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LATE S. M. ALI

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Reclaiming lost canals

Constricting them is counterproductive

THAT the capital comes to a standstill due to waterlogging every time there is heavy rain is hardly a surprise if we consider that as much as two-thirds of its conservable floodplains and water retention zones have been usurped by different realtors over the years. Natural canals, which are supposed to transport and dispose of water from floods, have been filled up with unplanned, and often unlawful, structures, rendering them defunct, and Dhaka dysfunctional. Under the dire circumstances, it is shocking that Dhaka WASA has actually been further constricting whatever little exists of the natural canals in the city in the name of development and reclamation.

According to a *Prothom Alo* report, although 70 crore taka has already been spent in the last four years in a project funded by the World Bank for reclaiming 12 canals, the channels have actually shrunk as banks have been concretised under the project period. In Jirani and Bashabo, for instance, the canal which is supposed to be at least 20 by 30 metres has been reduced to 6 by 6 metres, exacerbating the waterlogging woes of that area. In most project areas, illegal constructions still remain on both sides of the canal. Drives are undertaken from time to time, but so half-heartedly that the structures reappear within a week. Many canals are used as garbage dumps.

With so much money invested in the project, it is incomprehensible why Wasa could not conduct systematic drives with proper follow-up to make sure that all illegal structures are removed, the channels widened, and garbage disposed of. It is imperative that they free up and reclaim encroached channels rather than further choke them.

Fast-tracking Chittagong's development

Remove the hindrances

A recently organised seminar titled "Global Port, Global City: Prioritising Chittagong for Accelerating National Growth" dwelt on problems facing the country's premier port city. Chittagong is not only the second largest city in the country but is also home to 40 percent of heavy industrial output, contributes up to 25 percent of the annual national revenue and handles 80 percent of total external trade. Despite all this, the current trend of head offices of established business houses and industry moving out of Chittagong and relocating to Dhaka is a worrying sign. Chittagong's development which is pivotal to the growth of the national economy is being rather de-prioritised.

Plans for establishing a deep sea port still remain in paper. Hence the existing port facility cannot cope with the growth in trade. It continues to suffer from lack of operational autonomy and there have been allegations of graft that hinders efficiency. With infrastructure deficiencies left unaddressed, potential foreign direct investment risks being weaned away by competing nations in the neighbourhood. Another mega project that continues to suffer inordinate delays is the much-vaunted expansion of Dhaka-Chittagong highway from existing 2-lane to 4-lane. Lastly, the chronic gas supply shortage has crippled expansion efforts of industries in the Chittagong industrial zones.

Time has arrived to delineate roles and responsibilities of the 32 agencies responsible for city development and also prioritise fast-track completion of key infrastructure projects that have been virtually in a limbo.

COMMENTS

"Drainage scanty, mostly clogged"
(September 3, 2015)

Nuzhat Rodela

Total mismanagement is the root cause of this problem.

"BCL activists' suspension is unjust"
(September 3, 2015)

Abul Khan

Prof. Zafar Iqbal is too good to say that the students who assaulted the teachers including his wife need not be blamed. Surely, those who were behind this disgraceful incident need to be exposed and taken to custody as early as possible. But it's also true that the students who have assaulted their teachers are not kids. They should be and must be blamed.

"Doctor for the poor no more"
(September 2, 2015)

SM Musa

I want to thank Mr. Mirza Shakil for the well written report. I would like to request him to visit Ratanpur village (thana- Kaligonj, district- Satkhira) where 85-years-old Dr. Mohammad Ameer Hossain has been serving the poor since 1957 after graduating from Dhaka Medical College. He obeyed his mother's wish and started practicing in his own village. We will be happy to see a report on this selfless physician in *The Daily Star*.

Rony Akand

We hope Bangladeshi doctors will come forward to serve the poor.

Arifin Anik

He who lives for others never dies. He is alive in his work and the lives he saved. He set an example for all doctors.

SOCIAL BUSINESS

Opportunities and Challenges

DR. MUHAMMAD MUSTAFIZUR RAHAMAN

SOcial business has increased the importance of economic and social development in emerging economies. But research on this subject is still in a very nascent stage.

Recently, Wahiduddin Mahmud, a well-reputed economist, critically viewed the concept proposed by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus in his op-ed "Is social business the way forward?" published in *The Daily Star* on July 29, 2015. More specifically, he opines that the working of the market economy coupled with social objectives has been in existence since long and thus, socially oriented business is not a new concept. Moreover, no-dividend policy might discourage the potential investors in investing in a social business. In contrast to these arguments, in his op-ed "The emergence of social business" published on August 16, 2015, M. Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, a respected professor of finance, argues that the concept of Professor Muhammad Yunus is new and its necessity is immense for addressing social problems. This brief note will hopefully be a new addition to the ongoing debates.

The conventional business suggests that maximising profit or self-interest behaviour in turn benefits the whole society. In contrast, Muhammad Yunus calls for addressing social problems at the expense of profits. He argues that capitalism has created poverty by exclusively focusing on profits. He proposed another business model called "Social Business." He described social business as "selfless" business whose purpose is to bring an end to social problems, such as education, health, technology access and environment. He developed seven principles of social business at the 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos.

A comparison between social business and other business models leads us to believe that social businesses has more potential than other business models in addressing the problems of poverty of those who live at the bottom of the pyramid (BOP). Addressing social problems is the desirable bi-product of a conventional business, whereas it is the main activity of a social business. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a long practiced popular method of addressing social problems by conventional business models. CSR, however, devotes a small portion of profits which is

insufficient to address social problems. Moreover, CSR is constrained by company's budget limitations. Conversely, the target of social business is unreached poor people.

Of note, social business is not without its limits. It sacrifices profit on one hand and seeks financial sustainability on the other. For the sake of financial sustainability, social businesses might increase the price of its product or service which might lower its social impact, thus making the business self-defeating. As mentioned by Chowdhury, Grameen Danone Foods Limited, the first social business joint venture, charges a higher price for the same product in urban areas than in rural areas to earn profits. Similarly, the Grameen Veolia Water finds it difficult to survive because revenue earned from rural sales was too small to recover the expenses. Later, they started selling water in 20 Liter jars in urban areas at higher prices. It means that the expandability of the project is confined by the profit earned in urban areas and they look more like CSR than social business in the sense that they depend on the profit earned from someplace else.

Social business is fundamentally a non-loss, non-dividend business devoted to solving a social problem. The investors or owners don't earn profits but they can get returns of the original investment.

This principle seems too restrictive and might be harmful for social business. Needless to say, not all the social business can succeed and some businesses will eventually incur losses. In that case, the investors will lose their money. If no-dividend is allowed, then expected benefits from investing in social business will be negative which will discourage potential investors in investing in social business. Nevertheless, investment in social business by big companies and foundations will have little impact on their capital or business if their social businesses disappear from the market. But a marginal company will be driven out from the society if the investment in social business falls at risk because equity injection for the company will not be possible for a long time. It is noteworthy that a conventional small firm might be stuck in incurring losses, thus encountering the problem of financial sustainability. As it is a profit maximising business, the owner has the opportunity to regain it by earning profits in the near future. But this case is not possible

in a social business because the prices are too low to recover the expenses or loss.

With the requirement of no-dividends, social businesses would be much like other social enterprises and for-profit conventional business models. Social Enterprise Alliance (SEA) defines social enterprises as those that "encompass for-profit organisations whose driving purpose is to address social needs and services." Unfortunately, Yunus's definition of social business disqualifies these activities as social business. Furthermore, in his book *Building Social Business: The New Kind of Capitalism that Serves Humanity's Most Pressing Needs*, Yunus argues that ownership is what makes social business special. Due to this feature, many socially oriented NGO activities that address social problems will be excluded from social business. Said another way, Yunus's definition is narrow and it is very difficult to identify which is a social business and which is not.

Suffice to say, there is a long history of argument of social enterprises that delve into the social and economic well-being rather than maximising profits. For example, the International Development Enterprise (IDE), founded by Paul Polak in 1982, facilitated low-cost farming instruments for small farmers to the developing world at an affordable price. Among Rural Handicrafts, established in 1978 in Bangladesh by BRAC, created income opportunities for disadvantaged artisans. However, Yunus's social business is different from these socially oriented businesses because he is the first economist to speak about a no-loss, no-dividend business model. But, we should no longer debate whether Yunus is the pioneer of social business as he set aside the issue by echoing, "Invention is not mine, I have branded it," in a seminar held at the Chittagong Club on December 25, 2014.

To sum up, Muhammad Yunus delved into alternative business solutions to the existing social problems and put emphasis on social business which commits to address poverty or one or more social problems. Said another way, business is motivated by maximising social welfare at the expense of profits. While the model appears to be a promising solution to social problems, meeting its promises seems challenging.

The writer is an International Research Fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) at the Faculty of Economics, Kyoto University, Japan.

REGIME CHANGE REFUGEES

On the Shores of Europe

VIJAY PRASHAD

TERRIBLE pictures were posted on social media of refugees from Syria and elsewhere, washed up on the shores of Europe. One, in particular, is especially ghastly – the picture of the body of young Aylan Kurdi lying on the beach. He was only three. He was from the Syrian town of Kobane, now made famous as the frontline of the battle between ISIS and the Kurdish militias (largely the YPG and PKK). Aylan Kurdi's body lay in a fetal position. Few dry eyes could turn away from that photograph.

The Jordanian cartoonist Rafat Alkhateeb drew an image of Aylan Kurdi. The infant's body lies on the other side of a barbed wire fence that separates him from the continents of the world.

Children like Aylan Kurdi are disposable in the world's imagination. Untold thousands of Syrian children have died in this conflict. Tens of thousands of children have died in conflicts around the world. The United Nations estimates that half of all deaths in conflict zones are of children. In 1995, UNICEF reported that two million children died in conflicts over the previous decade. The rate has not decreased. The statistic harms the consciousness. But it is the picture of Aylan Kurdi that has unsettled our ethics – does the world really care about the damage done to children as a result of war and diabolical trade policies? The evidence suggests that the world does not care at all. What care there is comes in the brief instance when we glance at a photograph such as that of the dead body of Aylan Kurdi. He breaks our heart. But he will do little to change our politics.

The West believes that it is acceptable for it to intervene to influence the political economy of the Third World – to force IMF-driven "reforms" on these states. Capital is allowed to be

borderless. That freedom does not apply to labour – to people. Migration is forbidden. It is hateful. Racist ideas allow fortresses to be built against the natural movement of people. Barbed wire fences and concentration camp towers outline the US-Mexico border, just as such fences and the Mediterranean Moat block the passage into Europe. If the Capital destroys the society here, its people cannot be allowed to migrate there.

The West believes that it is acceptable for it to overthrow governments and bomb its enemies in the lands of the

Third World. It sees this as the limit of its humanitarianism. It calls this humanitarian interventionism or, in the language of the UN, "responsibility to protect" (R2P). When it breaks states, as it did in Libya, the West takes no responsibility for the broken lives of the people in those zones. Bombs are borderless. But war refugees must stand in queues and be held in concentration camps. They are not allowed freedom of movement.



CARTOON: RAFAT-ALKHATEEB

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Hypocrisy is central to elite Western ethics. It uses words like "freedom" and "equality" but mostly means its oppo-

sity. The freedom of human beings and equality between human beings is not relevant. More important is the freedom of Money. It is Money that cannot have its liberty impinged.

Both Europe and the United States want to build walls to prevent the free movement of people. The Statue of Liberty in New York harbor bears the words: "Give me your tired, your poor; your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." This is Emma Lazarus' poem from 1883. No longer do these words make sense. There is no exhortation to send the tired, the poor, the huddled masses

to safety. There is mostly the State-led jingoism that sets up barriers and threatens deportations. The more appropriate song is by Woody Guthrie, *Deportee*, from 1961: "They chase us like outlaws, like rustlers, like thieves. We died in your hills, we died in your deserts, we died in your valleys and died on your plains." He would have added, we died on your shores.

Such toxic lineages are not alone. There is also the people's ethics – banners in Germany unfurled at football games to welcome refugees, convoys of ordinary British nations to Calais

(France) to help feed and clothe the refugees, demonstrations of radical internationalists in Eastern Europe against the neo-fascists and the racists. There are also, in the United States, the Dream Defenders and United We Dream who fight for undocumented residents, who formed part of the massive pro-immigrant rallies that have now adopted May Day as their day. These indications of the good side of history are often ignored by the press, which has a tendency to hype up the bad side to boost ratings. Such gestures of solidarity tell us what is possible in the West.

Aylan Kurdi is dead. Many other Aylan Kurdis remain. Our outrage at this callous death should drive us deeper into a politics that calls for a drawdown of the violence in Syria and for a serious peace process in Libya that forces us to be resolute in our fight against IMF and NATO destruction of societies and states. In essence, this is a call for a resolute anti-imperialism. Imperialism, after all, is an extra-economic force such as war or the unequal drafting of trade rules to allow a small capitalist minority to sequester the largest share of globally produced social wealth. Refugees such as Aylan Kurdis are "climate change refugees," "regime change refugees" and "IMF refugees."

The West's managers will only talk about tragedies and security. For them, people are migrants and deportees, those whose mobility must be constrained. This is a limited imagination. They will not want to talk about the causes of the problem – the wars and economic policies that throw millions of people into the status of refugee. That is our job. In the name of Aylan Kurdi.

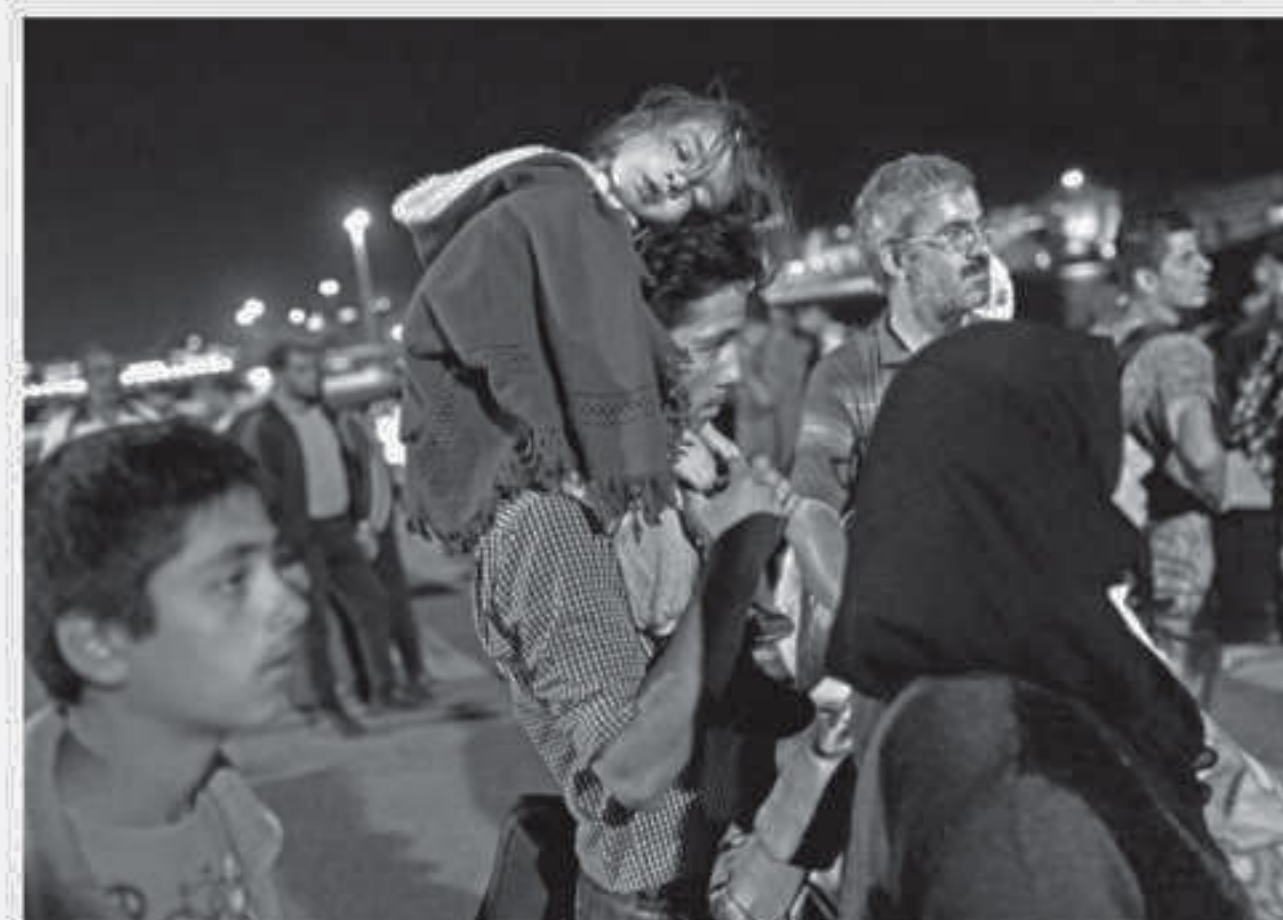
The writer is Director of International Studies at Trinity College and the Editor of "Letters to Palestine" (Verso). He lives in Northampton, © Counterpunch.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Migrant crisis

This refers to the report, "EU grapples with migrant crisis" published in this daily on September 2. Poor migrants are not welcomed anywhere in the world while rich migrants are always welcomed with open arms. The UK welcomes rich migrants who can bring in money. Greece has not turned its back to migrants even though the nation itself is facing an economic crisis. These migrants are coming to Europe from conflict zones such as Syria and Libya. We don't know what's waiting for these unfortunate people.
Deendayal M.Lulla
On e-mail



Foreigners cleaning Dhaka

It was really nice to see that a group of young volunteers from University of Japan was cleaning up our streets a few days ago. But I wouldn't be surprised if the locals littered the streets again. Unless we show that we care, no one will care for us.
Last year, we came across news and TV reports on Indian Prime Minister Modi sweeping the streets of Delhi with a broom. This is what I call leading from the front. Can we ever expect this from our politicians?
Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka