

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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Death in Hajj stampede

Our deepest condolences for the dead

IT is unfortunate that in the course of a fortnight two tragedies had struck Makkah Mukarna. Our heartfelt condolences go out to the families of the dead. The death toll in the stampede has since risen to 769 and we pray that Allah may accept them in Heaven. To the injured we wish early recovery.

According to latest reports, the Bangladesh Embassy has started ascertaining the total number of dead and injured. Those who have died should have their families informed and have the bodies sent home at the earliest if the families so wish. As for the injured, we expect the Saudi government to spare no effort to provide them with the best treatment possible. There should not be any sort of discrimination or lapse in this regard.

We acknowledge that organising the Hajj, which is performed by more than two million hajjis every year, is a logistical nightmare and the Saudi authorities have been doing a commendable job. However, as the incident shows, there are several areas that need to be addressed more critically. Crowd management efforts must be further enhanced and the number of personnel devoted to this task increased. During the Hajj period the possibility of special air surveillance and crowd monitoring by drones should be looked into.

Post-Eid waste management

An 'A' for the Mayors

BEFORE the Eid ul-Adha festival, the two Mayors of the Dhaka City Corporations pledged to clean the city within 30 hours. And they delivered on their promise in the most impressive way.

Led by the Mayors, both the North and the South City Corporations had a carefully designed action plan in place to speed up waste removal after the slaughter of sacrificial animals, taking several measures, from distributing biodegradable sacks for free to engaging with the residents round-the-clock through the electronic media. For the first time, they designated 595 spots for slaughtering animals and provided for enough manpower and logistics to drive the cleanup initiative.

Perhaps an important factor behind this unusual success was the simple fact that it was carried out with the participation of the public. The Mayors managed to weave a shared vision of getting the job done—together.

The lessons that can be learned from this experience is this: the responsibility of keeping this city clean and livable does not fall on the shoulders of the government alone. And also, people do respond positively when they are spoken to with sincerity and humility.

We wholeheartedly congratulate the city corporations as well as the residents of the capital for proving once again that if we are determined to do something, we can do it, no matter how difficult the task appears at first.

The power of an information society



MACRO MIRROR
FAHMIDA KHATUN

WHEN the 'Digital India' initiative of the Indian Prime Minister receives the backing of none other than the Google CEO Sundar Pichai, one can't help but look at it with admiration. This CEO of Indian origin, and his compatriot Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft, are among the talented products of India's world class tech institutes, Indian Institutions of Technology (IITs). Silicon Valley's strength depends on these IIT graduates.

The goal of becoming 'Digital Bangladesh' has been announced by our leadership at the highest level. We, however, are not fortunate enough to have such global support as we couldn't create a Pichai or Nadella. Even though our leaders have realised the importance of ICT, albeit a bit late, the preparations taken to become an information-based society are not as extensive as you'd expect. Just compare the number of IT institutions in Bangladesh. BUET, the only high quality engineering university of the country, has been there for decades. No government of the country has thought of investing in at least one more university like BUET, even though the number of students in the country, as well as the demand for IT solutions, has increased manifold. Students these days prefer to do BBA and MBA and pursue careers mostly in financial and commercial sectors. But they are not offered that many alternatives. Even if more students want to study science and technology, which institute will they attend? And then once they graduate, will they get to utilise their knowledge in the same field of their expertise?

Surely, even with limited talents, resources and opportunities, technology has brought a revolution in our lives over the past decade. For example, the

use of mobile telecommunication has brought in spectacular results in remote villages and helped promote growth. Farmers are now able to receive market information through mobile services. Cell phones are used for collecting accurate data and quick dissemination of information. Services such as mobile money, healthcare, education and information, and helpline services are contributing to the welfare of the poor in several ways.

Mobile money is particularly useful for the remitters from abroad as it saves

who do not have the opportunity to access education from government-run education institutes.

Technology and information flow are also contributing towards empowerment of women. A large number of women enjoy online helpline services for information on rural livelihood, agriculture and legal rights of women. Women's education and access to information have been found to be a critical factor behind increased use of maternal health services and improved health outcomes, as well as reduced fertility



time and energy. As a large section of the population do not have access to banking services, mobile money has enabled them to send money to their families living in villages. In case of healthcare, mobile technology is being used by NGOs and the private sector to provide health services to the poor. Mobile phones are being used by doctors to fill out prescriptions and reduce maternal and child mortality in urban slums. Mobile education service is another new product of mobile technology that helps a large section of people

and improved family nutrition.

However, the full potential of ICT in improving the livelihood of people, poverty alleviation and improving e-governance remains untapped in the country. Across the world, because of better and faster internet access and due to advanced fixed and mobile broadband technologies, there are new opportunities for innovative services and applications. In order to take advantage of these opportunities, our vision needs to be backed by proactive measures.

The first issue is that of affordability. Lower price has increased accessibility of technology. Having a mobile is no longer a luxury for farmers or housemaids, rickshaw pullers or day labourers. But further reduction in prices would expand the usability of many more services instead of using mobile technology only as a means of communication. The Broadband Commission for Digital Development has set a target to reduce broadband affordability for entry-level services to "less than 5 percent of average monthly income" by 2015. Lowering prices will also reduce the digital divide, a feature of technology which quite often manifests a "winner takes all" situation, whereby the educated and the wealthier tend to use mobile applications far more than the less educated and the poor. Therefore, in order to get more people digitally connected, low cost bandwidth and affordable phones are a must for establishing an information society.

The second obstacle in materialising the ambition of digital or information society is the lack of human resources. Bringing the whole country under digital coverage and connecting them through the internet would require massive capacity upgradation and skills development. Not only is there a need for more tech institutions, it is equally important to create awareness on the use of technology. Having access to technology is one thing, but using them for accessing various services is another issue. Apprehension and confusion regarding risks, and privacy and security concerns act as initial blocks for many of us when we first attempt to use technology.

In the coming days, the information society will not only provide improved services but also be essential for improving efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of governance. The faster we adopt ICT in all spheres of life, the better it is for overall development.

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.

SDGs belong to everyone

ROBERT WATKINS

OVER the past three days at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, more than 160 world leaders attended the UN Sustainable Development Summit at the 70th meeting of the UN General Assembly. It was here that leaders formally adopted an ambitious new sustainable development agenda on behalf of their citizens. It is the culmination of three years of inter-governmental negotiations and an unprecedented global consultation that gave voice to millions of people who came together and collectively identified and defined the next development agenda known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sustainable Development Goals: The People's Agenda

The SDGs build on the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which end in December this year. While the MDGs were successful in lifting millions out of poverty, there are pending gaps. Globally, 800 million people still live in extreme poverty, 57 million children are still denied the right to primary education, gender inequality continues to persist, and economic gaps between rich and poor households are growing. It is clear that there is still unfinished business.

The complex challenges that exist in the world today demand that a wide range of issues be covered but also that there be as wide a consultation as possible to ensure that the world's priorities were identified by people from around the globe. From governments and CSOs to youth, community groups, and individuals, the SDGs were as much driven by governments as they were by the citizens who have the final stake in them. The result is that with 17 goals and 169 targets, the SDGs are broader in scope and more flexible in design. They not only address unfinished business such as the environment, education, health, and gender equality, but acknowledge the importance of the internet and informa-

tion exchange, the urgency of addressing climate change, and the role not only of industrialisation and infrastructure in equitable economic growth, but the importance of the creators of this growth.

In this way, the SDGs aim to go further than the MDGs by strengthening the facilitators of development and addressing the root causes of poverty. In implementing the next development agenda, economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection serve as the compass for a holistic approach to reducing poverty, recognising that many issues affecting the poorest and most vulnerable are interrelated in nature and require multi-dimensional solutions. Crucially, the SDGs are universal, and don't just apply to countries that receive development aid. This contributes to stronger global partnerships and accountability.

The SDGs in Bangladesh

Bangladesh was active in the global consultative process to determine the SDGs, undertaking two national consultations on thematic priorities and on participatory approaches in the means of implementation. One issue highlighted by Bangladesh and echoed by other countries is ensuring the adaptability of a global agenda to a national context. Fourteen of the seventeen SDGs refer to the importance of aligning to national policies, frameworks, and plans, along with nationally defined indicators. This ensures that the SDGs not only reflect the contextual reality of development in the country, but that the goals are nationally owned.

National ownership is not restricted to determining benchmarks for national development, but also generating domestic resources to finance the national development agenda, enhancing inclusiveness, transparency and accountability of institutions and processes, and encouraging active civic participation. Many of the goals Bangladesh proposed as part of the consultations have been incorporated in the final SDG framework, and are also reflected in the Government's 7th Five

Year Plan and associated Development Results Framework.

A key area Bangladesh can already begin working on is preparing an institutional arrangement that reflects the integrated approach necessary to implement the SDGs. This can be done through adapting existing coordination for mechanisms such as the Local Consultative Group mechanism of development partners and government. Another element of creating the structures required for implementation of the SDGs is improving the availability and frequency of data for

South and Triangular cooperation. While the 7th Five Year Plan provides a template for delivery of the national development agenda, there is also scope for a national prioritisation process that not only educates people about the SDGs, but offers insight into which goals have critical mass support and are deemed to be important for the everyday lives of people. Moreover, the process can be undertaken by government, or alternatively by community groups, NGOs, and CSOs, continuing the open and inclusive spirit of the SDGs.

There is no question that the SDGs are



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effective monitoring, inclusive of the existing 7th Five Year Plan results framework and national surveys as well as participatory approaches. Suggestions from Bangladesh's national consultations refer to actions such as social audits and participatory planning and budgeting at the local government level, which not only provides accountability, but extends ownership of the SDGs to those with the biggest stake in their success.

Finally, while the SDGs offer a "grocery list" of goals, poverty eradication, shared prosperity, and planetary sustainability cannot be reduced to a simple formula. Bangladesh must determine not only which SDGs are prioritised, but how this prioritisation will take place and in turn, the budget allocation necessary for delivery. This need not be limited to national initiatives, and there is potential for regional solutions that capitalise on opportunities for South-

ambitious. Overcoming global poverty requires ambition. In their formation, and in their adoption, the SDGs demonstrate a collective desire to eradicate poverty and strengthen universal peace. There is a cost to human suffering, inequalities, and environmental degradation, stunting a country's ability to prosper, and an individual's ability to contribute to national economies and their own well-being. Development progress is not confined to broad platitudes and noble declarations; it is hard work, and it will take resources, the right policies, and the necessary political will to eventually see a world without poverty. The SDGs don't belong to a single entity, country, or organisation, they belong to all of us. And in this way we all have a part to play.

The writer is the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh.

COMMENTS

"Hajj death toll rises to 769"
(September 27, 2015)

Ahmad Ad
Praying for their families.

Mahbubul Karim Khan
A full-fledged investigation should be carried out!

"Australia delay Bangladesh tour over 'security concerns'"
(September 26, 2015)

Moshiur Rahman Shajib

Because Bangladesh is not the safest place to win matches anymore!

Biplob Rahman
Delays for security concerns? Surprised!

Jd Aziz

What security concerns? The only risk they run is to be assaulted by the rain and Soumya Sarkar.

Anik Zaman
Are the Aussies trying to avoid the test?

Reaz AU

I am confused.

Naureen Ali

What kind of security concerns? We would like to know.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Let's think about moving forward

Newspapers tend to only highlight the negatives of the government system. Bangladesh is a small and resource poor nation with a huge population—way beyond the carrying capacity and sustainability of the land. There is no doubt that the current or future governments will never be able to resolve all the complex issues plaguing the nation. The common people, including students and intellectuals representing Bangladeshi society, must

stand up and work together at the grassroots level with dedication, sincerity and enthusiasm; only negative criticism of the government will not help the nation survive in this world of harsh realities. Nations like Japan, and Germany survived the horrors and the devastation of World War II to move economically forward through sincere hard efforts to get out of the economic depression. The people of



Bangladesh who survived the severe atrocities of the Liberation War are resilient and if they are determined enough to change their future they

are capable of doing so. The so-called intellectuals of the nation need to show them the way instead of suggesting that this nation has nothing to look forward. If the educated section of the society sets an example of a peaceful and democratic passage of nation building along with the government, I am certain that Bangladesh will also make a difference
Saikat Kumar Basu
Canada