

Increasing highway fatality

Implement the corrective measures

THE government has announced yet another measure to reduce highway accidents – banning three-wheelers from the highways. But we can hardly take comfort from the announcement, simply because none of the decisions taken so far with regard to road safety has been implemented.

Every year the media has to carry the most painful reports of deaths in highway accidents that occur during the Eid holidays. This has been a repetitive phenomenon which the media constantly warn the authorities of well before the start of the holidays and ask them to address. Sometimes actions are taken but only in a makeshift manner and by temporary means. Unfortunately, the caravan of death continues.

This year has been perhaps even more tragic in the way accidents have occurred causing deaths, in four days only, to more than forty unfortunate holiday-goers. And more unfortunate is the fact that a particular point near the Bangabandhu Bridge has been the most dangerous spot taking more than twenty lives in the space of two days.

Government inaction in effectively curbing road accidents is lamentable. Even more unacceptable is the road transport minister's lamentation that the decision cannot be implemented for various reasons. Such a woeful excuse does not wash with the public and brings little comfort to those that have lost loved ones only because of incompetence of the road transport authorities.

The reason why decisions cannot be implemented is known to all. But no minister is worth his salt if he is stunted by political links from taking action. To allow political links to prevail over issues related to the safety of people's lives amounts to indefensible acquiescence.

Unsafe water in urban areas

Ill-maintained pipes a major cause

IT is of grave concern that a Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) survey has found 55 percent of urban households across the country use water contaminated by E.coli, a dangerous bacteria that causes serious waterborne diseases. It has been found that the water has become polluted from source mainly because of leaky water pipes. Not surprisingly it is mainly the urban poor who are affected the most by contaminated water.

Water becoming undrinkable due to inordinately high levels of pathogens is a regular problem in urban areas especially during water-logging when dirt and filth enter pipes especially if they are ill-maintained. There is therefore no excuse for the authorities supplying the water to have been so nonchalant about a situation that affects the lives of millions. According to a report in this paper, a high official of a government body that deals with water supply in the capital, Dhaka Wasa is in the process of replacing the old, cracked pipes with Asian Development Bank's financing. The question is: why have they waited so long?

Though delayed, it is still a hopeful sign that Dhaka Wasa is taking an initiative to solve this crisis; but water supplying authorities of other urban areas where the contamination has been detected must also do the same. In the wake of such a crisis, the state must take all necessary steps to ensure an adequate supply of drinkable water to urban households. These include maintenance of water pipes, raising public awareness about the use of clean utensils to carry water in households and preventing water-logging in streets. Providing clean, potable water to the public is one of the fundamental responsibilities of the government.

COMMENTS

“Stunning discovery” (July 22, 2015)

Satoto Shanto

He first has to copyright it if he has the right, or otherwise some business giants will earn millions of dollars with this technology and he might not get anything.

Rajjaque Bhuiyan

Congratulations and thank you so much for this important discovery.


“LAND IS PRICELESS adivasi lives are not” (July 22, 2015)

Robert Hall

It's so sad to read such stories; Bangladesh government is hardly doing anything to solve these problems.

Hypocrisy and its hidden horror

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

defaulters. When I told him he should repay the money, he gave me the shock of my life. “One shouldn't expect human beings to be angels,” he sermonised in these exact words. I stared him in the face, wondering if he was even human.

What he said stuck in my memory like chewing gum does to teeth. Frankly speaking, it was a moment of rude awakening for me because never before had I seen such a piteous face of evil in such a scurrilous incarnation. I am broaching up this subject years later not to settle my score with a misguided man, but to confirm that he was by no means an exception to the rule.

Dogs bark, cats meow, goats bleat, and donkeys bray, because the animal world is divided in its sights and sounds. We can recognise various species either from their looks or sounds, but human beings, given their mischievous capacities, interchangeably shuffle between vicarious identities. They cannot be necessarily defined by anything they do or say.

It's because hypocrisy performs an optical illusion on the audience when the visually perceived images differ from the objective reality. The hypocrites are not what they seem, their actual faces hiding behind improvised smokecreens. If you look into their eyes, you see nothing but incessant churning of the twilight glow. Days end and nights begin, but the hypocrites forever control the light of truth.

Thus, hypocrites have a split personality. They love to live inside one identity but live to love another. Double standard is to them what binary number is to computing. What the hypocrites say or do is either one in zero or zero in one. Truth is either muzzled by falsehood or falsehood is masked in truth.

The lives of such people are lies, schemes and subterfuges, and encounters with them are as if moments of drug-induced delusions. In avowal, you tend to give them the benefit of doubt. In denial, you don't know whether to believe what they say. The worst is when you know they are phonies but cannot challenge them.

ONCE I gave money to a costumed intellectual, whose intellect subsequently proved more conspicuous in his costume than anywhere else. He wanted to finish writing two books and I credulously gave him a sizeable amount of cash to complete his works. Several years later, he never finished those books or refunded the money, and I confronted him with a banker's instinct following up on a loan



These despicable people adopt this way of life because it's convenient for them. They change with the story and the story changes with them. They fixate on nothing. Nothing fixates on them.

In its basic form, hypocrisy is when words differ from actions. But different people load it up with different options. Many hypocrites hide their past by claiming to be who they aren't. Some exaggerate things, taking the credit they don't deserve. Others look for scapegoats to blame for problems of their own creation. The intellectual of my story has chosen to hide behind his deceptive disguise.

The hypocrites can be categorised as liars, fraudsters, connivers, manipulators, and evaders. But what makes them hypocritical is when the goal isn't to distort truth but to embellish lies. Tennessee Williams elaborated on this distinction when he wrote that the only thing worse than a liar is a liar who is also a hypocrite.

If you look around, hypocrisy abounds. Faces are hiding in their masks, actions are awash in contradictions, and words are going against intentions. It's hard to find anyone who is true to self to prove William Hazlitt's contention that even the repentance of a hypocrite is hypocrisy itself. Once a hypocrite, always a hypocrite. Caught in the concentric circle of

pretensions, he gets sucked more into it the more he tries to get out.

Meeting strangers is an adventure like mapping out an unknown terrain or charting a new course. But meeting hypocrites is like going to an amusement park designed around a central theme. Each of them is an area planned as a leisure attraction, in which all the displays, buildings, and activities are based on or relate to the art of deception.

American writer O. Henry claimed that the social structure would have fallen into pieces without prevaricators, hypocrites and liars. He argued that we must act in one another's presence just as we must wear clothes. He justifies manipulation of truth for the sake of modesty and shame.

Exactly where the hypocrites go wrong. They are shameless and immodest in their presentation of themselves. And hypocrisy does a reverse spin on them: instead of covering up they stand naked.

It was not long ago that I was stricken by its horror when a supposedly reasonable man had abruptly dropped his clothes.

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Resolving Greece's Debt Crisis

MIZANUR RAHMAN

GREECE'S debt crisis has turned out to be unsustainable. Greek banks are closed; government is rationing limited available cash to its citizens. It is highly likely that Greece will soon exit from the Eurozone. Its aftermath in Greece and beyond is uncertain.

Conflicting views are there as to why Greek economy has reached this dire state. A majority view is that the policy mix which Greece's creditors including IMF notably negotiated with Greek government has proved counterproductive. It has been heavily biased towards 'austerity,' which led to sustained economic contraction. The austerity measures forced countries like Greece to undergo painful deflation of wages and other costs to become competitive. It also failed to bring about the much needed price competitiveness. Greek GDP data shows that the economy began contracting just after the global financial crisis had gripped the world economy in 2009. Greek economy indeed contracted by one-third of its pre-crisis level. Greek macroeconomic data further show that in pre-crisis time Greece experienced a persistent saving-investment gap and hence a soaring current account imbalance. No doubt, this was possible as coeditors perceived Greece, then a new member state of Eurozone, to be a safe haven for lending and investment.

Net capital flow to Greece, though, surged to finance ballooning current account deficits that did not expand Greece's productive capacity. The growing accumulation of external debt seemed to have financed excessive dissaving on the part of both Greek private and public sectors. Data indicate that investment - GDP ratio in this benign time remained stagnant at around 20 percent. It is ironic that neither IMF nor Greece creditors in

the Eurogroup timely issued a warning flag that the Greek stock of foreign debt was becoming unsustainable.

Changes in real exchange rate from 2001 to 2009 indicate how Greece let its export production down. Real effective exchange rate (REER), a measure of relative price of Greece's home goods in terms of foreign goods, in fact, observed a sustained appreciation by more than 30 percent in this time. This happened as the surging capital flow continued to shift Greek aggregate demand to the right and the domestic price kept rising. As an outcome, Greek exports lost their price competitiveness in the rest of the world and its current account deficits widened. A false signal in recent movements of REER deserves further explanation. It is that austerity measures led to serial contraction of Greek economy after the first quarter of 2010 and accompanied a moderate real devaluation. Export-GDP ratio also rose in this time. This must not be a ground of further austerity on the premise that in the same time both GDP and investment-GDP ratio declined precipitously.

The global financial crisis in 2009, in fact, opened fault lines in Greek economy. By the end of 2009, capital flights out of Greece seem to have begun. This is indicated by an increasing government bond yield since 2010. Greece's creditors since then negotiated an economic policy which tied further lending to the country to the policy mix of austerity. This proved tragically counterproductive. The austerity, in fact, washed away investment in Greece economy. Investment-GDP ratio rapidly declined from 25 percent to less than 10 percent over the last six years. Austerity did not increase productive capacity of Greece's economy; instead it brought the economy to a stop.

Faced with the same kind of policy mix such as cutting pension benefits of the elderly and reforming tax policy, Prime Minister Alexi Tsipras had no option but

to come back to the Greek electorate. Greek people overwhelmingly approved the 'No' referendum on July 5, 2015. For more than three weeks, Greece's PM Tsipras could not offer any credible deal to the country's creditors while its banking system remained shut. A new bailout deal was ultimately struck on July 12. But the deal has unfortunately become what Greek people just rejected on July 5. IMF has also become uncharacteristically critical of the deal. It said Greece's public debt was now "highly unsustainable" and urged debt relief on a scale "well beyond what has been under consideration to date". The IMF told European finance ministers

Greece's desire to stay within Eurozone is a seriously constrained choice for its economy. This is because it will continue to plague price competitiveness of Greece's exportables in the rest of the world.

that a new bailout should include measures to restructure the country's debt. Tsipras is facing a rebellion within his left-leaning Syriza coalition.

The new deal included further spending cuts, more taxes and an elaborate scope for policy interventions by the creditors. The new Greece bailout programme will only affect Greece's debt structure not its debt sustainability. It is in all measures designed to bail out Eurozone's private creditors with European taxpayers' money. It will very likely aggravate an already alarming and protracted economic downturn, compounding poverty and exceptionally high unemployment. A case of Grexit is

deferred, not avoided.

Greece's desire to stay within Eurozone is a seriously constrained choice for its economy. This is because it will continue to plague price competitiveness of Greece's exportables in the rest of the world. Net foreign spending on Greek home goods will thus not rise and a sustained economic growth in Greece is unlikely. In the present scenario, this would not resolve Greece's investment problem, nor will it bring about a substantial relative price decline which Greece needs urgently. One must not forget that more than a quarter of working age people in Greece are now

unemployed. The Greek government might actively consider adopting a new currency. A new currency could facilitate the recapitalisation of the domestic banking system, bring in foreign direct investment, and bring about a resolution to its macroeconomic imbalances. It is certain that European taxpayers in the developed Euro area will ultimately have to absorb substantial losses to their claims on Greece.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Discrimination through pay scale

Every time a pay commission is formed in Bangladesh and it publishes reports a secretarial committee finalises the commission proposals. This year is no exception. But this time the secretarial committee discriminated against all other cadres and non-cadre employees. The first one is the creation of two pay grades for secretaries over grade-1: one for the cabinet secretary and the chief secretary to the PM, the other for senior secretaries. The other notable discrimination is the proposal of abolishing selection grade and time scale facilities usually applicable to employees other than the administration cadre.

If selection grade and time scale facilities are snatched away, most cadres (having less tiers than administration) will lose even the chance of reaching grade-2; most of them would end their service at grade-4! Therefore, I urge the secretarial committee and the cabinet to do justice to them by keeping both the selection grade and time scale.

MAS Molla
Life member, BAAS

Tigers' wonderful performance

Over the past few months, Tigers have outplayed some good teams and thus, made a good name in the cricket world. Hope from now on, no team will underest-
mate us. I would like to extend my heartiest con-
gratulations to the Bangladesh cricket team.
Nafis Nihal
Ferdaus
Anandaniketan
School, Sylhet



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Welcome back, LHC

Recently I have come across news reports which say that the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) has restarted after two years of intense maintenance and consolidation, and several months of preparation. That means the most powerful particle accelerator in the world is back in operation with protons circling the machine's 27 km tunnel for the first time since 2013.

In fact, now the beams will be set up in such a way that they will produce more collisions by bunching protons closer together and it would be possible because of improved magnet protection system. The technical stop of the LHC should be considered a Herculean task because at least 10,000 electrical inter-connections between the magnets were consolidated. However, it is said that physicists are frustrated by the existing Standard Model of particle physics. In order to explain several baffling properties of the universe, things beyond the Standard Model have been proposed - but never directly detected. We hope scientists will discover new physics beyond the Standard Model.

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