

Bangladesh investment climate

Take steps to remove impediments

THE American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) has recently launched a report on the investment climate in Bangladesh titled 'Investment Climate Statement 2015'. Corruption has been identified as one of the major impediments that increase the risk and cost of doing business, and it is estimated to reduce growth of GDP by as much as two to three percent. As the anti-corruption watchdog has been downsized in terms of power, the effectiveness of the drive against corruption may be stunted. Bureaucratic delays, inadequacy of infrastructure and lax implementation of laws are some of the issues that have been highlighted as major impediments to foreign direct investment (FDI).

The culture of settling political scores on the streets through agitation, violence and blockades increase costs and productivity losses for foreign firms. Despite receiving US\$1.5 billion as FDI in 2013-14, a 50 percent jump from the previous fiscal, it is a paltry amount when taking into account the total foreign investment that South Asia attracted during the same time period. The problems associated with energy supply and power have become chronic which could be alleviated due to the delays associated with implementing mega projects in the power sector.

Despite numerous problems, the country, boasting the eighth largest population in the world and having a young population, provides a lot of opportunities for investment, particularly in energy, power, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications and infrastructure. There is huge potential to be exploited, but bottlenecks need to be addressed in earnest before Bangladesh can expect serious growth of FDI.

Dr Edric Baker – An Unsung Hero

His work should be carried on

IT is with deep reverence that we acknowledge the noble contributions of Dr Edric Baker who passed away on Tuesday, September 1. A New Zealander, who came to Bangladesh in 1979, working mainly to give healthcare to the poor, Dr Baker set up the Kailakuri Health Care Centre in Tangail for the underprivileged in the area. At the Centre, he provided treatment and medicine at a nominal cost, sometimes even for free. Many of his patients were from the most deprived sections of the community. Fluent in Bangla, his selflessness and generosity touched the hearts of many, evident from the outpouring of grief by hundreds at his funeral.

In a country where healthcare is inaccessible to most of the citizens, Dr Edric Baker, popularly known as *Daktar Bhai*, is an example that we hope will be emulated. Instead of pursuing a lucrative career in his own country, he chose to serve humanity with the skills he had acquired as a doctor.

For the poor and helpless he was a Godsend, a ray of hope. His dream, as expressed by an interview in this newspaper in 2001, was to find a successor to run the clinic with the same dedication as he had for so many years. Unfortunately, that has not happened despite the hundreds of MBBS graduates we get each year.

We are eternally grateful to this noble soul for his gift of love to our needy brothers and sisters. His work and altruism should be an inspiration to other doctors of this country to dedicate some of their time to taking care of the sick and the poor. His work at the Kailakuri Health Centre must be carried forward.

COMMENTS

"If the impact of gas and power tariff hike is not tolerable for the people, the prime minister may reconsider this decision."

—Road Transport Minister Obaidul Quader

Amina

Well, it is not tolerable for the middle and low income people.

Joynal Abedin

Honourable minister, thank you so much for your realisation.

"Attorney general defends section 57"

(September 1, 2015)

Zahir Hasan

I don't know how someone can defend section 57.

Syed Ahmad Faruque

It is the duty of the AG to defend the government, no matter whether it is right or wrong.

"Khaleda for UN probe into disappearances"

(August 31, 2015)

Parimal Kanti Barua

Forced disappearances are very painful for families of those who have disappeared.

Dhaka's shameful waterlogging woes



NAHELA NOWSHIN

BARELY an hour's rainfall on the first day of September brought Dhaka city to a near collapse. Dhakaites all throughout the capital suffered miseries hours on end due to the long tailbacks caused by severe traffic jams in the heavily inundated streets. In a rare moment of unity, frustrated city-dwellers posted photos and status updates of a deluged Dhaka and of people navigating the streets under waist-deep water on social media decrying the capital's pathetic state of affairs.

The state of Dhaka – what is supposed to be the capital city of a "lower middle" income country – was telling after those *couple of minutes* of rain. That the capital city of a country can be brought to a standstill due to less than an hour of rainfall is absolutely shameful. That the drainage management system of a city with one of the highest population densities in the world is basically dysfunctional is appalling. The disastrous state of Dhaka's drainage system was most glaringly visible in that short period of time during which the city was brought to its knees.

Bangladesh has historically relied on wetlands and the gravity drainage system of *khal*s (canals) which are linked to surrounding rivers. Before modernisation, these natural canals served as the mode of disposal of runoff water from floods and such, as well as means of transportation. However, with time, due to rapid urbanisation water bodies and flood plains started being filled up (especially towards the end of the 90s) for various commercial and industrial purposes and water retention capacity fell sharply along with the availability of public spaces. Despite the enactment of the Water Body Conservation Act 2000, Dhaka has lost huge amounts of wetlands over time.

Around 80 percent of Dhaka city is drained through these channels and the city is divided into 12 drainage zones based on the topography of the area, *khal* systems and surrounding rivers. Dholai Khal, that once used to be an essential route for boats, has nearly vanished within the past four decades due to the city government's detrimental policies that closed the *khal* for road construction. The primary drainage channel of the Segunbagicha Khal – starting from Shahbagh to Jirani Khal – of central Dhaka is now mostly under

illegal occupation of influential people in the area. Begunbari Khal, Ibrahimpur Khal, Gopibagh Khal and many other canals have similarly come under encroachment and acquisition for the construction of roads, box culvert and drains. These actions have rendered these canals defunct of their original purpose which was to channel the city's drainage water.

Wasa and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), the authorities primary responsible of freeing the city of its waterlogging woes, are doing a questionable job of fulfilling their civic duty. These entities (including city planners) that have a habit of deflecting blame on one another for the lack of a proper infrastructure dedicated to manage the capital's drainage water system must be held accountable.

Wasa and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), the authorities primary responsible of freeing the city of its waterlogging woes, are doing a questionable job of fulfilling their civic duty. These entities (including city planners) that have a habit of deflecting blame on one another for the lack of a proper infrastructure dedicated to manage the capital's drainage water system must be held accountable.

Will the honourable Mayors and Wasa officials give us a glimpse into what exactly is being done, if anything, with regard to the drainage system that needs to be expanded by a whopping 40 percent to accommodate the city's rainfall induced flooding and other waste water? Apart from attending roundtable discussions, public conferences and forming ad hoc "committees" to address the problem of waterlogging, will the newly-elected mayors and concerned authorities tell us if any *remotely* concrete solutions have been acted upon in this regard? What's happening with the city corporations' project in conjunction with

Wasa that is yet to mitigate any of the problems regarding waterlogging?

DNCC Mayor Annisul Huq apparently visited Mirpur along with Wasa officials and directed the latter to take "proper initiatives". What were these "initiatives" and how much progress has been made thus far, if any? Will DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon, instead of placing the blame on "bureaucratic reasons", tell us what his three-member committee created with the sole purpose of easing waterlogging in the city has achieved so far? The committee is supposed to have submitted a report detailing possible solutions to waterlogging by now. How is DCC going about fixing the acute problem of manholes and ill-maintained roads that exacerbate the problem of waterlogging that continues to disrupt the lives of commuters on a daily basis? Is it too much to ask for a follow-up with transparency, efficiency and specificity instead of vague assurances (in the form of "committees" being created and "initiatives" being taken) and platitudes thrown our way every single time?

How assured are we to be when some authorities, with their comical statements, blatantly shun responsibility? Just recently, a certain higher-up posted a Facebook status update that basically blamed solid waste for clogging up the drains for flooding the streets this Tuesday while likening the situation to that of cities such as New York and Bangkok (meaning, the catastrophic waterlogging seen on Tuesday was inevitable and would have happened in any other city!)

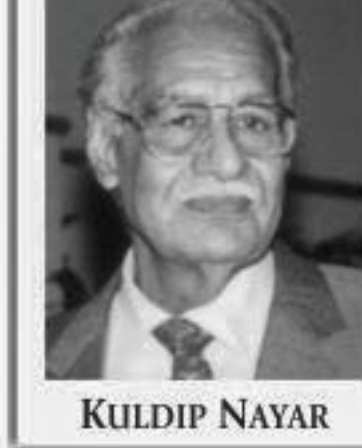
It seems like a basic understanding of Dhaka's drainage disaster of untold proportions eludes many of those who need to understand it the most. The bottomline is this: *the problem of waterlogging cannot be solved until and unless we are serious about building a drainage system that actually works in the long-run.*

A few sewerage lines and drains do not amount to a "drainage system". The latter should consist of a *network* of sewerage lines and drains that are interconnected to water bodies such as ponds, lakes and canals. But in order to do this, we must first save our water bodies that are rapidly shrinking due to indiscriminate encroachment by land grabbers. The concerned authorities – from Wasa officials to our new mayors – must stop pointing fingers at one another and sincerely tackle Dhaka's embarrassing waterlogging mess which is probably one of the worst anywhere in the world.

The writer is a journalist at *The Daily Star*.

SHADOW OF THE 1965 WAR

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDEEP NAYYAR

DEMOCRACIES celebrate Magna Carta, not war victory. Such actions only encourage Bonapartism and, in no way, strengthen people's say. I was dismayed to see a full-page advertisement in newspapers to commemorate the victory of the 1965 war against Pakistan. The advertisement said: "The Indo-Pak War of 1965, which began on August 5 and ended on September 23, is one of the biggest tank battles since World War-II. Pakistan launched troops inside Kashmir under Operation Gibraltar in early August 1965.

"Further operations were stalled when Indian Army captured the strategic Haji Pir Pass on August 28, 1965. Pakistan then launched operation Grand Slam in Akhnoor sector, but India opened the Western front to counter the same. Pakistan's 1 Armoured Division was badly mauled in the Battle of Asal Uttar with nearly 100 tanks destroyed. Other major battles were fought at Poonch, Phillora, Barki and Dograi."

True, India had an upper hand but it was at best 55 percent against 45 percent. Lahore was the yardstick. We could not take it and had to bypass it. General J.N. Chaudhuri, who was the Chief of Army Staff at that time, told me subsequently in an interview that he had never planned to occupy Lahore. It would have unnecessarily pinned down a large number of troops and we would have suffered heavy casualties. Pakistan, he said, would have defended the city with all its resources and fought us in every house, every street.

This may well be a valid explanation. Yet, the general impression is that India failed to take Lahore. A small contingent which reached the Ravi Bridge, bypassing Lahore, was severely crushed. General Chaudhuri's defence was that the march to the Ravi Bridge was neither authorised, nor did it figure in his scheme of things. This must be true. But the thinking of an average person is different. He believed that India lacked strength to occupy Lahore.

General Chaudhuri said that their main purpose was to destroy Pakistan's armour, particularly the Patton tank which America had given them. The Ichhogil Canal in the area came in handy. Indian troops breached it to let the water spread but the tanks got stuck in the water.

The question which remains unanswered is: Who was responsible for the 1965 war?

General Mohammad Ayub Khan, who was then Pakistan's Marshal Law Administrator, and Commander-in-Chief told me that it was 'Bhutto's war'. Bhutto sent infiltrators into Kashmir, without taking him into confidence. In fact, General Ayub's son, Gohar Ayub, apart from confirming what his father had said, went public with part of the information.

Gohar used to live in a palatial house in the suburbs of Islamabad. This was where he hosted a lunch for me. Mushahid Husain, then the editor of *Muslim*, had arranged it. I remember the day distinctly because I heard about the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi at Gohar's house. He

spoke about her only for a while and that too cursorily.

In fact, Gohar was keen to tell me something which was not complimentary to our armed forces. His story was that our armour had chinks. I was sure it had. But I was taken aback when he said that a copy of topmost secret papers from India's military headquarters would be "with us before they reached Nehru's table".

Those days you could walk through South Block corridors from one end to the other in New Delhi. Security requirements had not yet blocked passage. Nor had gates been built within gates. How could a paper conceivably reach Pakistan intelligence agencies before a messenger covered a few yards to deliver it to Nehru's office?

At that time, Gohar did not give the example of an Indian brigadier parting with the 1965 war plan for a sum of Rs 20,000. However, he did remark that his father

Kashmir reaching his father were 'doctored'. His father has himself told me that Bhutto never took him into confidence on the scale of infiltration. (Ironically, that's exactly what Nawaz Sharif, in exile at Jeddah, told me about Pakistan's misadventure at Kargil). Pakistan's attack in '65 began with hundreds of infiltrators—mujahids (liberators), as Bhutto, then Pakistan's foreign minister, hailed them—stealing into Kashmir.

The report of the intrusion first appeared in the India press on August 9, 1965. While accepting his credentials as India's High Commissioner at Rawalpindi, Ayub assured Kewal Singh that Pakistan would reciprocate every move from India for better cooperation. He argued that infiltration into Kashmir was not the same thing as infiltration into India. The 'uprising' that Pakistan expected to foment failed because local Kashmiris did



Indians exult over a captured Pakistani tank during the war.

PHOTO: AFP

was "contemptuous of Indian officers selling their country for a few thousand rupees". I did not join issue with him because it was the first time I was hearing of any such thing. But I told Gohar about a remark his father had made against the Kashmiris when I met him in Islamabad in 1972. I had gone there to interview Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was briefly the president after Pakistan's debacle in Dhaka.

Ayub said Bhutto had assured him that the Kashmiris would rise in revolt once they knew the Pakistan army was in their midst. Ayub referred to the infiltrators as 'Bhutto's mujahideen'. According to Ayub, he told Bhutto that if he knew anything about Kashmiris, they would never raise the gun.

Gohar was wrong in saying that the reports on

not help the infiltrators. And when I interviewed Bhutto, he did not deny Ayub's allegation that the 1965 war was his doing. However, he said that he has "learned a lesson and would not repeat it."

If at all New Delhi was keen to talk about the 1965 war victory, however limited, it should have dwelt more into the benefits of being a democratic state, instead of focusing on violence and weapons. India's advantage is that sovereignty remains with the people. In Pakistan, the interest of the armed forces comes first. New Delhi cannot export democracy, but it should help Pakistan get back the rule where the people have the final say.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Who is going to keep BCL under check?

Nobody—be it an unborn baby or a university teacher—seems to be safe from the mighty BCL men. Their audacity has exceeded all limits. The nation is shocked and disgusted at the way they attacked some teachers at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology. We wonder why the top leadership is not taking drastic actions to control them.
Sanat Singha Goswami
Gaibandha

Gas and power tariff hike

Recently, the government has decided to hike the price of gas and electricity. If this hike is implemented, it would be another blow to the lower and middle income people. We hope the government will reconsider its decision keeping public interest uppermost in their mind.
Samiul Raijul
School of Business and Economics, NSU



FILE PHOTO