

Deplorable, impassable roads

Blind eye turned to severe civic discomfort

RAINS or no rains, quite a number of major city roads connected to arterial thoroughfares are in dire straits. They are left cratered and potholed with mud and slush and mounds of earth heaped as collateral ramifications of inordinately delayed mega fly-over projects. The stretches and areas under the pillared spans which are supposed to provide diversionary routes to motorists and pedestrians are either constricted or contoured. And, when transports force their way through them dusts get blown right into the eyes and nostrils of commuters and other road users.

As if to add to the public misfortunes, you have the leaked sewage pipes water-logging and polluting parts of city streets.

You experience such nightmare in broad daylight along Muchak- Malibagh, Mouchak -Magbazar, Mouchak-Shantinagar, Moghbazar-Eskaton and Satmasjid via Hatirjheel point to sonargaon, a huge swathe or confluence of routes that bears so much traffic load. And yet they are so much neglected, being far from serviceable.

For at least three years the conditions of these vital link roads have aggravated from bad to the worst under the very eyes of those in charge. The DCC, north and south, LGED and construction companies. Obviously, they were so carried away by the projects they did not think through the planning, designing and operational aspects with due diligence and attention to details. For instance, the change of project directors has been the root cause of delays. Secondly, contingency alternative routing was neither thought through, nor provided for. Last but not least, nobody felt the need for keeping the public posted on the status of the works. The lack of answerability is particularly disconcerting.

Welfare of injured workers

Both policy and action missing

WORKERS injured in workplaces remain the worst sufferers in society. The first responsibility for workers maimed in the line of duty rests with their employers. They must provide sustained medical treatment to the victims after having paid reasonable compensation to them. But, unfortunately, no benchmark is set nor any standards followed in providing compensation, a matter calling for urgent attention.

It is, however, the duty of the State, more precisely, the government's labour and social affairs ministry, to care for crippled labour as a priority matter. There are compelling reasons why their welfare should be a national concern. A survey by Safety and Rights Society, a local non-government organisation devoted to improving workplace safety, reveals that 78 percent workers lose ability to work after accidents. And most possibly, they were the only earning members of their families, thus leaving whole households in the lurch. The resulting socio-economic impact is horrifying!

It is high time the concerned ministry or the directorate kept track of the crippled workers, enlisted them for their physical and economic rehabilitation and actually provided the services. Sustained physio-therapy and prosthetic aids should enable them to be re-trained for employment.

The government and the private sector, including corporate houses and NGOs, will have to coordinate policy decisions and action programmes for the rehabilitation of the workers laid off due to accidents.

Tackling acid attacks: What India should learn from Bangladesh

SHRUTI SRIVASTAVA

INDIA'S national capital witnessed yet another gory incident of acid being thrown at a 30-year-old woman doctor by two assailants on a motorcycle yesterday (December 23, 2014) in Rajouri Garden.

The lady, employed with Employees State Insurance (ESI) hospital, was attacked around 9.30 a.m. and rushed to AIIMS. The victim suffered 45% burn on her face and head, and is reported to be out of danger. The incident took place when the victim was preparing to step up into marital life in four months.

Around 90%-95% of victims of such incidents are women, and most of them survive. But the mental trauma continues to haunt them throughout their life. The survivors are always looked down as victims. They are marginalised in the society owing to their physical deformities and accompanying disabilities.

India is among the top three countries having the largest number of such incidents. Neighbouring Bangladesh has the highest reported acid assaults in the world. India might surpass Bangladesh soon due to the growing number of acid attacks while the number of such incidents in the latter continues to decline.

Bangladesh government's proactive initiative led to steady decline in number of acid attacks by 15% to 20% since 2002. As per facts complied by the Acid Survivors Foundation in Bangladesh only 91 such incidents were witnessed in the country during 2011. Acid Survivors Foundation is an NGO helping survivors with medical and legal aid.

In combating such evil in the society, the Bangladesh government adopted stringent laws criminalising acid violence and requiring business users of acid to obtain licenses.

In 2002, Acid Crime Control Act (ACCA) and Acid Control Act (ACA) laws were introduced by the government. ACCA heightened the penalties and created special court procedures for acid attack cases, while ACA helped the Bangladeshi government to control, regulate and monitor the use, sale, purchase, storage, transportation, import and export of acid in the country.

Learning from Bangladesh, India too must come forward to put an end to acid violence. For this the Indian government and NGO's must address the causes, which are availability of acid, gender inequality and discrimination, in addition to the core reason, which is impunity of perpetrators.

There is also a great need to create awareness about such incidents. Unfortunately, victims often fail to get basic first-aid. In most cases, the victims and local residents lack knowledge about first aid and on how to treat burns.

The areas need to be rinsed thoroughly and completely with water to neutralise the acid. Milk, if available, must be continuously poured on the burned area until the vapours of the acid start reducing.

India is busy taking economy lessons from the West and China, but it should also incorporate some knowledge from underdeveloped countries like Bangladesh to curb the menace of acid attacks.

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The conversion controversy

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD
NURUL HUDA

Conversion is a sensitive issue with Hindu groups saying that many poor Hindus over the ages were forced to give up their faith or lured into Islam and Christianity. From an historical perspective, the use of Hinduism for political mobilisation took a more militant form in North India through the Arya Samaj and the cow protection movement which led to the widespread communal violence in 1893.

Some commentators have opined that under the BJP rule in India there is quite clearly an attempt to define the Indian nation primarily in terms of Hindu religious symbols, myths, and history. Religion was never totally detached from politics in India nor was it ever exclusively confined to private space. The 19th century's so-called Hindu revivalism was marked by a conceptualisation of a glorious Hindu past, believed to have been degenerated under Muslim rule and threatened by the British. The glorification of Hindu civilisation over Islamic or Western civilisations often boiled down to attempts to exalt and rationalise Hindu institution and practices.

It might be relevant to recollect that evocation of Hindu glory mixed with patriotism which sought to restore the masculinity of the Indian nation denied by the colonial masters had a tremendous effect on the Hindu popular mind in the recently held Indian general election.

The Arya Samaj, established in 1875, began to preach the supremacy of Arya Dharam (religion), Arya Bhasha (language), and Aryavarta (land) and their propaganda was mainly directed against the Muslims and the Christians. The present conversion phenomenon bears striking resemblance to the concept of 'Suddhi' that the Arya Samaj developed and which aimed at re-conversion

A series of reported religious re-conversion by outfits linked to India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's description of India as a "Hindu Rashtra" (Hindu State) has led to heated debates resulting in disruption of parliamentary proceeding. Protests by the political opposition erupted in parliament against a campaign by Hindu hardliners to bring Muslims and Christians back to the Hindu fold.

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from Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism.

The question is do we witness in modern India a tendency "to turn Hinduism into an organised religion" based, like Christianity, on a recognised text, thus marginalising the liberal and secular traditions? Are there efforts to reconstitute Hinduism for becoming the foundational idea to imagine a nation? If that be so, then surely it will fail to appeal to the non-Brahman and lower caste masses of India. The stereotype of "medieval Muslim tyranny and decline" as against "ancient Hindu glory" will only lead to alienating the Muslims, who would be suspicious of Hindu majority rule.

Do we see serious efforts to build an essentially imaginary history with a specific historical purpose of instilling a sense of pride in the minds of Indians involved in the process of imagining their nation? Do the present rulers in India believe that the use of Hindu mythology and history is the best means to reach the masses and mobilise them in support of their policies?

One may recollect that political programmes obviously required mass mobilisation and religion was looked at by Hindu leaders as a means to reach the masses. Religious revivalism, therefore, was a main feature in 19th and early 20th century Indian politics. Bhagavadgita became a source of spiritual inspiration and Hindu religious symbols were frequently used to mobilise the masses. But this also alienated the Muslims and lower caste peasants.

In the Indian subcontinent, at least, religion no longer means just a set of ideas but has come to be identified with "an aggregate of individuals united by formal official definition." They are conscious of their comparative demographic as well as socio-economic position vis-à-vis other communities. However much the government trumpets the secular character of the public space and tries to confine religion to the private, the boundaries remain highly permeable.

The premonition is that as Hindu mobilisation makes progress it runs the risk of simultaneously sculpting and vilifying the other. The aggressive Arya Samaj movement contributed to the counter-mobilisation of the Muslims in urban Punjab. Islam also penetrated rural politics in the countryside. Consequently, the religious divide proved to be an insurmountable problem due to intense politicisation along communal lines.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Pakistan's new leaf?



BRAHMA CHELLANEY

AS US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton bluntly told Pakistan in 2011 that "you can't keep snakes in your backyard and expect them only to bite your neighbours." But her warning ("eventually those snakes are going to turn on" their keeper), like those of other American officials over the years, including presidents and CIA chiefs, went unheeded.

The snake-keeper's deepening troubles were exemplified by the recent massacre of 132 schoolchildren in Peshawar by militants no longer under the control of Pakistan's generals. Such horror is the direct result of the systematic manner in which the Pakistani military establishment has reared jihadist militants since the 1980s as an instrument of state policy against India and Afghanistan. By continuing to nurture terrorist proxies, the Pakistani military has enabled other militants to become entrenched in the country, making the culture of jihad pervasive.

The Peshawar massacre was not the first time that the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism became a terror victim. But the attack has underscored how the contradiction between battling one set of terror groups while shielding others for cross-border undertakings has hobbled the Pakistani state.

As a result, the question many are asking is whether, in the wake of the Peshawar killings, the Pakistani military, including its rogue Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, will be willing to break its ties with militant groups and dismantle the state-run terrorist infrastructure. Unfortunately, developments in recent months, including in the aftermath of the Peshawar attack, offer little hope.

On the contrary, with the military back in de facto control, the civilian government led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is in no position to shape developments. And, despite the increasing blowback from state-aided militancy, the generals remain too wedded to sponsoring terrorist groups that are under United Nations sanctions -- including Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) and the Haqqani network -- to reverse course.

Reliance on jihadist terror has become part of the generals' DNA. Who can forget their repeated denial that they knew the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden before he was killed by US naval commandos in a 2011 raid on his safe house in the Pakistani garrison city of Abbottabad? Recently, in an apparent slip, a senior civilian official -- Sharif's national security adviser, Sartaj Aziz -- said that Pakistan should do nothing to stop militants who do not intend to harm Pakistan.

Those who believe that the Peshawar massacre might serve as a wakeup call to the Pakistani military should ask why the generals have ignored hundreds of earlier wakeup calls. Despite the blowback imperiling Pakistan's future, the generals show no sign that they have tired of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds.

Pakistan is already a quasi-failed state. Its anti-India identity is no longer sufficient to stem its mounting contradictions, which are most apparent in the two incarnations of the Taliban: the Afghan Taliban, which is the Pakistani military's surrogate, and the Pakistani Taliban -- formally known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) -- which is the military's nemesis. Pakistan also provides sanctuary to the Afghan Taliban's chief, Mullah Mohammad Omar (and also harbours a well-known international fugitive, the Indian organised crime boss Dawood Ibrahim).

Meanwhile, Hafiz Saeed, the founder of the ISI's largest surrogate terror organisation, LeT, remains the generals' darling, leading a public life that mocks America's \$10 million bounty on his head and the UN's inclusion of him on a terrorist list. Earlier this month, Pakistani authorities aided a large public rally by Saeed in Lahore, including by running special trains to ferry in participants, so that the architect of the November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack (among many others) could project himself as some sort of messiah of the Pakistani people.

Yet none of that stopped Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, Raheel Sharif, and ISI Director-General Rizwan Akhter from rushing to Kabul after the Peshawar attack to demand that President Ashraf Ghani and the US-led military coalition extradite TTP chief Mullah Fazlullah or allow Pakistani forces to go in after him. In other words, they seek the help of Afghanistan and the US to fight the Pakistani Taliban while unflinchingly aiding the Afghan Taliban, which has been killing Afghan and Nato troops.

Such is the generals' Janus-faced approach to terrorism that, six years after the Mumbai attacks, Pakistan has yet to try the seven Pakistani perpetrators in its custody. Indeed, under the cover of indignation over the Peshawar attack, the leading suspect in the case -- UN-designated terrorist Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, who served as LeT's operations chief -- secured bail. International outrage soon forced Pakistan to place him in preventive detention for up to three months.

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The international community should stop placing its hope in some abrupt change of heart on the generals' part. Creating a moderate Pakistan at peace with itself can only be a long-term project, because it hinges on empowering a feeble civil society and, ultimately, reining in the military's role in politics. As long as the military, intelligence, and nuclear establishments remain unaccountable to the civilian government, Pakistan, the region, and the world will continue to be at risk from the jihadist snake pit that the country has become.

The writer is Professor of Strategic Studies at the New Delhi-based Center for Policy Research, and the author of Asian Juggernaut, Water: Asia's New Battleground, and Water, Peace, and War: Confronting the Global Water Crisis.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Freedom in the air

I would like to congratulate The Daily Star and Grameenphone for launching an online archive that consists of news, stories, media reports, articles, interviews, autobiographies and book reviews related to the Liberation War of Bangladesh. It would be very much helpful especially for the young generation who need to know the detailed history of the Liberation War.

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To our selfish affluent class

This is in response to the letter written by our learned affluent countryman, MAAZ, published in The Daily Star on 9th December, 2014. It was captioned "Cultivating the culture of giving back". Our affluent Bangladeshi friend circulates an interesting policy. The policy postulates that it is alright to enrich already developed countries with the money earned in Bangladesh! To him and many others Bangladesh is not a secure country. May I ask him why has he decided to remain in Bangladesh and enjoyed all the facilities provided by the government even though he does not consider it a safe country, and amassed the wealth? It is safe to earn in Bangladesh but not safe to keep the money so earned here! It is indeed an interesting logic. The inaugural speech of late President John F. Kennedy was also quoted. We fully agree that we should ask ourselves, what we can do for our country. And that country is Bangladesh and not Canada, USA, Australia, or Malaysia.

Tata Sons of India is a legendary and highly commendable example of philanthropy. Public welfare reigned supreme in all their planning and activities. RP Shaha has been immortalised by Kumudini Trust. We appreciate the contributions of our industrialists, affluent class in creating jobs, generating income, re-investing in expansions etc. We only condemn money-laundering activities of a great many of them. We would like to ask our affluent class a few simple questions: 1. How do you plan to give back to your society and country? 2. Are you paying full taxes? Lastly, please read the philanthropic activities of Tata Sons, Birlas, Bill Gates, the Chinese, the Filipinos, etc. They undertake CSR activities and also help their own governments.

Dr. SN Mamoon
A full tax payer
Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Movement soon to oust govt," published on Dec. 22, 2014

Rashid Ahmed

BNP must learn politics from Awami League. Calling street agitations, BNP top leaders always go home and relax while their junior leaders and workers fight alone on the streets. When Hefazat and BNP held rallies on 5-5-2013, the top leaders of BNP including their chairperson left the meeting venue in the evening, letting Awami League do whatever they wanted on that night. If AL were at BNP's place, their leaders would not have left the venue that day and would have ousted the government that night. BNP lost the opportunity of a life time that night!

"Modi hopeful but gives no timeframe" (Dec. 20, 2014)

Mortuza Huq

If Modi is farsighted, he should wait till a people's government takes over through a credible and democratic election.

OpeeMonir

What can we say? That's the typical Indian way of doing politics which has been always frustrating.

"Next target Pak politicians' kids" (Dec. 21, 2014)

Truthprevails53

Pakistan, a land of terrorists and no hope. As a nation it has not apologised to Bangladesh yet.

Zia

I guess Kharasani didn't even read the holy Quran properly. Killing people, especially innocent people is strictly prohibited in this great religion.

"Goodbye Wonderful Bangladesh" (Dec. 21, 2014)

Aminur Rahim

Your relentless advocacy of a strong, stable economy and good governance will remain green forever in our hearts. No goodbye my friend, abar dekha hobe!

Navid Choudhury

Your message, both visual and thru' speech, is poignant and honest. In times of rapid global change, strengthening the core of a nation with forward looking partnerships, investing in common safety and security areas and facilitating investment in people's future are key to success. I thank you and commend you for your service.