

Titas gas suffers avoidable loss

Plug loopholes urgently

TITAS gas is faced with significant pilferage of gas in the districts of Narayanganj and Munshiganj as reported in a prominent Bangla daily. A field level study carried out for Titas Gas has revealed that the national exchequer is deprived of nearly Tk1 billion per year for a variety of reasons including meter tampering and faulty meters, seepage of gas through faulty gas pipes and illegal connections. While the first two causes can be readily addressed, the third, i.e. illegal connections is another matter altogether. Past drives by Titas Gas to cut illegal lines in Narayanganj area have failed miserably primarily due to stiff resistance of people enjoying such connections. We were informed in an earlier report that there are thousands of such connections, primarily at the household level and the racket in such business feeds on support allegedly from ruling party men.

It is a pressing matter of national importance and these irregularities require to be dealt with sternly. The country as a whole has been suffering from acute shortage of precious natural gas for years now. While legitimate business sectors and the formal housing sector have been deprived of gas, we simply cannot allow vested interests to profit at the expense of the greater economy. Titas Gas needs to correct faulty meters so that bills are collected properly and the waste due to dilapidated gas-carrying pipes curbed. Failure to eradicate illegal gas connections is indicative of a governance failure that is not beyond redemption with sincere efforts. Finally, the people involved should be taken to task.

See-sawing between life and death

Reflective of lack of care

AN unidentified woman, found unconscious on the streets and admitted to DMCH, was declared dead on the basis of casual testing methods at DMCH, but woke up as she was being taken to the morgue on Thursday. The woman, who allegedly did not receive proper treatment at the hospital at the initial stages, breathed her last 26 hours after her 'resurrection' on Friday.

The perfunctory and apathetic treatment of the patient speaks poorly of the healthcare service provided by the country's leading public hospital and is symptomatic of the problems plaguing the premier institution.

Preliminary investigation by the hospital found that the doctor pronounced her death when she was found to have no heartbeat, physical movement and blood pressure, without using any of the three ECG machines on the floor.

It was learnt from patients in her ward that she did not have an attendant and was denied proper treatment, given only an intravenous saline drop and some injections. Doctors at DMCH corroborated that she did not receive any lab tests. Had comprehensive care been provided by the hospital, it is probable she might still be alive.

We note that the DMCH authorities have undertaken an investigation process to determine if the doctor who declared her dead was at fault. However, it must also resolve whether the hospital fulfilled its obligation in providing proper treatment to the patient.

Appropriate measures must be taken to ensure that such an incident is not repeated in the future.

'I can't breathe'

ABDUL MATIN

THERE is a new wave of protests in the United States of America. From New York, it spread to Washington DC, Boston and Chicago after a grand jury declined on Wednesday to charge a white police officer, Daniel Pantaleo, for choking a black man, Eric Garner, to death in last July. The protesters are chanting, "I can't breathe!" These were the final words of Eric Garner after Daniel Pantaleo put him in a chokehold (applying pressure on the throat or windpipe) in Staten Island. The city's police department patrol guide states its officers "will not use chokeholds." Yet it was used, and captured on a video. Police confronted him in July, when they suspected that he was illegally selling untaxed cigarettes.

Unlike in Ferguson, the protesters in New York and other places have been peaceful. Eric's family pleaded for calm. "It's happening in every city, every town," a protester said in Pittsburgh and added: "They (police) are harassing people. There is just no accountability and no justice for the victims." Eric's family can't understand how anyone could think the officers' actions that day were justified.

The decision of the grand jury again raised basic questions of how the predominantly white police deal with the predominantly coloured community. In brief comments, President Barack Obama addressed the inherent mistrust many African Americans have of police. "We're seeing too many instances where people do not have confidence that folks are being treated fairly," Obama said. Attorney General Eric Holder said that the US Justice Department will conduct an "exhaustive and fair" civil rights probe into the incident.

Recently, a 12-year-old black boy was gunned down by police officers in Ohio while playing with a toy pistol in a playground. The grand jury consisting of nine white and three black members decided on November 24 not to indict white police officer Darren Wilson for shooting a black unarmed teen, Michael Brown, on August 9. 17-year-old African-American Trayvon Martin of Sanford, Florida did not get justice. These incidents have reignited a longstanding debate in the United States about relations between the police and African Americans and also accusations of overly aggressive policing.

On August 28, 1963, civil rights activist Martin Luther King delivered his famous speech "I have a dream" from the steps of the Abraham Lincoln Memorial in which he called for an end to racism in the States. After more than half a century his speech still sounds like a cry in the wilderness. Today, it is not only Eric Garner but the entire coloured community in the States is choking. It is unable to breathe normally.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Social choice and social welfare



level of power is hard to achieve. More important, dictatorship of any kind can readily be seen to be a terrible way to govern a society.

So, for both ethical and practical reasons, social scientists have long investigated how the concerns of a society's members can be reflected in one way or another in its collective decisions, even if the society is not fully democratic. For example, in the fourth century BC, Aristotle in Greece and Kautilya in India explored various possibilities of social choice in their classic books, *Politics* and *Economics*, respectively (the Sanskrit title of Kautilya's

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book, *Arthashastra*, translates literally as "the discipline of material wellbeing").

The study of social choice as a formal discipline first came into its own in the late eighteenth century, when the subject was pioneered by French mathematicians, particularly J. C. Borda and Marquis de Condorcet. The intellectual climate of the time was greatly influenced by the European Enlightenment, with its interest in reasoned construction of a social order, and its commitment to the creation of a society responsive to people's preferences.

But the theoretical investigations of Borda, Condorcet, and others often yielded rather pessimistic results. For example, the so-called "voting paradox" presented by Condorcet showed that majority rule can reach an impasse when every alternative is defeated in voting by some other alternative, so that no alternative is capable of standing up to the challenge of every other alternative.

Social choice theory in its modern and systematic form owes its rigorous foundation to the work of Kenneth J. Arrow in his 1950 Columbia University PhD dissertation. Arrow's thesis contained his famous "impossibility theorem," an analytical result of breathtaking elegance and reach.

Arrow's theorem shows that even very mild conditions of reasonableness in arriving at social decisions on the basis of simple preference rankings of a society's individuals could not be simultaneously satisfied by any proce-

cedure. When the book based on his dissertation, *Social Choice and Individual Values*, was published in 1951, it became an instant classic.

Economists, political theorists, moral and political philosophers, sociologists, and even the general public rapidly took notice of what seemed like -- and indeed was -- a devastating result. Two centuries after visions of social rationality flowered in Enlightenment thinking, the project suddenly seemed, at least superficially, to be inescapably doomed.

It is important to understand why and how Arrow's impossibility result comes about. Scrutiny of the formal reasoning that establishes the theorem shows that relying only on the preference rankings of individuals makes it difficult to distinguish between very dissimilar social choice problems. The usability of available information is further reduced by the combined effects of innocuous-seeming principles that are popular in informal discussions.

It is essential, particularly for making judgments about social welfare, to compare different individuals' gains and losses and to take note of their relative affluence, which cannot be immediately deduced only from people's rankings of social alternatives. It is also important to examine which types of clusters of preference rankings are problematic for different types of voting procedures.

Nonetheless, Arrow's impossibility theorem ultimately played a hugely constructive role in investigating what democracy demands, which goes well beyond counting votes (important as that is). Enriching the informational base of democracy and making greater use of interactive public reasoning can contribute significantly to making democracy more workable, and also allow reasoned assessment of social welfare.

Social choice theory has thus become a broad discipline, covering a variety of distinct questions. Under what circumstances would majority rule yield unambiguous and consistent decisions? How robust are the different voting procedures for yielding cogent results? How can we judge how well a society as a whole is doing in light of its members' disparate interests?

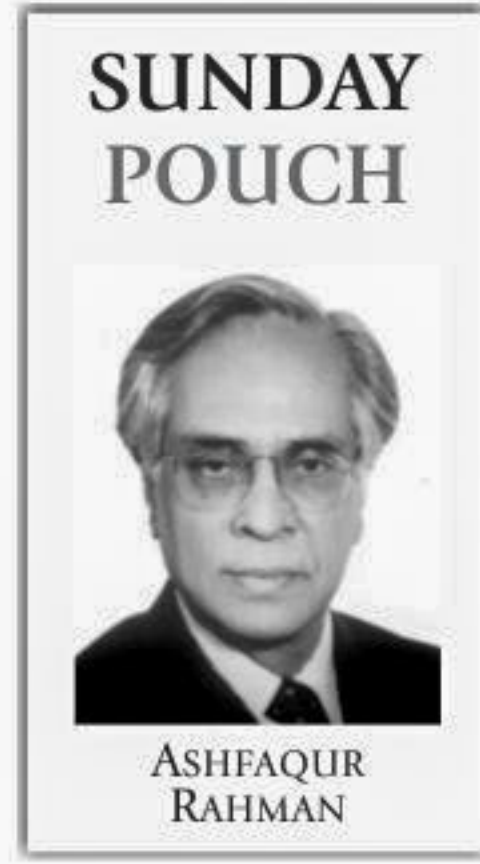
How, moreover, can we accommodate individuals' rights and liberties while giving appropriate recognition to their overall preferences? How do we measure aggregate poverty in view of the varying predicaments and miseries of the diverse people who comprise the society? How do we arrive at social valuations of public goods such as the natural environment?

Beyond these questions, a theory of justice can draw substantially on the insights and analytical results emerging from social choice theory (as I discussed in my 2009 book *The Idea of Justice*). Furthermore, the understanding generated by social choice theorists' study of group decisions has helped some research that is not directly a part of social choice theory -- for example, on the forms and consequences of gender inequality, or on the causation and prevention of famines.

The reach and relevance of social choice theory is extensive. Rather than undermining the pursuit of social reasoning, Arrow's deeply challenging impossibility theorem, and the large volume of literature that it has inspired, has immensely strengthened our ability to think rationally about the collective decision-making on which our survival and happiness depend.

The writer is a Nobel Prize-winning economist.
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Understanding China's 'one belt and one road' policy



CHINA seems to be on a roll ever since Xi Jinping became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, and later the President of China in 2013. He has put forward several ideas that are intended to catapult that country to the centre of geo-politics and geo-economics in the world. To begin with, he has floated the concept of a 'Chinese dream,' and gave the idea of 'one belt and one road.' The 'dream' envisages doubling the 2010 GDP per capita and building a prosperous China by 2021. By 2049, when China will celebrate 100 years as a People's Republic, it wants to be a modern and socially advanced country. Another grand idea, among others, is to construct a geo-economic Silk Road and a modern Maritime Silk Route that would connect China with Europe by both land and sea.

Last week, a team of eminent editors and columnists from Bangladesh were flown to Beijing and then to Kunming in Yunnan province in south west China to have talks with Communist Party leaders as well as provincial government officials to understand what China is talking about, especially its 'one belt and one road' policy. Not only did the Chinese talk about their grandiose scheme, they also took us to Pu'er, an ancient town in Yunnan which is the first tea producing area in the world and from where the first tea route across borders started. It was called the 'Tea Horse Road,' and carried Chinese tea on horseback over mountains and valleys from China to Vietnam, to Laos and also to Myanmar. The route through Myanmar carried tea and ideas from China through Bangladesh to India for centuries. The route reminded all of us of the possibility of having a modern day road that can establish connectivity from China to other countries in Asia, especially the Mekong sub-region and the Indo-Gangetic plains.

China intends to build a single road that will connect this backward region in Asia with its prosperous hinterland and bring economic benefits to this area where people are comparatively poor. The 'one belt and one road' is a concept rooted in history. Through this overland route that brought tea from China it was connected to a Maritime Silk Route that linked Asian and African ports to finally end up in Europe. China has built first class highways and railroads from the north of China to the south and from the east of China to the west in the last three decades. It intends to start connecting its own networks to link up with roads in South East Asia, South Asia and, through a maritime route, with Africa and Europe.

China is therefore keen to see that all countries and

regions along the 'one belt and one road' participate in this massive endeavour. Most of the countries of South East Asia, with whom China has a trade volume of over \$400 billion, have welcomed the idea. China has already pledged \$40 billion for this project. But what about Bangladesh?

Since 1999, we have been a part of an initiative called the Kunming Declaration, which is meant to enhance sub-regional cooperation framework for China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and India, officially designated as the BCIM economic corridor. The BCIM-EC is but a small portion of the huge economic belt that would emerge after the completion of China's other ambitious scheme -- the Southern Silk Road and the 21st century Maritime Silk Route as envisaged by President Xi Jinping. This land based and maritime silk route would ultimately connect the 21st century growth zones of East Asia, South Asia and South East Asia to the energy rich Middle East and industrialised Europe.

Beijing envisages that the BCIM corridor will link its south western Yunnan province through Myanmar to Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, and then on to the Indian megapolis Kolkata. This will be the key segment of the land based 'Silk Road economic belt.' It will also link with the port city of Chennai in India, which is a mid-point of a Maritime Silk Route which starts from south eastern Fujian province of China and links littoral countries in the region. From an historical point of view, India has been the converging point of the Maritime Silk Route and the Southern Silk Road. It is through this road and maritime route that the famous Chinese traveler and scholar Hiuen Tsang (also Xuanzang, Hsuan Tsang) reached India and returned to China. During his stay in India he had studied Buddhism and later disseminated it in China.

When our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited Beijing in June this year, she met President Xi Jinping and discussed the BCIM corridor and the Maritime Silk Route. The port of Chittagong is an important point in the Maritime Silk Route.

The trip to China by the media delegation from Bangladesh deepened their knowledge of the ancient connectivity between China and Bangladesh. But it also deepened their understanding of the bright prospects that the 'one belt and one road' holds for the millions of people in our two countries. Indeed, prosperity beckons to all if the unexploited resources of this inaccessible part of the world are opened up through better connectivity. It also negates to some extent the US policy of 'pivot to Asia,' which President Barack Obama announced. It also questions the utility of a new Silk Road that the US planned across Afghanistan.

The writer is a former Ambassador and a commentator on current issues.
E-mail: ashfaq303@gmail.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

They're what they do, not what they say

When Sheikh Hasina speaks against Khaleda Zia and BNP, I think she is correct; when Khaleda Zia speaks against Sheikh Hasina and Awami League and its government, she is also correct. But when they speak about themselves, I don't think people believe their words. Therefore, people will judge them and find the truth from their course of action and not from their political rhetoric. Both the leaders should remember that.

Md. Shahjahan Mia
Development Professional
Dhaka

Bangladesh cricket should keep up the spirit

Bangladesh national cricket team has won the ODI series against Zimbabwe after a long time. Their outstanding performance has rekindled the lost hope among the Bangladeshi cricket fans. The leadership of Mushfiqur Rahim and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was extraordinary. Our cricketers also made many records in these Test



and ODI matches. They should keep up the spirit and prepare for the upcoming World Cup 2015. We have the experienced players like Tamim, Shakib, Mushfique, Mahmudulla, Mashrafe, Imrul, Rubel and so on. The new players like Mominul, Bijoy, Taijul, Sabbir, and Sunny have shown their ability as well in the recent matches. We hope to see really great performances by our Tigers in the 2015 World Cup.

Md. Tareque Aziz, Md. Shah Alam, Piplu kormaker
BBA students, East West University

Bikers' contempt for traffic laws

The complete disregard for traffic laws by the motorbike riders in the city roads is alarming. Dhaka is witnessing an exponential growth in motorbike traffic which in the short term may not seem to be so much problematic, but the prevailing disrespect for the traffic laws by these bikers in the long run will lead to a complete breakdown of the traffic system. Why do the authorities allow the bikers to ply on the wrong side of the roads, cross the roads when red lights are on, driving on the footpaths and so on? If we do not bring them to book now, the day is not far off when the motorbikes will take the place of jaywalking pedestrians and completely shatter the traffic system. Are we waiting for that to happen?

Mohiuddin
Gulshan, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Shajahan trouble for Dhaka rivers," published on December 03, 2014

New Generation
There are many other troublemakers like him.

Faisal
Why has the minister involved himself in deciding where the demarcation pillar will be set up? BIWTA should set up the demarcation pillars without any interference.

A reader
If our rivers live, Bangladesh will live. Please do not choke them to death.

"A private university's obsession with foreign degrees" (December 03, 2014)

Enayetul Karim
Very nicely written; constructive criticism is always good. However, the fact is that very few DU/BUET faculties can be found who don't have a foreign degree.

Smanzur
The author addressed a very interesting and important point. I hope there will be more discussion on this in the future. Thank you for writing this!

"Bergman guilty of contempt" (December 03, 2014)

Molla A. Latif
We remember his intentional comments on our glorious Liberation War. That was really foul play and denial of the settled historical facts.

"CHT Peace Accord" (December 03, 2014)

Enayet Mowla
It is actually disgraceful for the government as it has failed to implement the peace accord in the last 17 years.