

Another ship-breaking yard mishap

Safety standards must be enforced

EIGHT workers of Shital Enterprise are fighting for their lives in hospital after being critically injured when a gas cylinder exploded at the ship-breaking yard in Sitakunda Upazila where they worked. These men in their prime, were getting ready for work when the accident occurred. The extent of their injuries points out once again the total disregard on the employers' part for workers safety. Ship-breaking yards in Chittagong are notorious for terrible work conditions and frequent accidents. Just this year, five workers have been killed in accidents and many have been severely injured at various shipyards in the district. Lack of protective gear and proper supervision to ensure safety are causes of such terrible loss of life and limb.

It is unacceptable that an industry as huge and risk-prone as ship-breaking should still be in such a primitive state that allows these horrible accidents to occur. The apathy and negligence demonstrated by employers violate basic labour laws that make it mandatory for workplaces to maintain minimum safety standards.

In this particular accident it is believed that someone with a lit cigarette entered the scrap yard where there may have been a leaky gas cylinder, which caused the explosion and subsequent fire. If that is so, there should have been proper monitoring and dissemination of information regarding safety rules that would have prevented such carelessness and its disastrous consequences.

With regard to the injured, Shital Enterprise must take responsibility of taking care of their treatment and paying them adequate compensation. Companies at these shipyards must be required to provide safety gear to the workers and also have awareness programmes regarding precautionary steps to avoid these mishaps that take away precious lives and livelihoods.

Europe's response to the refugee crisis

Still some way to go

WE welcome Europe's waking up to the realities of the ongoing migrant crisis that has stirred the human conscience. In July alone, more than 100,000 migrants entered the European Union, leaving the 28-nation EU squabbling over ways to deal with this huge influx of people leaving behind civil war, persecution and misrule.

With Germany and Austria opening their borders to thousands of exhausted refugees and the UK, one of the more reluctant responders to this humanitarian crisis pledging to provide resettlement for "thousands more" refugees, European leaders seem to have realised that they have a moral obligation to offer a place of safety to these desperate people. Let us not forget that after the Second World War, countries made solemn pledges never again to abandon innocent people to persecution and conflict. Countries that still seem to be reluctant must remind their citizens that it is a test of their values and the values of modern, democratic states extend well beyond their borders.

The burden, however, is not on the shoulder of Europe alone. Wealthy Gulf countries that so far have done very little or nothing to give shelter to Syrian refugees should be more welcoming. The refugees need help and the international community can provide it only if it shares the task.

Dhaka: A sustainable city?

MACRO MIRROR



FAHMIDA KHATUN

THE annual 'Liveability Index', published by the Economist Intelligence Unit, listed Dhaka as the second least liveable city in the world. This recent ranking of Dhaka, among the 140 cities in the world, has once again created a sense of fury and frustration among many of us. The EIU based this ranking on indicators such as stability (violence, crime, terror etc.), health care, education, culture, environment and infrastructure. In order to compare countries against various economic, social, environmental, political and cultural indicators and to determine their relative positions, several organisations take the lead in undertaking such exercise of rankings. It is good to know how a country is performing vis-à-vis others. It is also in a way an eye-opener and can alert countries to take initiatives to do better. If rankings are taken in that spirit, it can be a constructive mechanism for improvement. But that is not always the case in reality. While this gives top performers a sense of feeling good, the bad performers, however, not only get upset but also tend to discard such rankings.

The position of Dhaka on the liveability index is one such indicator which makes us feel excruciatingly dejected. Placed only ahead of Damascus, capital of the war-torn Syria and behind Lagos, capital of Nigeria, and Port Moresby, capital of Papua New Guinea, we are the lone South Asian city to be so far behind in the rankings. Though per capita income is high in both these countries, they rank far below

Bangladesh in terms of human development. In 2013, Nigeria ranked 152nd, and Papua New Guinea ranked 157th, while Bangladesh ranked 142nd on the list of Human Development Index of the United Nations. Many have contested this rating and highlighted many good attributes of Dhaka which do not get captured in such rankings. Of course, rankings cannot be perfect as they cannot take into account many

Yes, Dhaka as a city (indeed Bangladesh as a whole) has so far been resilient to various shocks. It is a city which has energetic and hardworking people who sail through all odds with astonishing tenacity and perseverance. But it is also a city where people have learned to demonstrate their patience as they get stuck in traffic for hours to get to a destination that is only fifteen minutes away. Waterlogging, from even a short

its population, but at a faster rate. Like all megacities in the world, Dhaka also attracts millions of people from all over the country for better economic opportunities, better education, better health and better quality of life. But a large number of them end up working in the informal sector and living in slums. Infrastructural development and other basic services fall far short of the requirement of the population of the city.

Traffic congestion eats up several valuable and productive hours from human lives each day. Poor air quality increases human mortality and morbidity. The economic cost of particulate (PM10) air pollution in Dhaka city estimated by this columnist in a research is 2.4 percent of GDP of the country. The current model of Dhaka's growth is thus not economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. This is of course a global concern. It expands from Rio de Janeiro to Beijing to Mumbai. Global leaders, therefore, decided to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' by 2030 (UN SDG 11) through access to affordable housing, basic services, transport system and reducing environmental impact of cities, among other means.

If our policymakers want to make Dhaka a sustainable city, there has to be a change in the way they think, the way they plan, the way they take decisions and the way they work. It is not only about moving away from a car-oriented to a public transport based city but to envision a city hundred years from now. A futuristic view of the political leadership, along with actual implementation, is what Dhaka city needs for its survival.

The writer is Research Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, currently a Visiting Scholar at the Centre for Study of Science, Technology & Policy, India.



qualitative indicators because of quantification problem. Despite such limitations, ranking is now a widely accepted tool for comparative assessment.

But, if the EIU's rating makes us unhappy, then let's take a look at another similar ranking. According to an air pollution monitoring report of the World Health Organisation, Dhaka has been ranked 23rd among 1,600 cities of 91 countries with worst urban air quality (2014 Ambient Air Pollution database). In fact, to understand the liveability condition in Dhaka, we do not need any survey. The challenges of Dhaka city and the way they affect the lifestyle of its residents, are probably much deeper than reflected in quantified indicators.

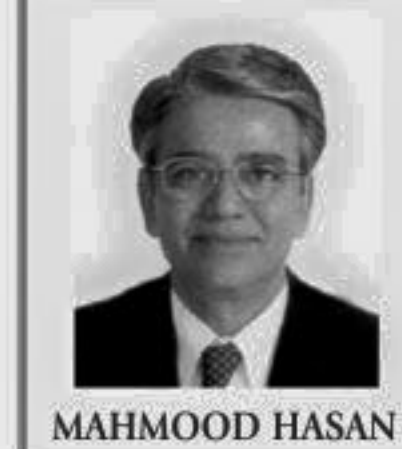
spell of rain, poor sanitation, lack of drainage and sewerage system, and poor emergency services are among many inconveniences that its residents face in their daily lives.

The city is overcrowded. And the crowd is now beyond the carrying capacity of the city. Urbanisation is a natural process and a global phenomenon. Currently, half of world's population live in cities. By 2050, urban population is predicted to rise to 70 percent of total global population. However, Dhaka's urbanisation is alarming. Dhaka is the densest city in the world but with so little civic amenities. Though the statistical metropolitan area of Dhaka has increased manifold over the years, so did

AFGHAN PEACE PROCESS

Taliban without Mullah Omar

FROM A BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

IT was around 1994 when Islamic fundamentalist Taliban appeared in Afghanistan under Mullah Mohammad Omar. Omar was Taliban's spiritual leader, known as its *Ameer ul Mumeneen* (leader of the faithful). He held the movement

under extremely firm control and enforced strict interpretation of the Sharia law. He commanded unquestioned loyalty from his followers. During its time in power (1996-2001), Taliban had committed unprecedented atrocities, forcing people to flee to neighbouring countries.

The Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is said to be the mastermind of Taliban. Pakistan probably has the deepest strategic interest in Afghanistan. The country's policy apparently was to drive out the increasingly independent Mujahideens and install a friendly Taliban government in Kabul.

Taliban's downfall came in the wake of the 9/11 attack on the Twin Tower in New York in 2001. The US launched Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001 and by December, Taliban was driven out of Kabul and a new government was formed under Hamid Karzai.

Taliban members fled to the mountains and turned into an insurgent force. Over the past 15 years, the Taliban insurgency has killed hundreds of civilians and Nato soldiers. As violence continued unabated, attempts were made to negotiate with the Taliban. In June 2010, President Karzai organised a "Peace Jirga" with a view of building a national consensus on peace talks with the Taliban. Taliban dismissed the *Jirga*, terming it a trick to secure the interest of foreign powers. They reiterated that there will be no talks until all foreign troops left Afghanistan. Besides, Taliban did not recognise the Karzai government and only wanted to hold discussions with the US, which they termed as "the main party in the conflict".

With Ashraf Ghani becoming president of Afghanistan in September 2014, Pakistan felt that it was time to push Taliban for a peace deal. Ghani is considered to be friendlier

towards Pakistan than his predecessor, Hamid Karzai.

The other more compelling reason is the Chinese pressure on Pakistan and Afghanistan to resolve the 15-year old insurgency. China wants peace, as it has high stakes in the region. It is investing billions of dollars in Pakistan to develop rail and road links from Southern China to a new sea port in Pakistan. China has also invested heavily in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Besides, China is keen to see that Islamic fundamentalism does not spread to the Xinjiang province, where it is trying to contain Uighur militants.

At Pakistan's initiative, the first round of talks between the Afghan government and Taliban took place on July 7, 2015 at Murree, in the presence of US and Chinese government representatives. The second round was scheduled to take place on July 31, 2015.

Interestingly, just two days before the second round, the office of the Afghan president announced on July 29 that Mullah Omar was dead. Actually it was Pakistan that informed Kabul about the Taliban chief's death in Karachi in April 2013. Earlier speculation that Mullah Omar had died, since he was not seen in public for several years, was never confirmed.

What is incredible is the way Taliban conducted themselves even after Omar's demise in 2013. A well-trained clique of mullahs orchestrated the myth of Omar for two years and kept the movement unified. Every decision was issued in the name of Mullah Omar. Taliban fighters never knew or realised that Omar was dead. Taliban is in an awkward situation now that the myth has been broken.

Pakistan seems to have two objectives for breaking the news - to weaken the Taliban leadership and to keep the new leaders under its influence. Omar's deputy Mullah Muhammad Akhtar Mansoor was immediately announced as the Emir of the fundamentalist group.

Pakistan now has a difficult job at hand. First, it has to keep Taliban united by containing the power struggle and stopping it from splintering into rival factions. There are serious personal, tribal and strategic rivalries among the field commanders. Several leaders

have already staked their claim as the head of Taliban.

Second, Pakistan has to make Taliban understand that it is no longer a 'religious war' and fighting the Afghan military will not bring them to power.

Third, Pakistan has to make sure that the leadership issue is quickly resolved. And a leader, who commands loyalty of major factions, is ushered to the negotiating table to conclude a workable deal with Ashraf Ghani. So far, Taliban leaders were not sure whether to join the peace talks or keep fighting.

Finally, Pakistan has to undertake some serious confidence building measures with Kabul. President Ashraf Ghani, who is keen to stop the bloodletting, is still not sure whether Pakistan really wants the insurgency to cease or if it has other motives.

Taliban's proclaimed aim was to rid

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Afghanistan of all foreign forces. Taliban, however, never declared any intention to spread its movement beyond Afghanistan.

The fear is that Islamic State (ISIS) has already made its presence in Afghanistan. The worry is that without the firm control of Mullah Omar, disgruntled Taliban fighters may join the ISIS. That could lead to a new kind of war that no one has yet witnessed in South Asia.

Afghanistan's history is a narrative of wars. The news of Mullah Omar's death has already put the peace process on hold. All stakeholders need to work for durable peace in this devastated land.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

COMMENTS

"Adieu, Aylan"

(September 5, 2015)

Dewan Shakhawat Hussain Jewel

Along with this boy, humanity has also drowned in the Mediterranean Sea.

Tanveer Islam Pavel

What is going on in this planet?

Extrovert Nishad

Humanity washed ashore. Shame!

Purnima Chattopadhyay-Dutt

Rest in peace, little Aylan. Hope you are in a better world now.

Latifa

Mediterranean has become a cemetery for migrants.

Shireen

Outrage on social media will bring no good for these unfortunate people unless some real action is taken.

"School psychologists and mental health of children and youth"

(September 3, 2015)

Asif Rayhan Anik

Well, psychologists can help a bit but it won't bear any result until our families understand us and help us deal with our problems.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Let peace prevail in this region

Recently Pakistani defence minister said that Pakistan is ready for either a long or a short war with India. His remarks came in reaction to the statement by Indian army chief that India is prepared for 'swift and short' wars in the future. We feel extremely worried by their statements. We urge them to not start anything that endangers the lives of millions of people living in this region who simply want to live in peace.

Anami
Dhaka

Adieu, little Casper

It pained me so much to go through the news of the sad demise of four-year old Muhammad Sadman Casper, the little and popular trekker who loved expeditions at this tender age. He was indeed a brave child. I express deep condolences at the death of this young trekker. His memory will always be alive within the trekker community of our country.
Professor M Zahidul Haque
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka

