

Bangladesh Bank governor confused hubris with heroism

Abject disregard for public safety

Put appropriate measures in place

A construction worker working at the Moghbazar-Malibagh flyover without minimum safety gear like a hard hat died on March 16 when an iron bar fell on him in Eskaton of the capital city. He along with hundreds of workers employed in the construction of the 8.7km long flyover have little or no safety gear to avoid injury or fatality. Not only that, we are looking at a scenario where thousands of people and hundreds of vehicles commute below the ongoing construction work and it is only a miracle that stops more accidents like this from happening. This is horrifying and we find it unconscionable that such an important infrastructure project as this is being constructed in violation of minimum safety requirements.

We have long highlighted the plight of workers in various sectors doing dangerous jobs without proper safety gear. And this is not the only project that is violating the safety rules. The excuse by project authorities of the flyover that workers have been provided with safety gear but apparently they are not at ease using them is very difficult to believe. There is a general lack of enforcement by authorities to make sure contractors adhere to official guidelines. Now that a major accident has occurred, we hope it will serve as a wake-up call for the LGED that is executing the project, to do the needful and put requisite safety measures in place in the greater interest of public safety.

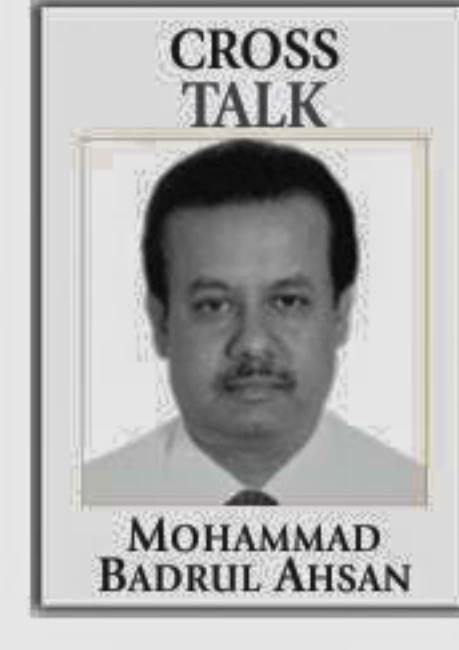
Myanmar elects a civilian president

Let democracy take root

MYANMAR, ruled by the military since 1962, seems to be moving towards a full-fledged democracy with its parliament electing Htin Kyaw, a long-time friend and confidant of Aung San Suu Kyi as its first civilian president in more than 50 years. We congratulate the people of Myanmar for this hard-fought, long-awaited victory and hope that it will lay the foundation for a more democratic and inclusive society in Myanmar.

This comes after Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy winning majority in both houses of parliament in elections in November last year. But before that, in June, the military which controls a quarter of the seats in parliament, flexed its muscles blocking moves to rescind its veto power in parliament and refusing to ease a rule that prevents Suu Kyi from becoming president. The good news is Htin Kyaw, selected primarily for his loyalty, is not likely to veer from the wishes of Suu Kyi. In all important ways, she will, therefore, be the country's virtual leader.

The days ahead of her will still be difficult. Though the military has eased its control of the government, it still holds many instruments of power, directly controlling key ministries such as defence, home affairs and border affairs. The most crucial task for the new administration will be to improve the lot of the country's numerous minority ethnic groups including the million-plus Rohingyas, which comprise about 40 percent of the population—often victims of state sponsored abuses systematically and specifically aimed at them.



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

CROSS TALK
 THE governor of Bangladesh Bank has resigned, which is an appreciable act intermediate between compulsion and courage, and he deserved full credit if not for the dissonance of what he said perhaps on the spur of the moment. He said he was leaving as a "hero" when his leaving was certain but heroism wasn't. We're not sure if he was leaving because he took responsibility for what happened or just because he didn't have a choice. If everyone shown the door is a hero, then we have more heroes cluttering corporate corridors than all the battlefields taken together.

The outgoing governor has tried to give a moral shine to his abrupt departure. But he hasn't told us what exactly happened. If the delay in informing the government was as per protocol, as he claimed, then why has he resigned? Why couldn't he stay on and help investigators nab the miscreants? The fact is straight and simple. He wasn't trying to be bold; he just didn't have another option.

The now-to-be former governor also argued that he wasn't a technical guy and was puzzled by the theft. If ignorance of law is no excuse, ignorance of operation is no excuse for the head of an organisation. That he resorted to such inept arguments shows he may have misunderstood his job. A hero stops digging when he is in a hole.

It's curious why a six-week-old disaster couldn't hit the headlines until he hoping to recover the money and then pretend nothing had happened? Or, was he misled into stupor by his colleagues in their efforts to cover up? It's fair to infer that if not for the story published in a newspaper in faraway Philippines, this country probably wouldn't have had any clue about the heist till today. If we believe that nobody from Bangladesh Bank was involved in this crime, why was it hesitant to come out? Why did it wait for several weeks to

last week. The hackers attempted to steal \$1 billion but managed to steal \$81 million because typos luckily thwarted the full heist. So it's both good news and bad news. We have lost money but not more than ten times that could be gone if hackers were not sloppy with typing.

But why was Bangladesh Bank sitting on this keg of gunpowder for so long? Is it because the governor was puzzled as he confessed? What was he thinking all that time the money was missing? Was

open up and that too after the cat was already out of the bag?

Money has gone missing in this country several times in the past. And it has always been a one-way traffic because what was lost was never recovered. We are yet to know how much of the BDT40 billion siphoned out of Sonali Bank has been brought back, although a few officials of the bank and a couple are serving time as poster boys of that criminal enterprise.

in the parliament, the bank's former president is still roaming free. The memory of the 2011 stock market manipulation, when masterminds had defrauded investors of at least BDT50 billion, has all but faded into darkness.

This country, over the years, has turned into a theme park for corruption. There is corruption everywhere and Bangladesh Bank may not have escaped the havoc of this viral attack. The governor would have been our hero had he lost his job for admitting it or unmasking those who may be working to destroy this important institution from inside.

Instead he did the most mundane thing, although one must admit resignations are rare in this country. Rather, this one time the finance minister has showed more class by putting his foot down. He has been heroic in his decision to remove the governor and promptly appoint his successor.

And the minister surely knows more than us. He has also sacked two deputy governors and talked about introducing reforms in the central bank. He may have other things in mind, but one thing that must be restored is the firewall between the regulator and the regulated.

The central bank shouldn't collect blankets from the banks. Neither should it ask banks to sponsor its activities, nor allow any bank to introduce scholarships "in recognition of the governor's contribution to the economy." The foundation of fairness flounders when favours breed familiarity, which is the fiercest form of flattery.

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RISING SEA LEVEL Challenges ahead for Bangladesh

A.K.M. SAIFUL ISLAM

RISING sea levels will definitely be the biggest threat for Bangladesh among all the external drivers related to climate change. Sea level rise affects the coastal zone of Bangladesh and its geometry in a number of ways including inundation, erosion and saline water intrusion into the water table. Climate change induced potential rise in sea level will aggravate the risks to coastal zones. In particular, the poorest people living in the vulnerable regions are the most susceptible to climate-induced risks and will continue to suffer the most. It is therefore important to know about the level of impact due to sea level rise (SLR) on Bangladesh.

Results from a recent collaborative study of BUET with Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS) and Institute of Water Modelling (IWM), funded by the Department of Environment (DOE), showed that trends of water level rise of the 18 tidal gauge stations were determined for a period of 30 years. It can be found that the overall trend in the coastal zone is 6-20 mm per year, which is about 2 to 5 times higher than the global average. Spatial variation of sea level rise was found along the coast, and the highest trend has been observed in the Chittagong and Cox's Bazar region compared to other two coastal sub-zones of the country.

Several recent studies, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports, provide sea level rise projections for the world. Over the last century, global mean of sea level rise was stated as 19 ± 2 cm. Higher rapid sea-level rise is now projected to be 28-98cm by 2100. In the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) in Paris, a historic agreement to combat climate change in order to achieve a low carbon, resilient and sustainable world was signed by the representatives of 195 nations in Paris. The purpose of this historic agreement is to reduce the level of greenhouse emissions to restrict the increase in global average temperature within 2 degree Celsius above

the pre-industrial level. However, different projections scenarios of IPCC showed that the increase of average temperature from the pre-industrial period is about 0.78 degree Centigrade. For very high emissions, IPCC predicts a global rise of sea level will be 52-98 cm by the year 2100 even with aggressive emission reduction; a rise of 28-61 cm is predicted. IPCC reports also note that a collapse of the marine-based sectors of the Antarctic ice sheet, if initiated, could potentially add up to a further several tenths of a metre of sea level rise, independent of scenario, and that estimate could be around 0.5m. This additional amount, when combined with the upper limit of the highest-emission-scenario (RCP8.5) likely range, gives a value of sea level rise by 2100 of around 1.5 m, not including potential local variations or subsidence.

Considering all these risks, it is very important to know the probable areas which are under threat of inundation in the coastal zone of Bangladesh with sea level rise in the near future. A four year long research project entitled 'High End Climate Impact and Extremes (HELIX)' is currently on-going at BUET, where the European Union provide funding under the Seventh Framework Programme FP7/2007-2013, to carry out the study for assessing impacts of the extreme climate change in Bangladesh. Under the HELIX project, coastal inundation due to sea level rise has been assessed using coastal modelling. A widely used flow simulation model Delft3D has been set up for a part of the complex Bangladesh delta.

After validation, the model has been simulated to prepare an inundation map and to calculate affected areas and affected population for 0.5m, 1m and 1.5m sea level rise. According to the Coastal Zone Policy report of the Government of Bangladesh, 19 districts out of 64 are in the coastal zone, covering a total of 147 Upazilas. Of these 19 districts, 12 districts are contiguous with the sea or lower estuary directly. The coastal zone covers 47,201 sq.km land area, which is 32 percent of the total landmass of the

country. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) report of 2003, the total population living in the coastal zone is 35.1 million, i.e. 28 percent of the total population of the country.

The area under sea water inundation will be changed under different sea level rise conditions. It has been found that 0.5m, 1m and 1.5m SLR will inundate about 4.3 percent, 8.4 percent and 11.3 percent of the coastal areas of Bangladesh. The number of affected people will be 2.5 lakh, 6 lakh and 8 lakh for the 0.5 m, 1m and 1.5m SLR. The biggest threat of SLR is on the largest mangrove forest of the world, the Sundarbans, as it is not protected by the coastal polders. It has been found that about 12 percent, 43

percent and 60 percent of the Sundarbans will be inundated for the 0.5m, 1m and 1.5m SLR. As the Sundarbans is very important from ecological, environmental, geological and economic point of view for Bangladesh, its inundation patterns with different SLR conditions have profound impact.

Note: The scenarios presented in this article are indicative of the expected range of changes of the coastal inundation. Mr. Abdur Rahman Tazkia worked as a Research Assistant at BUET to simulate the coastal model and prepared the figures.

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COMMENTS

"BB governor quits over cyber heist"
 (March 16, 2016)

Ali Imtiaz Babu
 We should appreciate that someone took responsibility and resigned from a high position. That's a rarity in our country.

Firdaus Sohel
 Now the government should try to get all that money back.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Shakib should behave himself

Shakib Al Hasan's unprofessional attitude is contradictory to the norms of standard cricket. In the past, he had been reprimanded several times for his attitude but he did the same thing again during the Bangladesh-Pakistan match in the recently concluded Asia Cup T20. The left-handed batsman hit the stumps with his bat after being bowled by Mohammad Amir. He was reprimanded by the ICC for breaching the Code of Conduct and was fined 50 percent of the match fees.

Although Shakib apologised for his behaviour, he should have been more careful. Players should maintain their sportsmanship at any given situation.
 Jahanara Begum
 On e-mail

Why power plants near the Sundarbans?

Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company Ltd. (BIFPCL), a joint venture of PDB and NTPC of India, is developing the 1320MW Maitree Super Thermal Power Project at Rampal which will run on imported coal. Besides, local firm Orion Group is building a 566MW power plant in Rampal area. It is needless to say that for healthy economic development, it is a must to produce sufficient power. But establishing such projects near the largest mangrove forest of the world is unacceptable. These power plants can be easily built elsewhere in the country. Sundarbans saved the lives of people living in the coastal areas several times when cyclones hit



Bangladesh. Sidr in 2007 and Aila in 2009 made us realise how important the Sundarbans is for us. We would like to request the authorities concerned to stop the projects that will

endanger the Sundarbans and the livelihoods of millions of people.
 Md. Sayedur Rahman
 Jatrabari, Dhaka

A big blow to economy

The incident of Bangladesh Bank reserve heist is surely a massive blow to the country's economy. The government must do everything possible to get back the money.
 Foyjul Islam Rigen
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