

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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Cost overruns and missed deadlines

City residents pay the price

THE initial cost of the Moghbazar-Mouchak flyover was Tk 7.73 billion and original completion of the project was December 2014. Not only did it miss the first deadline but got an extension till December 2015 and now it has been given a new lease till July 2017! The cost of the extension is equivalent to Tk 446 crore which has been authorised by the National Economic Council (Ecne) since there are "a few structural changes" in the offering. Needless to say, the residents of Moghbazar and Mouchak in particular, have been counting the cost of living with dust and horrendous traffic jams for the past couple of years.

What we would like to ask is why we are looking at structural changes so late in the day and why the present layout needs to be changed now. Has it anything to do with having a flawed layout to begin with? Why must the prime minister have to step in to point out the obvious that the ramp of the flyover should be extended beyond the FDC level crossing? Should the obvious not have been clear to the traffic and engineering planners when the project was conceived?

Again, we find it astonishing that no proper mapping of the route was done prior to construction. Had that been done by the relevant authority, we would know precisely which utility company had laid their pipes and cables underground, and the project would not have to face inordinate delays to rectify routes. At the end of the day, we find that cost overruns and delayed project executions have become a common feature of public projects. The taxpayers' money could be better spent with better planning.

Shipbreaking workers in peril

Proper safety measures, monitoring needed

In this paper we have written many times about the hazardous working conditions at shipbreaking yards. Regrettably, there has been very little progress in ensuring safety measures for the workers. According to an estimate, in the last five and half years 60 workers were killed and another 125 injured in accidents at the yards.

Though there is a clear directive that all ships must be cleaned of toxic materials before they are exported to ship recycling yards, it is hardly followed in Bangladesh. The workers are exposed to poison contamination and explosion of leftover gas and fumes which are the prime causes of accidents in the yards. According to international rules, workers must use personal protective equipment (PPE) at works but it is alleged that many companies do not provide adequate safety gears. Furthermore, owners usually hire unskilled workers who do not have training on shipbreaking works and are unaware of safety measures. Owners also do not allow workers to exercise their rights. These malpractices ultimately result in frequent accidents and high casualty numbers.

There are High Court directives and government safety guidelines on shipbreaking, but very little is being implemented due to owners' apathy and lax government monitoring system which also suffers from acute shortage of inspectors. There are only two inspectors in Sitakunda for around 100 shipbreaking yards in the Upazila.

The government should gear up the monitoring mechanism of the yards and ensure safety of the workers. There should also be a probe into the accidents by independent inquiry committees and the persons responsible should be taken to court for their sheer disregard for workers' lives.

COMMENTS

"BSF tortures Bangladeshi to death" (January 19, 2016)

Shahlam Khan

It is happening on a regular basis. So sad!

5 time bombs found in Gazipur (January 18, 2016)

Afrina Khanam

It's just another drama.

Uniting to prevent violent extremism



BAN KI-MOON

VIOLENT extremism is a direct assault on the United Nations Charter and a grave threat to international peace and security.

Terrorist groups such as Daesh, Boko Haram and others have brazenly kidnapped young girls, systematically denied women's rights, destroyed cultural institutions, warped the peaceful values of religions, and brutally murdered thousands of innocents around the world.

These groups have become a magnet for foreign terrorist fighters, who are easy prey to simplistic appeals and siren songs.

The threat of violent extremism is not limited to any one religion, nationality or ethnic group. Today, the vast majority of victims worldwide are Muslims.

Addressing this challenge requires a unified response, and compels us to act in a way that solves - rather than multiplies - the problem.

Many years of experience have proven that short-sighted policies, failed leadership, heavy-handed approaches, a single-minded focus only on security measures and an utter disregard for human rights have often made things worse.

Let us never forget: Terrorist groups are not just seeking to unleash violent action, but to provoke a harsh reaction.

We need cool heads and common sense. We must never be ruled by fear - or provoked by those who strive to exploit it.

Countering violent extremism should not be counter-productive.

This month, I presented to the United Nations General Assembly a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which takes a practical and comprehensive approach to address the drivers of this menace. It focuses on

violent extremism which can be conducive to terrorism.

The Plan puts forward more than 70 recommendations for concerted action at the global, regional and national levels, based on five inter-related points.

We must put prevention first

The international community has every right to defend against this threat using lawful means, but we must pay particular attention to addressing the

unresolved and prolonged conflicts even more intractable.

We also know the critical elements for success: Good governance. The rule of law. Political participation. Quality education and decent jobs. Full respect for human rights.

We need to make a special effort to reach out to young people and recognise their potential as peacebuilders. The protection and

people. I will continue to call on leaders to listen carefully to the grievances of their people and then act to address them.

Preventing extremism and promoting human rights go hand-in-hand
All too often, national counter-terrorism strategies have lacked basic elements of due process and respect for the rule of law.

Sweeping definitions of terrorism or violent extremism are often used to criminalise the legitimate actions of opposition groups, civil society organisations and human rights defenders. Governments should not use these types of sweeping definitions as a pretext to attack or silence one's critics.

Once again, violent extremists deliberately seek to incite such over-reactions. We must not fall into the trap.

An all-out approach

The Plan proposes an "all of Government" approach.

We must break down the silos between the peace and security, sustainable development, human rights and humanitarian actors at the national, regional and global levels—including at the United Nations.

The Plan also recognises that there are no "one size fits all" solutions. We must also engage all of society - religious leaders, women leaders, youth group, leaders in the arts, music and sports, as well as the media and private sector.

UN engagement

I intend to strengthen a UN system-wide approach to supporting Member States' efforts to address the drivers of violent extremism.

Above all, the Plan is an urgent call to unity and action that seeks to address this scourge in all its complexity.

Together, let us pledge to forge a new global partnership to prevent violent extremism.

The writer is Secretary-General of the United Nations.



causes of violent extremism if this problem is to be resolved in the long run.

There is no single pathway to violent extremism. But we know that extremism flourishes when human rights are violated, political space is shrunk, aspirations for inclusion are ignored, and too many people - especially young people - lack prospects and meaning in their lives.

As we see in Syria and Libya and elsewhere, violent extremists make

empowerment of women must also be central to our response.

Principled leadership and effective institutions

Poisonous ideologies do not emerge from thin air. Oppression, corruption and injustice are greenhouses for resentment. Extremists are adept at cultivating alienation.

That is why I have been urging leaders to work harder to build inclusive institutions that are truly accountable to

The urgent crisis of inequality in Asia

WINNIE BYANYIMA

THE Asian continental "economic tiger" - after more than a quarter-century of sustained economic growth - is now confronting a defining challenge of inequality. Many Asian countries have prospered and created new wealth. However this wealth, and the prosperity and opportunities that it promises, are not being equally shared. Inequality in Asia has risen by as much as 18 percent from the mid-1990s till now. Around 1.6 billion people continue to live in Asian countries on less than \$2 a day. The Gini co-efficient - a common measure of inequality - has worsened in the past two decades in countries where more than 80 percent of the Asian population live.

Last year Oxfam revealed that 240 million people in Asia could have escaped poverty had inequality not increased from 1990 levels. Millions of Asian workers and farmers are being left behind the economic curve, trapped in poverty, despite of being part of the engine that is driving the very growth from which they are being marginalised.

This extreme division of wealth is part of a world-wide trend that is - in every sense of the word - indefensible. Oxfam's new inequality report published today before the World Economic Forum in Davos, "An Economy for the 1 Percent", says that just 62 individuals now have the same wealth as the 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of the world's population. As recently as 2010, 388 of the world's richest people shared this dubious honour.

The consequences of these new extremes are huge. Economic inequality can act as a brake on growth, slow poverty reduction efforts, and spark social unrest. Oxfam estimates that the much-heralded goal to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030 will be missed if we do not resolve inequality. The damage that inequality does to people's lives can be seen across our continent - for school children whose education is cut short

because they can't afford school fees, for women who work long hours but whose incomes don't cover their rent or the cost of the medicines for their children.

It is good news that economies across Asia continue to grow; people throughout the continent are establishing businesses, developing new technologies, and running multinational corporations.

But inequality of the levels we are seeing in Asia is not simply the natural outcome of talent, hard work and healthy competition. Over the last 30 years, the phenomena of unchecked deregulation, privatisation, financial

once there, an elaborate system of tax havens and an industry of wealth managers ensure that it stays there - far from the reach of ordinary citizens and their governments.

Tackling extreme inequality across Asia is going to require action on many fronts. Governments, businesses and those creating wealth in Asia must build inclusive and sustainable economies that provide decent jobs with fair living wages. We must act to reduce gender discrimination in the workplace and the wage gap. Governments must invest more in healthcare and education, promote the economic empowerment of

corporate tax avoidance schemes that route investments through tax havens.

Countries in South East Asia are moving towards more economic integration under the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The AEC could be an effective place to develop a common political vision for tackling inequality in Asia. It could help to end the era of tax incentives to rich individuals and corporations. It could agree upon harmonised corporate tax in the region and demand transparency in the operations of corporations. Most importantly, it should agree on hard standards of fair living wages and conditions for workers.

G20 governments agreed on steps to curb tax dodging by multinational companies in 2015, yet these measures largely ignore the problems posed by tax havens, and do little to help Asian governments to claim their fair share of taxes. Now, with tax havens becoming an ever more common way of doing business - 109 of the World Economic Forum's 118 partners have a presence in at least one tax haven - it's time to put a stop to this practice.

That is why I will be pressing political leaders, CEOs and others in Davos to act. I will be asking wealthy individuals and business leaders to commit to bring their money back on shore and I will be urging our politicians to work together to agree on a new global approach to end tax havens.

It would be wrong to suggest that many of those gathering for the World Economic Forum do not care about inequality - they do. However, they have collectively failed to recognise that the solution to this crisis is not just about helping the poorest get a foot on the economic ladder - it must also be about tackling the corrupting influence of the extremely wealthy who are pulling up the ladder as the poor try to climb it. If the men and women in Davos take this simple truth on board we can begin to build a new global economy that works for the many and not just the 62.

The writer is Executive Director, Oxfam International.

Over the last 30 years, the phenomena of unchecked deregulation, privatisation, financial secrecy and globalisation has allowed big companies and well-connected individuals to use their power and influence to capture an increasing share of the benefits of economic growth. On the other side of the ledger, the benefits for the poorest have shrunk.

secretary and globalisation has allowed big companies and well-connected individuals to use their power and influence to capture an increasing share of the benefits of economic growth. On the other side of the ledger, the benefits for the poorest have shrunk. This trend of a relatively few wealthy individuals and corporations having undue influence may damage fledgling democracies and create wider discontent in Asia.

As the President of the World Bank stated last year, wealth is simply not trickling down - it is being sucked up by a powerful and wealthy minority. And

women, increase social protection expenditure and tackle injustices in the ownership of assets such as land.

Amongst the most urgent actions is to put a stop to tax havens.

Tax havens allow super wealthy corporations and individuals to avoid paying their fair share of tax. This denies governments of vital revenue that should be spent on schools, healthcare, roads and other essential services and infrastructure. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates that developing countries lose around US\$100bn in tax revenues each year as a result of

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Rampage at Brahmanbaria

The recent violence that took place in Brahmanbaria by enraged madrasa students is another example of how our students have been moving further away from ethical standards and following a destructive path. Armed with bamboo sticks and iron rods, they vandalised Brahmanbaria Railway Station and removed the fishplates off the railway tracks. We are now used to reading about these types of incidents frequently in newspapers. This kind of vandalism and hooliganism by students is totally unacceptable. They should keep in mind that they are our future leaders.

Ezaz
Dhaka



PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

Construction of Padma Bridge

Bangladesh government has started the construction of the Padma Bridge with its own fund. It is a dream project which we want to see fulfilled within the shortest possible time. Hopefully the project will be completed in a professional, efficient and corruption-free manner.

Nasif Ferdous
Sylhet

Soul-searching needed

For several decades, Muslims in the subcontinent have extended unconditional support to their Arab brothers, but what have they received in return? Saudi Arabia, the "icon" of the Muslim world, exported radical Islamism to the whole world, and is currently promoting sectarian divisions among Muslims while covertly

supporting Israel against its feud with Iran. Is this not ironic? Subcontinent Muslims get emotional when talking about their "Arab brothers". But they are regarded less than human by the so-called leaders of the Arab world. We need serious soul-searching before providing unconditional support to the Arab world in the name of brotherhood.

Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge, AB, Canada