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LATE S. M. ALI

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Tragedy strikes family

Check gas connections regularly

WE find it difficult to express our sorrow for the family of Shalin bin Nawaz who, along with his wife, are fighting for their lives due to the fire caused by gas accumulation in the kitchen at their apartment on February 26. Mr. Nawaz's two sons have died while a third is convalescing in Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The couple are in a critical medical condition. According to reports fire department officials have stated that there was a possibility of a gas leak which led to an accumulation of gas in the kitchen that triggered the explosion.

We will have to wait for the official inquiry to be concluded on what caused the explosion. However, this should serve as a wakeup call for every apartment resident to regularly check gas connections and for landlords to be more vigilant about maintenance. Authorities have a duty to perform monthly checks on gas lines for perforations in the line, because at the end of the day, utility authorities have a duty to make sure their lines are safe at the customer level. There is of course also a question of raising public awareness regarding the safety measures that should be adopted while using gas stoves such as making sure there is some form of ventilation in kitchens and remembering to turn off the stove after use. For this the electronic media need to be involved in disseminating information on how to maintain safety with gas connections.

High dropout rate at secondary levels

Why aren't we intervening where it's most effective?

A report titled 'Bangladesh Education Statistics-2015', prepared by the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (Banbeis), reveals some harsh truths about the education sector of Bangladesh. As per information collected from 38,757 educational institutions across the country last year, a whopping 40.29 percent of secondary students (45.92 percent girls, 33.72 percent boys) dropped out last year, of whom 19.11 percent left school when they were in Class VIII.

With children from poorer backgrounds expected to take on the financial burden of their families as they grow up, it is hardly a surprise that many of them are leaving school around the age of 15 to look for full-time work. It is also telling that more girls are dropping out of school than boys, married off at the early age of 14-16. Poverty, as we know, is a major impediment to completing education, and it is unfortunate that we have not been able to ensure free education for our students, particularly at the secondary level. The lack of standardised quality education and the need for students to turn to private tutors at the secondary level to perform well in the exams mean that education becomes even more inaccessible for students from poorer backgrounds. Meanwhile, schools make little to no effort to identify at-risk students and allocate more time and energy towards motivating them.

We urge the government to put more emphasis on decreasing the dropout rate for students, beginning with making education more accessible for poorer students. In addition, schools need to channel more resources towards retaining students likely to dropout, with

COMMENTS

"Two Bangladeshi students killed in Australia car crash" (February 25, 2016)

Ahmed Farabi Sayeema

Higher education is really expensive for foreign students in developed countries. Families who send their children abroad for higher studies make a lot of sacrifices. It is sad that once the students reach there, many of them start leading a reckless life including partaking in street race and drinking.

Rose Forbes

So sorry to hear the news. Young men in the prime of their lives, taken so very tragically. I will pray that they are at peace.

Bangladeshi scientists make us proud

SUNDAY POUCH

ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

IT is not usual for a Bangladeshi scientist to be credited for major discoveries. Of late, however, three scientists of Bangladeshi origin have been in the forefront of three major discoveries. All three for the moment belong to the realm of astrophysics and related sciences.

The first Bangladeshi scientist in this area who came to our notice is Rubab Khan, a 29-year-old astrophysist, working at the National Aeronautics and Space Adminstration (NASA) Goddard Space Flight Centre in USA. He led an international team and made a significant contribution towards enhancing our understanding of 'how massive stars in the Universe live, age and die'. Using data from NASA Spitzer and Hubble Space telescopes, he and his associates discovered five potential twins of Eta Carinae, "a super star in other galaxies. Eta Carinae itself has the mass of 100-150 suns". In 1840, Eta Carinae had a major eruption. This threw out a large amount of matter. It was 20 times the mass of the sun. But this was not the only aberration. Rubab's team found that the debris from this giant eruption was not only in Eta Carinae but there are five such twin debris in other galaxies. But what is the benefit of knowing all this information? At least astronomy now knows that such massive explosions occur to such massive stars as they grow old. This knowledge would help future astrophysicists to trace clearly the origin of such stars and its future progress.

Another US-based Bangladeshi Professor Selim Shariar led another team of scientists at Northwestern University to discover gravitational waves – which now confirms Albert Einstein's famous theory of relativity. He confirmed the existence of gravitational waves created by the collision of two black holes in the universe. This collision took place 1.3 billion light years away from earth. (A light year is the time taken when a ray of light moves at the speed of light per second). Selim said he had been working to "improve the sensitivity of LIGO detectors and broaden the spectrum" for the last ten years. In September 2015, he placed two L-shaped antennae on opposite sides of the US – one in Washington State in west USA and the other in the eastern sea board. And then, on the same day, he noticed a small blip lasting for 0.2 seconds, which was 1000 times smaller than a proton. Such blips gave extensive information to scientists about the birth and nature of the universe. It also confirmed Albert Einstein's idea of gravitational wave in the universe. Now he is trying to use atomic clocks as pulsars on other planets in order to find out about gravitational waves that show up in a spectrum. So far scientists have used light to detect gravitational pull. But by not using light -- as immediately after the Big Bang, light could not escape the universe because it was too dense -- we are likely to get a better understanding of gravitational pulls. Through this blip, he was able to also measure gravitational waves. Thus Selim Shariar has devised another way to observe immediately what happened after the Big Bang.

The third individual who brought fame to Bangladesh is a physicist who was part of the international team that detected gravitational waves and ripples in space. He is Dipanker Talukdara, a 39 year old former student of Physics Department of Dhaka University. He, along with his team, used a pair of giant laser detectors in the US. One of these detectors was in Lousiana and the other in Washington. The Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory (LIGO) received a wave signal about which scientists came to know. They found that the waves were the product of a collision between two black holes 30 times more massive than our sun and located about 1.3 billion light years from earth. Dipanker now wants to study the cosmos by studying the gravitational forces.

It may be noted that two of the scientists from Bangladesh are in their early or late thirties. Only Salim Shariar is slightly older. But interestingly, all of them began their studies in their village schools and in rural colleges. Only Salim studied in Notre Dame College in Dhaka. But then all of them went for higher studies in some of the top universities in the US. They were chosen on the basis of their merit. They have brought international laurels to Bangladesh and have attributed their discoveries to Bangladesh.

It is clear that if the bright students of the country are given an opportunity, they will not disappoint their families and their country. Students at the primary and secondary level, therefore, need to be nurtured and educated in well-funded schools and colleges and then move on to universities where merit takes the premier position. Our society guardians need to prioritise their goals. We need an educated population but we also seek a merit-based society. The nation needs to develop the concept of pouring resources on educational institutions where a new generation of Bangladeshis will take charge without fear or favour, to steer this country into a prosperous future. The deeper pursuit of pure science and technology as well as profound knowledge of humanitarian subjects should be the way forward. Let our politics and society be geared to nurturing the new generation.

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FROM PARIS TO MARRAKECH

The next stage of global climate change policymaking

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

SALEEMUL HUQ

PHOTO: PROCAS.COM

THE 21st Conferenc e of Parties (COP21), which was successfully concluded in December 2015 with the adoption of the Paris Agreement, has set in train global actions by all countries to tackle climate change through both mitigation to reduce emission of greenhouse gases as well as adaptation to the adverse impacts of climate change.

The next milestone will be on April 22 in New York where the Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki Moon has invited heads of government to come together to formally sign the Paris Agreement. In order for Bangladesh to be able to join that meeting, we will need to have adopted the Paris Agreement domestically.

After that, COP22 to be held at the end of 2016 in Marrakech, Morocco, will be the next stop in the global policymaking process; it will need to develop momentum for implementation of the Paris Agreement.

In this article, I will focus on one of the most important topics that will need to be dealt with at COP22, which is of great importance for Bangladesh and in which Bangladesh can make a significant contribution if we prepare ourselves well.

The topic is loss and damage, more specifically how to deal with the failure to adequately mitigate or adapt, when we are faced with inevitable losses of human lives, ecosystems and damage to infrastructure like roads and embankments.

At COP21 in Paris, the developing countries fought for and succeeded in including the topic of loss and damage as a separate article (Article 8) in the Paris Agreement against the resistance of the developed countries who did not wish to treat it as a separate issue from adaptation. This Article also reinforced the mandate of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) on Loss and Damage that had been agreed upon at COP19 in Warsaw, Poland in 2013.

The WIM has an executive committee consisting of 20 members (10 from developing countries and 10 from developed countries), and it has a work programme with nine action areas to be presented to COP22 in Marrakech later this year.

The nine action areas include the following:

Action Area 1: Vulnerable populations

Enhance the understanding of how loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change affect particularly vulnerable developing countries, segments of the population that are already vulnerable owing to geography, socioeconomic status, livelihoods, gender, age, indigenous or minority status or disability, and the ecosystems that they depend on, and of how the implementation of approaches to address loss and damage can benefit them.

Action Area 2: Risk management

Enhance the understanding of, and promote, comprehensive risk management approaches (assessment, reduction, transfer, retention), including social protection instruments and transformational approaches, in building long-term resilience of countries, vulnerable populations and communities.

Action Area 3: Slow onset events

Enhance data on and knowledge of the risks of slow onset events and their impacts, and identify ways forward on approaches to address slow onset events associated with the adverse effects of climate change with specific focus on potential impacts, within countries and regions.

Action Area 4: Non-economic loss and damage

Enhance data on and knowledge of non-economic losses associated with the adverse effects of climate change and identify ways forward for reducing the risk of and addressing non-economic losses with specific focus on potential impacts within regions

Action Area 5: Capacity and coordination

Enhance the understanding of the capacity and coordination needs with regard to preparing for, responding to and building resilience against loss and damage associated with extreme and slow onset events, including through recovery and rehabilitation.

Action Area 6: Migration, displacement, mobility

Enhance the understanding of and expertise on how the impacts of climate change are affecting patterns of migration, displacement and human mobility; and the application of such understanding and expertise.

Action Area 7: Financial instruments

Encourage comprehensive risk management by the diffusion of information related to financial instruments and tools that address the risks of loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change to facilitate finance in loss and damage.

Action Area 8: Other organisations

Complement, draw upon the work of and involve, as appropriate, existing bodies and expert groups under the Convention, as well as relevant organisations and expert bodies outside the Convention at all levels.

Action Area 9: Five-Year rolling work plan

Develop a five-year rolling work plan for consideration at COP 22, building on the results of this two-year work plan to continue guiding the implementation of the functions of the Warsaw International Mechanism.

Bangladesh's role

Bangladesh has a major opportunity to influence the decision to be made on loss and damage at COP22 in Marrakech in two ways.

Firstly, as Bangladesh is a member of the twenty-member Executive Committee of the WIM, we can influence their deliberations if we prepare ourselves well for each meeting of the Executive Committee.

Secondly, Bangladesh has an opportunity to move forward pro-actively to set up a national mechanism on loss and damage, using the reserve funds in the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF) which could make us an example for other countries to follow. Thus Bangladesh has a major opportunity in the next ten months to make a major contribution to what is likely to be known as the "Loss and Damage COP" in November 2016.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Objective criticism

It has now become a pattern: When the Tigers win, we all celebrate the victory but when they lose, some of us start hurling harsh, cold and rude remarks on the players, the selectors, coaches and the team management. It gets even worse when people make hateful comments about the personal lives of the players in the social media. No one has the right to do this. Our cricketers are doing a great job and we must remember that even the best team can lose sometimes. All kinds of criticism should, therefore, be objective.

Muhtashim Uddin Ahmed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Attention to the DNCC Mayor

Now that DNCC has started drainage work at Banani and Uttara, a lot of streets are being dug up, hampering regular movement of traffic in these areas. It is very unfortunate that we do not find any traffic diversion measures when a particular area is under excavation for placement of big reinforced concrete pipes for the under-construction drainage channels.

We are drawing your kind attention to this issue to take appropriate measures immediately and reduce our everyday suffering.

Engr. K. Z. Azam
A senior citizen

Attacks on foreign students in Karnataka

It is very sad that very few Indian intellectuals have uttered a single word of protest or condemnation with respect to the vicious and highly condemnable attacks on foreign students in Karnataka, India. The political motivation behind taking advantage of every condemnable incident within the nation has exposed the true nature of a section of Indian intellectuals who shed crocodile tears based on selective intolerance that suits their agenda.

It is also important to notice that Karnataka (where such incidents have been rampant) has been ruled by a specific political party that has been vocal about similar incidents in other states but silent when the incident occurred in their own backyard.