

Stop trivialising DAP

City's future under threat

NOTHING is more distressful when the authorities seemingly choose to ignore the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) for Dhaka. Judging by what has been printed in newspapers, we believe that some 47 projects have been approved this week that allow for residential plots to be built up on restricted zones like flood flow areas, water bodies and agricultural lands. Indeed, if that be the case we wonder if violation of DAP is being resorted to in the name of development activities. Then obviously the price for such deviation will have to be borne by the city, and ultimately its residents.

It has to be noted that the current DAP is valid till 2015, after which a new version is supposed to come into effect. We are led to believe that the changes being proposed to the new DAP could open up opportunities for land grabbers to do as they will in the hitherto restricted zones. In fact, such intentions are already manifesting themselves presently as a number of housing projects have been approved by relaxing DAP rules.

While we fully appreciate that the capital city needs to be expanded to make it liveable, such expansion must be in accordance with DAP's original principles. Filling up of restricted zones in the name of city improvement and expansion cannot come at the expense of the city's sustainability. We endorse the environmentalists' concern for any ill-judged revision of the DAP to suit the purposes of vested interests of which the government should be wary. The government must hold the violators of DAP to account keeping the city's interest uppermost in its mind.

Glimmer of peace in Gaza

Getting to the root cause of conflict imperative

WE, along with the rest of the peace-loving people of the world, welcome the long-term ceasefire agreement finally reached between Israel and Hamas, the two hostile sides in the 50-day Gaza war. We believe both the Israeli leadership and Hamas representing the Palestinians in Gaza have come to realise the senselessness of the protracted hostilities. These claimed around 2200 lives, most of them civilians including children on the Palestinian side and some 69 people, five of them civilians on the Israeli side. The monstrosities of the war become patently evident from the mind-boggling havoc wreaked by Israeli aerial and artillery bombardments carried out on buildings and other physical infrastructures in Gaza.

Now that the stage has been set for a relative calm, it will be in the greater interest of the parties involved to sustain the Egypt-brokered truce, as promised by both sides. Needless to say, the ceasefire will provide the warring sides the necessary breathing space to think out ways to work for establishing durable peace in the area. But there is still reason for caution given the fragile nature of several other earlier ceasefire deals, which came to a naught a few hours after they were agreed upon. So, to avoid pitfalls the peace-makers would do well to take heed of UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon's warning in this regard: "any peace effort that does not tackle the root causes of the crisis will do little more than set the stage for the next cycle of violence." And for such effort to succeed, the world powers, the US, in particular, will have to extend their fullest coop-

Arrival of sovereign bonds

FAARIA TASIN

THE news of Bangladesh's imminent international sovereign bond issuance has caught the attention of plenty. The world's leading investment bank- Goldman Sachs- is expected to advise the government on its maiden sovereign bond issuance and believes that Bangladesh can raise \$2-\$3 billion from the international market through such bonds.

Firstly, what are sovereign bonds and how can they help? Sovereign bonds are debt securities issued by national governments. These bonds can be denominated in either a local or global currency like the US dollar or euro.

The proceeds from bond sales can be used to fund governments' day-to-day operations, building a country's infrastructure and the like. For Bangladesh, the proceeds can be used for several reasons- to finance a major infrastructure project (for example, Padma bridge), to finance a gap in the fiscal budget (where government's expenditure is higher than its revenue), to finance an external account deficit (when a country imports more than it exports) or to finance investments for future economic growth. Sovereign bonds, if managed the right way, can be used for the country's economic development; it can help to divert government resources to where it is needed the most. For instance, we know that education is a necessary component for the economic development of Bangladesh; however the sector is suffering from inadequate funds.

Bangladesh's education expenditure as a proportion GDP has been hovering around 2%, compared to Malaysia (5.8%), Thailand (3.8%), China (4%). The government, on the other hand, has decided to finish Padma Bridge through domestic financing with an allocation of Tk 8,100 crore (approx US\$1 billion). In instances like these, proceeds from sovereign bonds can be used to finance large infrastructural projects like the Padma Bridge which can free the public resources to be used on sectors such as education or health. Though sovereign bonds may sound like a definite solution for economic development, it can act as a double-edged sword. Mismanagement of proceeds can eat into these funds which can ultimately defy the purpose of development.

However, what is important to remember as Bangladesh takes a plunge into the international markets, is that it is not only the lack of foreign capital that is constraining the country's growth- rather it is low levels of local investment opportunities and weak business confidence among others. Given the wide range of investment opportunities available to investors globally, there will be no incentive for them to stay invested in Bangladesh, unless the country delivers good policies and performs well.

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Shameful political rhetoric: When will it end?

STRATEGICALLY
SPEAKING



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

Father of the Nation, is not only unwarranted and unfortunate, but it also demeans the person who is making them. That, however, does not mean that Bangabandhu is above any kind of criticism. One is entitled to criticise his policies and his politics, and so is Tareq Rahman, but that should not cross the bounds of civility nor be laced with venom that one noticed in some of his comments with regard to Mujib. And I would like to think that my feeling is shared by most of the many that do not belong to any of the two 'gharanas'.

Having said that, one is constrained to point out that the ruling party has contributed, very significantly, to the round of ugly rhetoric that one wishes not to have heard at all. If uncharitable remarks are being hurled at Bangabandhu the Awami League also must share a part of the blame for it. Listening to invectives spewing from leaders of the two parties leaves one with very little hope for any civil interaction, let alone serious engagement and discourse, between the two. One notices with anxiety, too, that the intensity of the tirades grows in volume and filthy contents during some particular months.

Come the month of August there is a race on the part of the leaders at all levels and of different cadres of the Awami League to endear themselves to the party leader by frothing in the mouth in extolling the late lamented Bangabandhu. While that is only to be expected in a political system which is one-person centered, what causes further deepening of the inter-party animosity, and consequently the political atmosphere in the country, is the accusations, counter accusation and in general the attempt to run down one another in such despicable manner.

The behaviour of some of our politicians admits of no excuse. When will this practice end? When can we expect our politicians to talk with deference about their counterparts?

One must admit that there is a question mark about Zia's alleged remarks and actions following the assassination of Mujib, and there are allegations of his complicity in the killings. Let history be the best judge particularly when the man is not there to defend himself. But we have noticed with awe the vile and derogatory manner in which Begum Zia and her family have been attacked and the entire lot painted as being the murderers of Mujib. Filth begets filth and unfortunately it is the public that has to bear such a situation.

However, the culture of ugly rhetoric is not new. One has heard the leaders of ruling party not in the very distant past using vile language against public figures. Even the country's Nobel Laureate was subjected to the most disparaging remarks like 'bloodsucker'. And the floor of the House was defiled by MPs from both sides, and the women members outdid their male counterparts in this regard, using the filthiest language against the late leaders of the other party. What was most disquieting to see was that instead of reining in the errant MPs they were commended for what they did.

Unfortunately such behaviour has rubbed off on the society, particularly on the newer generation of politicians. Little wonder that political discourse has degenerated into exchange of most abusive language that only the Bangla

vocabulary can describe in one word - "galagali". Some feel strongly that if the BNP has resorted to vile language it is partly because the party has been gradually divested of the avenues and opportunities to express dissent. Frustration at being prevented to hold rallies, spurious charges against a large number of their cadres, including many senior leaders, random arrests and incarceration have caused the pent up anger to be expressed in the manner that the party has done verbally.

The behaviour of some of our politicians admits of no excuse. When will this practice end? When can we expect our politicians to talk with deference about their counterparts? We need more sophistication in our politics. And for that there is need to change. Unfortunately, Bernard Shaw's advice that we must reform society before we can reform ourselves does not apply to our situation. It is the politicians who must change themselves first if they want to change society and the country.

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The Middle East Crack-Up

THE WORLD
IN WORDS



SHLOMO AVINERI

powers, Great Britain and France, during and after WWI. While the war was still raging, they signed an agreement drafted by the diplomats Sir Mark Sykes and François George-Picot, which delineated their respective spheres of influence across the Levant - an agreement that entirely disregarded the region's history, ethnic and religious traditions and affiliations, and the will of local populations.

The modern states of Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon thus arose as separate, independent entities. Their borders were arbitrary and artificial, and none had ever existed in such form. (The case of Palestine was even more complicated, owing to Britain's conflicting promises to Arabs and Jews.)

Eventually, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon became independent countries, modeled on the Westphalian idea of the modern nation-state. Their leaders maintained this system - and its borders - as the best available. None of these rulers, especially the authoritarian ones who emerged after independence, had an interest in rocking the boat.

That Western-imposed system is now unraveling. Nation-states cannot be sustained when they do not reflect the wishes of their populations.

The United States-led invasion of Iraq put an end not only to Saddam Hussein's rule, but also to Sunni-minority control, established by the British generations ago. The Shia majority, once unleashed, viewed US-backed democratic elections as a vehicle for imposing hegemonic control over the country.

Iraq today is not the unitary Arab nation-state that it was, and it is doubtful whether that state can be restored. The Kurdish Regional Government in the north is a de facto state, with its own army, border authorities, and control (up to a point) of the natural resources located on its territory. Foreign consulates in the KRG's capital, Erbil, effectively function as embassies.

In Syria, what started as peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations deteriorated quickly into an armed insurrection of the Sunni majority against the hegemony of the Alawite sect, led by the Assad family. As with Iraq, it is difficult to see how Syria can be reconstituted as a unitary Arab nation-state.

The de facto dismemberment of both countries' central state authorities gave rise to a totally new player - the Islamic State, which has announced the establishment of a caliphate straddling Iraq and Syria, totally disregarding the old Sykes-Picot arrangement.

The Islamic State, an offshoot of Al Qaeda, probably will not succeed in creating a viable, cross-border entity, but its brutal effort and Islamist ideology certainly suggest that the old borders, and the states delineated by them, are on their way out. Indeed, the group's recent incursions

into Lebanon may also undermine the fragile inter-communal balance there.

The unraveling of the Western-imposed state system is taking place elsewhere in the greater Middle East. Sudan - a vast, multiethnic, and multi-confessional country, established as a political entity by the British in the 1890s - is continuing to fray. The emergence, after a prolonged and bloody civil war, of an independent South Sudan in 2011, freed the local Christian and animist population from the Arab/Muslim yoke. But Darfur is still bleeding, and South Sudan is far from being a stable polity.

Libya, too, is disintegrating. The two provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, which Italy wrested from the Ottomans just before WWI, were forced together into an entity called "Libya," despite their profound historical and cultural differences. Since Muammar el-Qaddafi's demise in 2011, Libyans have failed to establish a coherent state structure of any sort, cycling through six prime ministers. Pious Western sermons about the need to form a unified, democratically elected government sound utterly irrelevant, given the extent of social and political fragmentation.

There is one exception to this regional development: Egypt. For all of its internal tribulations, there is no doubt that Egypt is a coherent entity, deeply anchored in history and in the consciousness of its population. For all of the problems confronting the Coptic Christian community, no



one doubts that they are as Egyptian as the Muslim majority.

But Egypt, too, has followed a defining regional pattern. Whereas secularism in the West arose with the emergence of liberal and democratic forces inspired by the Enlightenment, in the Muslim Middle East it has always been imposed by authoritarian rulers: the Shah in Iran, Atatürk in Turkey, Saddam in Iraq, Assad in Syria, and Nasser and Mubarak in Egypt. This explains why Syria's Christian and Druze minorities now support Assad, and why the Copts in Egypt support military rule: democratic majoritarian rule means Muslim hegemony.

Europe endured centuries of violent religious and national struggle, culminating in the horrors of the two world wars, before achieving its current stable state system. The Middle East probably will pay less in terms of time and violence; but the idea that what emerges will necessarily be European-style nation-states may turn out to be a Western conceit. The late literary theorist and public intellectual Edward Said might even have called it an example of paternalistic Orientalism.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Horrible condition of roads



PHOTO: STAR

Before Eid, the media was flooded with stories of the praiseworthy steps the government took to improve the poor road conditions of the country including Dhaka. But eventually, we found nothing satisfactory. Soon after the Eid, the authorities seemed to have stopped thinking about this serious issue, even when roads are going from bad to worse day by day due to monsoon. Especially, the areas where flyovers are under construction get clogged during and after rain.

The potholed, dilapidated conditions of the roads are the main cause of huge traffic gridlocks and immeasurable sufferings of the people. How long will we have to tolerate this? When will the authorities take measures to repair the roads? We don't want mere words; we want actions to take place.

Nusrat Gulzar
Khilgaon, Dhaka

World powers' double standard

A few powerful countries of the world can pulverize huge buildings of other countries into dust just within minutes! No, not empty buildings, buildings full of little children, women and men. They can even destroy a whole country. It matters little to them, as the sophisticated bombs, to produce which they have spent billions of dollars, can annihilate anything. Buildings, gardens, crops, orchards, trees, flowers, fruits, animals, birds, roads, bridges and most of all, human beings. But if one of these people were their own, all hell would let loose to take revenge. So much of double standard.

And the world watches quietly. Strange that everybody is so afraid to speak out against such wrongs. Don't they fathom that this will only help the wrongs to multiply. Why the UN was created after the World War II if no country would listen to it or pay any heed to its orders? If this continues, even a third world war can start.

Please stop this! Because with great power comes great responsibilities.

Dr. Sabrina Rashid
Dhaka Cantt., Dhaka

Implement new law on industrial research

Nearly six months back, the government passed a new law under the title "Bangladesh Biggan O Shilpo Gobeshona Porishod Ain 2013" by making the Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research Ordinance 1978 (Ord. No.V of 1978) defunct. In the new law, a number of provisions for the betterment of research and researchers have been incorporated which include raising of retirement age of outstanding scientists to 67 years. But till now the law has not been implemented due to non-formulation of the criteria for assessing the eligibility of scientists to award benefits under the new law. It is known that the BCSIR authority has made a draft criteria which is yet to get approval of the higher authority. Due to delay in the implementation of the new law, a number of deserving scientists have been sent to LPR.

It is sincerely hoped that the new law will soon be implemented to encourage the really deserving scientists of the BCSIR to continue their research work with full dedication in the interest of the country.

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Comments on news report, "Coach & players need to answer," published on August 25, 2014

Saidur Rahaman Srabon

BCB should be freed from politics first.

Muhammad Ariful Islam

Bangladesh team can not perform well under Hathurasingha. We should find some enthusiastic and young dynamic professionals for board who can maintain the whole year cricket calendar.

"Safety flaws pose risk" (August 23, 2014)

Humayun Hyder

The United Airways Bangladesh Limited is running its flights despite flaws which have been pinpointed by the CAAB. Despite numerous flaws, the airline is continuing its flight risking passengers' lives. I think CAAB should cancel its permit to fly until they rectify the faults.