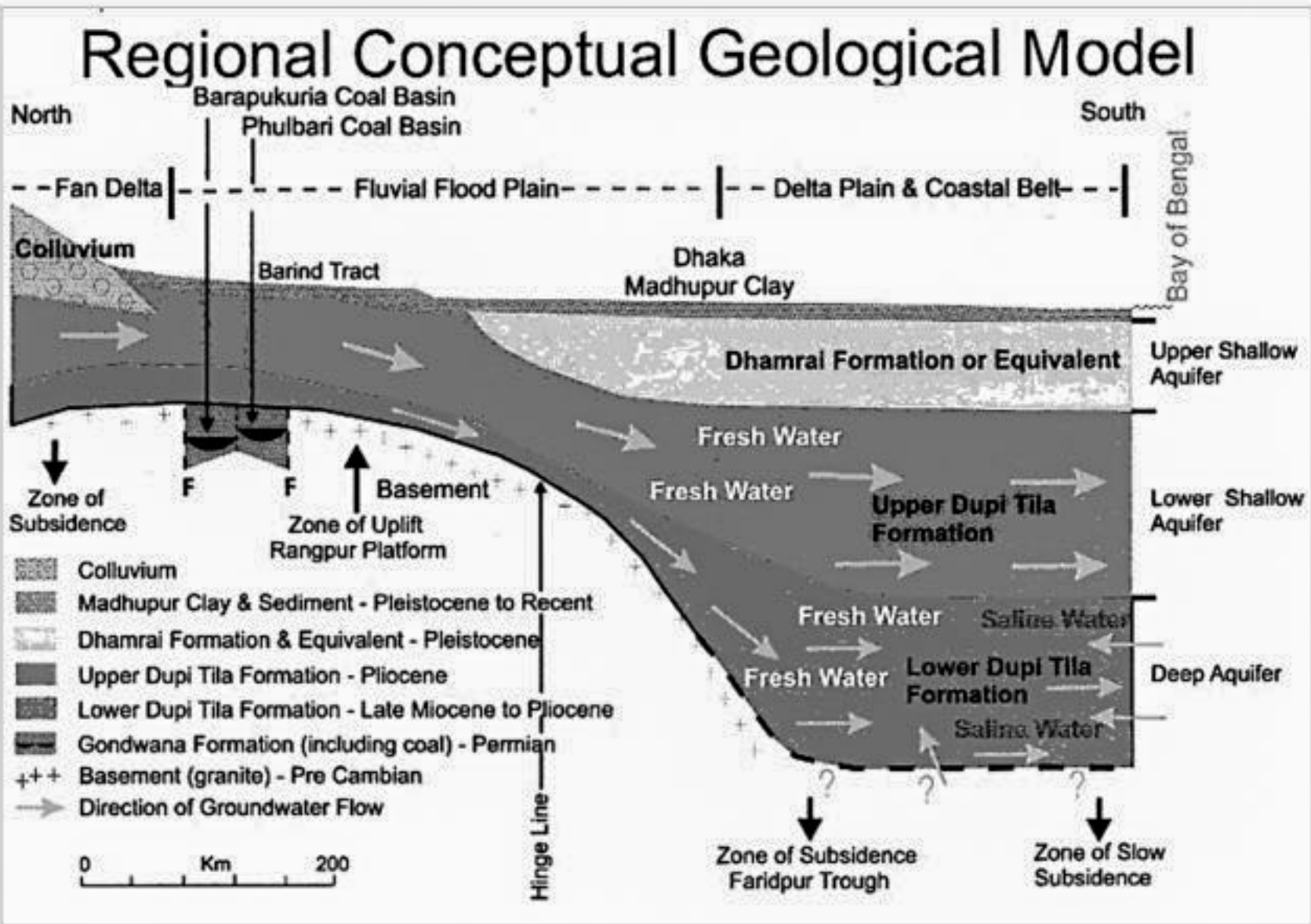


Figure 1: The Dupi Tila Formation & Coal Fields (Bangladesh Geological Society).

Financial Year	Roadway Development (M)	Total Extraction (MT)
Upto June 2004	--	91,037.761
2004-2005	--	87,142.843
2005-2006	972.84	3,03,015.923
2006-2007	2,579.70	3,88,376.474
2007-2008	4,551.60	6,77,097.701
2008-2009	2,826.14	8,27,845.074
2009-2010	2,253.20	7,04,567.760
2010-2011	2,506.70	6,66,635.390
2011-2012	4,587.10	8,61,071.650
Total	20,277.28	46,06,790.580

The Barapukuria coal deposit lies in six layers between sandstone and mudstone, of which one layer is 36m thick. This bituminous coal has only 0.53% sulphur, so it is ideal for power generation. But the extraction method applied has some drawbacks; it does not sand-fill the empty chambers, as a result of which land subsidence can occur. A large area in Hamidpur Union is now under water due to such subsidence. Secondly, not more than 50% coal can be extracted by long tunnel method. To extract full amount of coal from the deposit, open pit mining is suggested. IWM interim study finds open pit mining is possible at Barapukuria. But, is it really possible practically?

