

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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Another death trap Stop construction of unlawful makeshift housing

IT is disquieting to see that an illegal two-storied tin-house, built on a marshland inside the capital, caved in causing the death of 12 of its dwellers and injuries to many. This tragic incident lays bare the fact the vulnerable housing arrangements for the urban poor and sheer apathy of the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) towards prevention of unauthorised construction in the city.

It is reported that there are still about a hundred illegal makeshift structures around the marshland where the accident took place. One wonders how such a large number of unauthorised constructions could have taken place on government land right under the nose of Rajuk! According to various reports of The Daily Star, such unlawful constructions are going on across the city even in unauthorised and unfit places like marshlands in collusion with local influentials and corrupt members of the regulatory bodies. In this case, a city leader of the ruling party's youth wing, reportedly, built the illegal makeshift structure, managed unauthorised utility connections and rented it out to make a quick buck.

We urge the government to bring the culprit to book and give exemplary punishment. The city authority should take necessary action to prevent construction of such illegal and vulnerable structures and demolish the existing ones.

The urban poor contribute significantly to the city's economic activities and development. But they pass their lives in the shadow of the city's extravagance; they dwell in risky housing structures without basic amenities. The city authority should plan for rehabilitation of these poor people into safe and affordable housing arrangements.

Rules broken on land acquisition for power projects Give the people their due compensation

ATIB report on the Rampal and Matarbari power plant projects has found major violations in the way the acquisition of the land has been done. Many of the displaced people, on whose land these coal power plants will be built, have been deprived of compensation. Not only that, to add injury to their wounds, the report alleges that the displaced have had to pay 3 to 10 percent of their compensation to officials even before they got it.

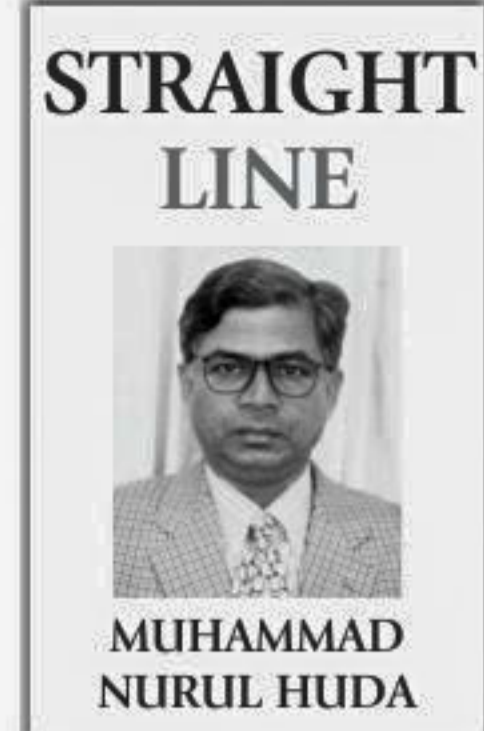
The anti-graft body has further pointed out that the government must follow the Environmental Impact Assessment Guideline for Industries 1997 while carrying out the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the two projects. But the EIA for one of the projects was conducted by a foreign firm in violation of the rules.

What is most disconcerting is that the government does not appear to give any importance to the views of the people who will be most affected by the construction of these power plants. An official of the anti-graft body has said that locals have been threatened not to express any views that go against the projects.

So far only 492 of the 3,681 displaced by the Rampal plant project have received compensation, says the study.

Development requires more power generation and these plants are supposed to provide 2640 MW of electricity. But the construction of the plants cannot be at the cost of environmental degradation and total disregard for the local people who will be deprived of their land without being recompensed for their loss. The government must make sure all those displaced receive proper compensation without having to pay 'commissions' to greedy officials.

MAYORAL ELECTION hype and fact



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

STRAIGHT LINE
FOR understandable reasons the ensuing mayoral election in the national capital and the commercial capital of the country has generated much excitement, especially after a painfully protracted period of confrontational political postures and action. Worried citizens may justifiably feel relieved. Only time will tell if the mayoral election will prove to be a significant development affecting the polity.

The reality is that despite not very strong disclaimers from the two main political parties, the mayoral election is, in effect, being contested on a political party basis. In fact, senior political leaders have opined in favour of politically supported and influenced local body election. One only hopes that heightened political passions as evidenced in the recent past will not inflame a long due mayoral election in the cities.

The question is, are local bodies elections very important in as far as it impacts governance and socio-economic development? Alternately, can we really achieve substantive democratic governance without adequately empowering the local elected institutions?

Public administration in our environment takes place in a setting where political power struggles blur the vision of administrators. Born out of colonial traditions and trying to respond to the demands of changed circumstances and times, administrative systems encounter tremendous pressures. The system has been used to further narrow interests of the rulers and privileged groups and as a result the public is alienated from the administration.

