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FOUNDER EDITOR
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Shell-shocked by death of 10 devotees

Lax security arrangement unpardonable

WE are aghast at the deaths of 10 devotees due to a stampede during a bathing ritual for Hindu pilgrims in Narayanganj. The bath in the Brahmaputra River at Lalgalbagh is a century-old sacrosanct ceremony, drawing around 10 lakh Hindu devotees from around the country, even from neighbouring West Bengal, each year. Reportedly, a rumour that an overcrowded bridge leading to the most revered ghat at the site was collapsing triggered panic amongst the crowd, causing the stampede.

Witnesses state that had it not been for failure on the part of organisers, administration and law enforcers, the catastrophe could have been avoided and lives spared. With inadequate deployment of police in disciplining the crowd, questions arise as to whether the authorities were at all cognizant of the magnitude of the event, and of the need to ensure the safety and security of those participating in the ancient ritual. What measures, if any, were taken, to prevent an untoward incident in what was a major event for Hindu devotees, attended by tens of thousands? Furthermore, if there was even an inkling that miscreants might cause chaos at the site, as claimed by some leaders, why did law enforcers not take adequate steps to deter such mischief?

Illegal makeshift business establishments along the river had narrowed down the festival, hindering the mobility of devotees along a crowded site. Why, we ask, did authorities not take steps to clear the area, ensuring safe passage of people?

We condemn such mismanagement and huge security unpreparedness that all but made an avoidable tragedy inevitable. We condole the deaths demand that those responsible for the catastrophe be held accountable.

Brazen occupation of public space

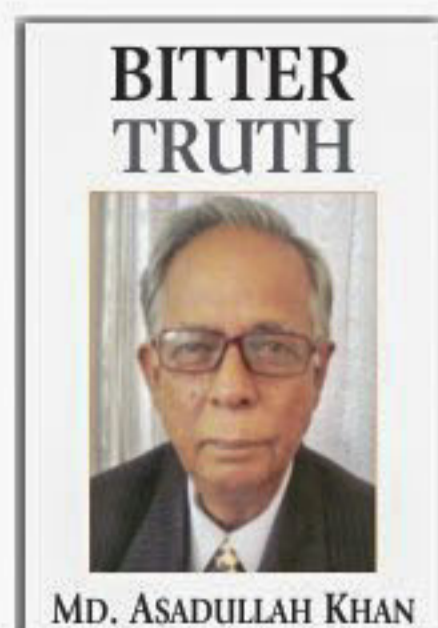
Free all roads plagued by encroachment

PLACEMENT of heavy construction material on the intersection between Road 98 of Gulshan and the DCC market for more than two months now is yet another example of blatant encroachment on public spaces in the city. This paper has over the years highlighted how roads and pavements have been illegally taken over by small businesses including welding shops and what have you! It is pathetic enough to see a city of more than 15 million people having to contend not just with potholed and waterlogged roads, but also where busy thoroughfares have been intruded upon by construction companies and other business interests as though these are their private property.

In the particular case of Gulshan, not only the intersection has been left unusable by pedestrians but also vehicular movement has come to a standstill. Besides, these are like eyesores in the city landscape. Such irresponsible behaviour is made possible because of the nonchalance and lack of professionalism of city officials and the construction contractors taking advantage of the lack of official oversight.

It is of utmost importance that the authorities identify all the roads that have been encroached upon, including the pavements and get a move on to evict the illegal occupants of these public spaces. The Gulshan incident is a specific instance of violation of law. So, the eviction drive could begin from there and replicated

Green technology is key to sustainable development



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

our doorstep.

Even if we stop burning coal, oil and natural gas right now, the world would still continue to get warmer. Stabilising emissions does not stabilise climate, as long as the gases keep rising, even at current rates. So we need to reduce emissions 1% to 2% per year. If we don't start now, we will have to cut 3% to 4% per year, which would be even more daunting, says atmospheric physicist Michael Oppenheimer, Professor, Department of Geosciences at Princeton University.

So how do we strike a balance? The world has been awaiting a dramatic green revolution where countries and individuals begin to change their ways of doing business and change their lifestyles to become more environment friendly and more considerate of the well-being of the planet. However, that has not motivated governments to enter into binding international agreements to address the problem.

Fortunately, the failure of the governments has not rubbed off on the passion and enterprise of individuals and indeed some corporations to envision a greener future. Countries like India and China have always argued that it is the advanced economies that must do more

DANGERS that seemed exaggerated and distant even a decade ago -- global warming, ozone depletion, desertification and even extreme weather conditions -- are now at

to mitigate climate change. Developing countries, still in the catch-up mode, cannot afford to sacrifice the quest for growth by going green at any cost. There is no waste in the natural system: the same materials have been recycled for billions of years. All we have to do is to relearn the lessons. 'Greenovators' can motivate banks, financial institutions and venture capitalists to put more money into interesting new green ideas. Let us see some examples.

Swiss semiconductor maker ST Microelectronics has saved more than \$60 million by cutting its energy usage and \$20 million by reducing water consumption below baselines set in 1994. The company issued some environmental goals and empowered its divisions to become creative: the responses include using solar power and finding ways to recycle water. Cargill Dow is manufacturing biodegradable and recyclable plastics from corn sugars. McDonalds, it is learnt, has stopped buying chicken treated with "Cipro-like antibiotics," and Nike has begun stripping toxins from its shoes.

The key to sustainability is to make the market work for, and not against, the environment. British Oil giant, BP decided in 1997 to reduce its carbon emission by 10% below 1990 levels. In the year 2001 a report by Baxter International, a medical products maker, detailed how reductions in energy, water use, improved wastes disposal and recycling over the past seven years cut costs by \$53 million.

Experts say wind could provide up to one fifth of world demand of electricity within the next 15 years. The UK government is legally committed to delivering 15% of its energy demand

from renewables by 2020. As of 2014, Denmark is generating around 40% of its electricity from wind. But surprisingly, fossil fuel subsidies reached \$500 billion globally in 2011 whereas renewable energy subsidies reached \$88 billion in the same year. There is no disputing that some energy subsidies counter the goal of sustainable development, as they may lead to higher consumption and waste, exacerbating the harmful effects of energy use on the environment, creating a heavy burden on government finances and weakening the potential for economies to grow.

How soon we reach an era of clean, inexhaustible energy depends on technology. Solar and wind energies are intermittent: when the sky is cloudy or the breeze dies down, fossil fuel or nuclear plants must kick in to compensate. Current from wind, solar or geothermal energy can be used to extract hydrogen from water molecules. In the future, hydrogen can be stored in tanks, and when energy is needed, the gas could be run through a fuel cell, a device that combines hydrogen with oxygen. The result: pollution-free electricity, with water as the only by-product.

Renewable sources can help, from village-scale hydropower to household photovoltaic system to bio-gas stoves that convert dung into fuel. The cost of solar photovoltaics (pv) fell by 50% in recent times, which means that large scale solar electricity is increasingly within our grasp. More than a million rural homes in developing countries get electricity from solar cells. At present, 65,000 solar systems are being installed every month in Bangladesh, and about 3.5 million homes are already using solar energy. Ultimately, we can meet our energy

needs without fouling the environment. "But it won't happen without the political will," asserts Thomas B. Johansson, former advisor of UNDP and Professor and Director of Energy Systems at Lund university, Sweden. To begin with, widespread government subsidies for fossil fuel and nuclear energy -- estimated at \$500 billion per year -- must be dismantled to level the playing field for renewable sources.

On the road to enlightened energy policy, a few countries offer models of reform. More than a decade ago, Denmark required utilities to purchase any available renewable energy and pay a premium price, and today the country gets 40% of its electricity from wind. Germany and Spain have enacted incentives for renewables. India is now the globe's fifth largest generator of wind power. As of March 2014, the installed capacity of wind power in India was 21,136 MW. At the same time, surpassing 20,000 MW of solar power by 2022 that the past government in India wanted to achieve, the present government is trying to add 10,000 MW of solar power target every year.

Global energy demand is expected to triple by the middle of this century. The earth is unlikely to run out of fossil fuels by then, given its vast reserves of coal, but it seems unthinkable that we will continue to use them as we do now because of the potential threat to environment. The world has gradually moved toward cleaner fuels -- from wood to coal, from coal to oil, and from oil to natural gas. Renewable energy sources are the next step.

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COMMENTS

"Mozaffar rejects Independence Award" (March 26, 2015)

M Sirajullah

I salute him; he is a real leader. It shows that there are still some people with principles.

Saleh Tanveer

He is a rare breed in today's corrupt world.

"Bangladesh third most 'depressing country'" (March 23, 2015)

New Generation

Yes, the report speaks about the opinion of the general mass. No doubt, we live in a really depressed country!

"City corporation polls will be a window for the BNP to return to healthy politics."

--Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed

Mansur Reza

What is the definition of 'healthy politics' in Bangladesh? It would be better if he explicitly described it.

Islam Ashraful

You don't have the right to talk about healthy politics. You are the minister of only 5% of people.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

The bonds that bind

THE Independence Day celebrations across the country, combined with the national euphoria created by the Bangladesh Cricket team's World Cup performance, have left me wondering: What exactly is patriotism? It would be easy if we could define patriotism simply as unqualified love for one's homeland. The concept, however, is much more complex and interpretations may vary depending on the ethnic or geographical context and political or religious ideology. Of course, devotion to one's country is closely related to one's cultural and social affiliations. But then, how can we explain the fact that most immigrants are passionately devoted to their new country of choice, even though they may have limited cultural affinity to it?

The truth is, at a practical level, people love their homeland for different reasons. Some seek diversity while others may find comfort in homogeneity. Some may question a country's ideological progress while others may have blind faith in its ideals. Unfortunately, this variance allows politicians and vested interest groups to use patriotism as an instrument for manipulating people's emotions. We observe this phenomenon almost daily in the Bangladesh political arena. Both the government and the opposition parties lay exclusive claim to "patriotism," using

disparate arguments. One side maintains that Bangladeshi patriotism is primarily defined by a strong commitment to the ideals of secularism and democracy, which formed the basis of the War of Independence. Whereas others insist a religious identity should be the leitmotiv of Bangladeshi patriotism. Within this highly contestable space leaders conveniently bend and distort facts and label their opponents as "traitors and collaborators" to suit their narrow political ambitions.

Since love and loyalty for one's country are difficult to measure empirically we tend to judge others using our subjective standards. This is not just a South Asian occurrence...

Although Americans claim that they are a nation where freedom of expression is of supreme importance, "patriotism" is frequently employed as a tool to discredit political opponents. For instance, citizens who spoke against the Iraq war were routinely branded as unpatriotic. The fact that the country waged a war based on inaccurate information and false assumptions did not deter the self-professed "patriots" to silence their critics by labeling them as disloyal. More recently, the former New York Mayor, Rudy Giuliani, said: "I do not believe, and I know this is a horrible thing to say --

but I do not believe that the president loves America." The ex-mayor clarified that he believes President Barack Obama is a patriot, but the president doesn't love America because he is "too critical" of the country. Giuliani's logic is intrinsically questionable since criticism is not necessarily indicative of dislike, or even indifference. Patriotism, like any form of love, is organic -- it mutates and grows to adapt itself to changing needs. People and nations continually evolve and there are new challenges that need to be overcome. Debating ideals and social and political norms is a healthy characteristic and should be a defining element of good citizenship. It's thus important for a country to nurture a mechanism for citizens to critique progress in a healthy and positive way.

This brings to mind another leading question: What does it actually mean to love your country? Does it mean you drape yourself in the colours of your flag and sing patriotic songs? Or does it entail much more in terms of making personal sacrifices for the greater social good? Yes, there is a romantic aspect to patriotism -- we grow up loving our motherland because it gives us a sense of belonging and an identity. However, we humans are selfish creatures and only a handful of people make significant contributions to

their country for altruistic reasons alone. People expect certain basic privileges from the state -- like security, income opportunities and health care and education. And if the state fails to provide these services adequately, the bonds of citizenship become tenuous. It's therefore the responsibility of the leaders to instill confidence amongst the citizens that a better nation ensures a better life. Only then people will realise that "giving" to the country is an investment in their future rather than a mere benevolent act.

In any case, believing that one's homeland is perfect should not be a prerequisite for patriotism. I love Bangladesh but I strongly recognise that what it stands for ideologically is juxtaposed with the harsh reality that many citizens face because of gender inequality, skewed wealth distribution, limited religious freedom and unequal access to health care and quality education. I also understand that we cannot transform the country into a Utopia. But, an ideal Bangladesh should be part of our dream -- and we must continually strive to close the gap between reality and dream. For, what is patriotism without dreams for a better tomorrow?

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Digital archive of agricultural theses

A digital archive of agricultural theses and journals of Bangladesh has been set up under a sub-project of the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP) of the University Grants Commission (UGC). The ultimate goal of the archive is to establish a dynamic, open source based content management system-driven, highly customised and state-of-the-art search engine equipped web portal. Till now, nearly 6,000 theses and journals of different agricultural universities of Bangladesh have been included in the archive. Academics, researchers and others may visit the archive at: www.daatj.net

Meanwhile another HEQEP sub-project CP-3655 is now working to upgrade/update and to incorporate anti-plagiarism software in the existing archive. The objective of the present project is to control plagiarism in academic fields.

Professor M Zaidul Haque

Will the Palestinians get justice from ICC?

We have learnt from a news report that the Palestinians are going to file a complaint in the International Criminal Court against Israel over the Gaza war in 2014 and its policy of settlement. In this context, we expect that the international law that says "all Israeli construction on land seized during the 1967 six-day war is viewed as illegal" will be implemented.

We were shocked to know that Israel reacted furiously to this and quickly moved to cut off millions of dollars in monthly tax payments it collects on behalf of the Ramallah-based Palestinian authority. We hope the international community will do



PHOTO: AFP

something to stop Israel from doing this which will only worsen the financial crisis of Palestine.
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