We, the environmental activists, always suggest that four steps be taken during studies for any type of development project: Economic Viability, Technical Feasibility, Social Acceptability, and Environmental Impact. Open pit mining at Barapukuria may look economically viable; but its land cost, excavation cost, dewatering cost, operation cost etc., may exceed the benefit to be achieved. IWM may find 344 million cubic meters of water dewatering per year possible by calculation, but may not be possible in reality. For social acceptability, what alternate livelihood and compensation are offered to the to-be-affected people? Finally, we cannot ignore the multifarious environmental impacts. If all those studies are done properly and made open to the public, there remains no ambiguity; and then only, a project will not bring disaster but joy to all stakeholders.

The writer is Chairman, Institute of Water & Environment.  
Email: minamul@gmail.com

# Israel: Winning yet losing

MUNIR AKRAM

THERE is justified global outrage at the slaughter and maiming of innocent children, women and men in Israel's latest ruthless military campaign in Gaza. As a Muslim, it is difficult not to feel ashamed at the indifference of most Arab and Islamic governments to the suffering of the beleaguered Gazans.

This fourth Israeli incursion into Gaza in 10 years has once again demonstrated Israel's considerable military prowess. Hamas' asymmetric resistance is heroic but militarily puny. Israel's sense of impunity has been enhanced by the preoccupation of its Arab neighbours with preserving themselves from Islamist movements within their own polities. Any concessions Hamas secures will be on humanitarian grounds and at a high cost.

Yet, Israel's military success is unlikely to yield sustainable security. There are four broad trends which portend more difficult times for the Jewish state.

First, Israeli extremism. Over the past decade, Jewish religious parties and the 250,000 Israeli settlers on the West Bank have emerged ascendant in Israeli politics. They believe the occupied territories are part of historical Israel - Judea and Samaria -- and cannot be returned to the Palestinians. Today, Prime Minister Netanyahu, when compared to the likes of Foreign Minister Lieberman, is considered a 'dove'!

No Israeli leader is bold enough to advocate the removal of the West Bank settlements. On the contrary, and despite US pressure, Netanyahu has allowed additional settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Palestinian towns, villages and communities there are like apartheid South Africa's 'bantustans' -- separated by increasingly large Jewish settlements connected to each other and 'mainland' Israel by a network of roads closed to the Palestinians. Meanwhile, Gaza remains blockaded by Israel (and Egypt).

As a consequence, there are diminishing prospects for the two-state solution that all have agreed is the only basis for a settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Since Israel will not oblige the settlers to leave the West Bank, not accept East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state, nor agree to the return of Palestinian refugees expelled in past conflicts, a viable and geographically contiguous Palestinian state appears impossible to achieve. Israeli occupation is thus likely to continue indefinitely.

Second, demography. Israel will have to rule over a Palestinian population which is growing rapidly; while Jewish immigration to Israel has petered out after the post Cold War inflow of Russian and East European Jews. Controlling a growing, hostile and increasingly radicalised Palestinian population will become, literally, a bloody business.

There is a body of opinion emerging among the Palestinians which holds that a two-state solution is no longer viable and thus Palestinians should focus instead on securing equal 'democratic' rights within the (Israeli) state. Reportedly, even the Fatah leader, Mahmoud Abbas' son, subscribes to this view. Were this view to gain wide support among the Palestinians, it would revive the original debate at the time of Israel's creation -- whether it should be an exclusively Jewish state or one in which

Palestinians and Jews live together with equal rights.

Given that Palestinians would be in the majority in a unitary state, Israeli leaders would be hard put to respond to such demands if they cannot offer the two-state option.

Third, Palestinian and Arab radicalisation. The plight of the Palestinian people is often, and rightly, cited as the core cause for the initial rise of religious radicalism in the Arab and Muslim world. Over the past 70 years, Israel has faced ever more ideologically 'difficult' adversaries: initially its neighbouring Arab states; then the PLO and Fatah, now Hamas.

Israel's declared aim is to destroy Hamas, militarily and politically. The present regime in Cairo shares this objective because of Hamas' affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood. If Hamas is discredited in the current or subsequent confrontations, influence over the Palestinians is unlikely to revert to Fatah; it is more likely to move to even more 'radical' groups, similar to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) or al-Qaeda.

Today, ISIS is not only at the gates of Baghdad but also on Israel's border with Syria. It has gained adherents in Jordan and Lebanon. Egypt's suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood may result in the rise of more militant ISIS-like groups operating in the Sinai. At some stage, such extremist groups could turn from pursuing their largely sectarian wars in Syria and Iraq to promoting the 'sacred' cause of the Arab and Islamic world: the 'liberation' of Palestine.

In sum, Israel may have to deal with a growing and increasingly militant Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank which receives active cross-border support from militant groups located in every one of its Arab neighbours. As evident in Gaza, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, it will not be easy for Israel to put down such an ideologically motivated and battle-hardened insurgency.

Fourth, eroding Western support. Israel has been justifiably condemned for its disproportionate response to the largely ineffective rockets fired by Hamas from Gaza. The images of dead and wounded Palestinian children have stirred revulsion even among Israel's staunchest Western supporters. A US poll indicates sharply reduced support for Israel among younger Americans.

If the Israeli occupation of the West Bank continues, if Gaza-like operations become endemic, if future conflicts with the more militant Palestinian groups become even more brutal, Israel is likely to see the hitherto unconditional Western support erode dramatically. Israel could face international isolation and penalties from which it has been protected so far.

Israel's leaders should look into the future. Do they want to consign their people, the Palestinians and the region to never-ending violence and war?

There is a narrow window of opportunity to reverse their disastrous course and agree to the concessions required to achieve a two-state solution. Fatah will obviously accept such a solution. Despite its formal refusal to recognise Israel, Hamas displayed pragmatism in the past and would accept a fair settlement too.

The writer is a former Pakistan ambassador to the UN.  
© Dawn (Pakistan). All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement with Asia News Network.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

## Who to blame for level-crossing tragedy?

The tragedy that struck the newly-wed couple at the Barobazar level crossing in Jhenidah was avoidable! The gateman should be held accountable for this as he was not present there at the time of the accident. Nowadays, this sort of train accidents has increased.

There are 389 level crossings in the country which are poorly-manned and there is no guard at about 2,150 level crossings, according to news reports. The government must take necessary steps to recruit full-time gatemen at all the level crossings in order to stop such fatal accidents from happening. We do not want to see these tragedies over and over again.

Jannatul Ferdous Usha  
Holy Cross College, Dhaka

## Palestinians bleed, world stands by

The pleasure of my Eid has been turned into pain with the spilling of Palestinian children's blood by Israel. Surprisingly, the world leaders have not yet taken any pragmatic step to stop Israeli barbarism. The so-called saviour of the world USA and, its greatest ally UK, are still silent as if nothing has happened to the poor and helpless Palestinians. It seems to me that Muslim leaders are not interested to talk about this issue. This nonchalant attitude of the Muslim leaders is nothing but sheer stupidity. Isn't there anybody to stand beside the oppressed?

Md. Musfikur Rahman Jony  
MPH student  
State University of Bangladesh  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

## Comments on news report, "PM's firm no to dialogue," published on July 27, 2014

### Deep Purple Blue

A pack of lies and half truths laced with unreasonable stubbornness.

### Dr. Ahsan Habib

If BNP creates lawlessness, it is the duty of the law enforcers to face them. Why is the PM publicly giving authority to a group of people to violate the laws of the country?

### Deep Purple Blue

And why would The Daily Star reporter be denied entry to her press conference? After all, The Daily Star is the leading English language newspaper in the country.

### Mortuza Huq

Too much false pride is the main cause of shameful fall.

### Hafeejul Alam

Bangladesh is surging forward economically and socially which have been confirmed by the United Nations itself. Then what's the necessity of dialogue with BNP right now? Is it for getting the BNP high-ups to the threshold of power right away? If so, be rest assured that the people of Bangladesh are not that foolish. If BNP at all wants to get to power, it has to prove that it can deliver better than AL.

\*\*\*\*\*

## "Biman to team up with foreign companies" (July 26, 2014)

### Supermono

It is not just the luggage that needs to be treated better. The rudeness and unprofessionalism of the Biman staff is a national disgrace.

\*\*\*\*\*

## "Newspapers safe" (July 25, 2014)

### Deep Purple Blue

The current information minister does not sound credible at all. Reading through the developments, it is evident that the government is trying to gag the media as was done during the Baksal days.

In situations where governments are formed following arranged elections, there is a natural propensity towards authoritarianism and that is what is happening now. The media and the civil society must be alert.

### Aasfisarwar

Press freedom is synonymous with democracy, and therefore, any attempt to muzzle it under any pretext will be a violation of the clauses of the constitution that guarantee the protection of the fundamental rights of the citizens.

\*\*\*\*\*

## "Anguished father behind the story" (July 26, 2014)

### SY

Thank you, Prof. Dr Hanif; you are truly our hero. Also thanks to the media for doing the right thing this time.

### Mohiuddin Maswood

Yes, they should be hanged; this punishment is not enough for their crime.