There is no denying that our cities are bursting at the seams. There is decay and deterioration in disturbing proportions. Efforts for up-gradation and renewal are few while urban centres lack elementary hygiene. Sanitation is conspicuously missing. Drains are choked and sewage at places is overflowing into the streets. Half of Dhaka metropolitan area, if not more, does not have any disposal system anyway.

Basic municipal functions like conservancy, scavenging, collection and disposal of solid waste and garbage are not attended to. The situation becomes more intriguing when we claim to be an organised society. The reality is we cannot effectively manage our cities. It is a pity that we cannot even collect and dispose of our garbage in a scientific and sustainable manner.

Efforts to identify the major factor for the paradox would point to the absence of effective local government on a regular basis. Some would say that a mismanaged city is the direct consequence of there being no responsible local self-government. National

governments come and go but local government continues to work in stable societies. In such an atmosphere, the citizens are assured of the basic amenities of life and do not have to bother about political shenanigans.

It is an interesting fact of our national life that democratically-elected governments have always been averse to the concept of local government. On the other hand, the military dictator that was afraid of an elected parliament and the urban elite loved grassroots institutions and politicized them irretrievably. As a result, we have an upside down power structure, quite unlike stable democratic societies.

Orderly social change and development of grassroots institutions have, admittedly, a longer gestation period but there is no shorter route to durable socio-economic development. There has to be a chance to learn.

Our public servants and politicians have not been able to produce alternative models of governance at the local level. Master plans have been made but not implemented. Interestingly, no one talks loudly about the concept of "city government," nor did any interest group lobby for it seriously. Our politicians see hyper-urbanisation as a problem but have very little clue about its true impact. In an age of professionalism we can perform and deliver by developing expertise in different fields and for that to happen our conventional bureaucracy has to adapt accordingly.

The writer is a columnist of the *The Daily Star*.

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But, thank you India



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

ONE cannot thank India for having a hand in drying our rivers across which today ply bullock carts, not by any act of magic but by common logic. Even the other day these were mighty rivers that were

traditionally the lifeline of our Bangalee lifestyle. We petitioned you time and again as our larger neighbours to stop indiscriminately building barrages to increase water supply in your river system, not to divert international river water from its natural flow, to please give us our legitimate share of the Teesta, Feni, and etcetera. But, we have been left parched, holding on to hopes that resume prospects at the pace of intravenous drips every time there is a VVIP visitor from across the border.

Despite our two countries liaising well to counter cross-border as well as interior terrorism and being reputedly the largest trading partners in South Asia, you have been unable to adhere to the Watercourse Convention Article 7.1 which states:

"Watercourse States shall, in utilising an international watercourse in their territories, take all appropriate measures to prevent the causing of significant harm to other watercourse States." Have you? Over the decades, significant harm has been caused to our watercourse, and we expected as per the same convention that you shall "take all appropriate measures", in consultation with the affected State (here, Bangladesh) to "eliminate or mitigate such harm and, where appropriate, to discuss the question of compensation". Alas! From this side the rivers look half-empty or less.

India can neither be thanked for being unable to stop blanket killing of our civilians by their Border Security Force (BSF) in the name of security but by brutal force. We have pleaded with you at all levels to please spare people who live in the border areas and close to no man's land, some of them may have wandered to areas that make your troops jittery. The tragic killing of 15-year old

Felani hit the world headlines, not because she was brutally murdered, but because her dead body was left hanging on the bizarre barbed wire fence for photographers to fulfil their daily dispatch. Her marriage had been arranged. There have been countless flag meetings at various civil and military ranks, but the very next day after a friendly parley, we have had cause to fly our flag at half-mast, again. Is it so difficult to train your men not to be trigger-happy? What damage can an unarmed member of the public inflict on you? How big a threat can he or she be? It is time we stop asking the questions, and you start answering a few.

On Friday morning, January 7, 2011,

much easier to exchange our eelish with your cow, our jamdani with your silk... We have talked enough. Our people in the enclaves deserve a mainland. Our children living in those areas need access to schools and medical care. The men and women have a right to seek employment in their country, but some unfinished paperwork keeps alive the deliberation while depleting the human spirit, body and mind. Living in such a situation can be torturous and traumatic.

However, we thank India wholeheartedly for their most recent support to Bangladeshis stranded in war-torn Yemen. Headlines such as "India evacuates 272 Bangladesh nationals from Yemen" can but only warm our relations.

Bangladeshis, including women and children, stranded in Yemen rescued by Indian naval ship Sumitra

Two days earlier, Nirapad News reported 8 April 2015: A total of 23 Bangladeshis have been evacuated from war-torn Yemen so far with the help of Indian government so far. Two Air India flights and an Indian Navy ship carried them to Djibouti from Sana, capital city of Yemen, and Aden. The Bangladeshis are now staying at a hotel in Djibouti. Bangladesh embassy in Kuwait through Councillor (political) SM Mahbab Alam confirmed the matter.

The State Minister for Foreign Affairs M Shahriar Alam was appreciative. "I would like to thank the Government of



FILE PHOTO

when Felani tried to climb over the border fence at Anantapur, Fulbari, her clothes got entangled in the wire, and she started screaming. Hearing her scream, the BSF members started shooting at her. She was asking for water till her death, a mouthful not a river-full.

According to Human Rights Watch, the so-called 'shoot-to-kill' policy of the BSF killed nearly 1,000 Bangladeshis between 2001 and 2011.

We cannot also extend our thanks to India because of the unresolved land disputes, that seem to have been kept alive so that the long-standing give-and-take issues can be part of the perennial agenda whenever there is an exchange of views between the two neighbours. It is so

UNB, Dhaka wrote: Bangladesh has so far evacuated 272 Bangladesh nationals, including five women and five children, with the assistance of an Indian ship. "The final number of Bangladesh nationals evacuated by INS Sumitra from Al Hudaaydah is 272, including five women and five children," the Indian High Commission tweeted early Friday. There is no Bangladesh diplomatic mission in Yemen, although according to one approximation of our foreign office, there might be between 1,500 and 3,000 Bangladeshis living in Yemen. Thanks to the captain and crew of INS Sumitra for lending their hand to a people in plight, for whom death may have been the other choice.

India for rescuing stranded Bangladeshis in Yemen and our officials who are still in Djibouti." That expression of gratitude did not make the media headlines. Public relations between our two countries have reached such a limbo that expressing thanks publicly seems inappropriate.

On behalf of the families of the rescued Bangladeshis, and on our behalf, we thank you India for coming to the aid of the distressed. Your assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

We look forward to thanking you soonest for Teesta, Feni, enclaves, land...

The author is a practising Architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Multiple Paul Harris Fellow Rotarian.

COMMENTS

"Can we eradicate extreme poverty in Bangladesh?"
(April 13, 2015)

Shuvonn Rezaa
The cure for poverty has a name; it's called empowerment of women.

"Khokon promises modern Dhaka if voted mayor"
(April 13, 2015)

Hasan Tareq
I'm still stuck with "Din Bodoler Sonod". Can't think more, sorry.
Faisal Zakaria
Need to see detailed blueprint of your strategy and plan. Otherwise, it's only big talk.

"Withering tulips on moral grounds"
(April 11, 2015)

Deep Purple Blue
A wonderful thought provoking piece - many thanks, Dr. Nizam!
Keep writing.

"Beef prices spiral for two reasons"
(April 12, 2015)

Ali I Choudhury
This is a double-edged weapon, no doubt, and is sure to bring about hardship for both countries; its economic impact shall have to borne by both the communities to satisfy the ego of their leadership to gain political benefit.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Why this mass promotion?

I must thank Engr. S.A. Mansoor for his letter 'Mass promotion or mass mess-up?' published in The Daily Star on April 9, 2015. His observation is true. He mentions that the measures adopted by the top management of the government to win the favour of bureaucrats will possibly help the government win the next election. This may be tantamount to bribing public servants.

A day after this mass promotion in the civil administration, the government promoted 134 police officials. This came just over a year after the Awami League-led government assumed office through the January 5, 2014 polls.

We do not understand why police officials are getting promotions; the law and order situation is deteriorating fast. Sagar and Rumi's murderers are still at large, people are being killed and kidnapped and they vanish without a trace. Sometimes law-enforcing agents act like friends not friends. We think the government should refrain from showing this sort of favour.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

The Body Monologues

- My university in Ann Arbor, USA recently hosted an event called 'Body Monologues', greatly inspired by the popular Vagina Monologues series. An empowering venture, the event showcased spoken word poetry and speeches about body image and issues from a diverse group of people. Adding hilarious jokes, the performers shook the audience into laughter as they talked about appearance issues they have battled with during their lives such as for being anorexic, homosexual or someone of colour.

- However, the first part of the show impacted me the most because it was opened by a Bengali American girl. Shy and yet eloquent, she stood tall and proud on the stage and talked about

how as a Bengali living in America, she had constantly been the target of body shaming for not showing enough skin in front of her friends and always feeling like the outsider in school and society. I could greatly relate to her issues, having faced similar situations. I applauded her strongly when she ended by talking about how she always incorporated her cultural values into her appearance even if they were deemed outside the usual fashion trends. Our culture is not oppressive, she added vehemently, but it certainly taught her to be unique in a field of American faces and traditions. It helped her become herself, she concluded. It helped her live life as a Bengali in America.

Samiha Matin
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor