

Train journey turns perilous

Make more trains available

IT is difficult to understand why rail authorities have a difficult time gauging the estimated number of passengers who will be going home for the Eid festivities. This is a ritual that tens of thousands of passengers make every year to be near their loved ones during one of the two most important Muslim festivals. A report in this paper on September 10 gave the grim picture of hundreds of passengers travelling on rooftops of passenger trains. There are no safety harnesses up there and predictably some 40 passengers were injured when they fell off the roof of a train in Sirajganj as they got hit by hanging wires above the track.

Indeed, we find people hanging on for dear life on roofs, in front of engines simply because there are not enough seats in the bogeys of trains leaving Dhaka to various parts of the country. We are told by railway authorities that the traffic of passengers this Eid is heavier than the earlier Eid. Is it not time for authorities to own up to the fact that their contingency plans for heavier-than-anticipated traffic was not well thought out? And how is it that those responsible for safety and security of train journey conveniently choose to look the other way which makes it possible for people to travel in an insecure manner that costs lives and injury? It is bad enough that there are fewer carriages than needed, people must contend with the perils of overcrowding. Let us hope that when next Eid comes round, railway authorities have figured out a workable plan of action that allows for passengers to make a trip to their home districts that will not involve risking their lives.

Tongi factory fire

Thoroughly investigate what really happened

AN alleged boiler explosion at a factory in Tongi BSCIC industrial area of Gazipur has led to the biggest industrial disaster in Bangladesh since the Rana Plaza incident. More than a hundred workers were working at the factory when the explosion shook the entire area and engulfed the plastic packaging factory in fire. So far, 24 people have reportedly been confirmed to have died, with more than 70 people having sustained injuries. Our heart goes out to the victims and their families.

Many of the trapped workers were seen to be screaming for help, but the huge flames, prevented people outside from getting anywhere near the building. At least 20 fire fighting units tried to douse the flames, but given that there were chemical filled drums mostly kept on the ground floor of the factory, the task was not an easy one. Meanwhile, according to local television channel reports, parts of the four-story building had collapsed because of the impact of the boiler explosion or after the fire had broke out.

All of this once again begs the question as to how serious the authorities really are in terms of ensuring worker safety at workplaces. Questions as to what safety measures were there at the factory must be asked. And if the necessary safety measures were, indeed, in place, why such high number of casualties? Factory fires are not new and the management is supposed to take decisive measures to prepare for such incidents.

The incident is another tragic lesson for the country. No amount of worker safety should ever be compromised as the price paid for such negligence is paid in human lives. We hope the authorities will launch a thorough investigation into the incident and that such horrible incidents are avoided by implementing stricter safety measures and proper fire drills at all workplaces.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Limiting children's screen time

It is becoming increasingly harder for parents to control their children's screen time which includes watching television, using internet and other electronic devices such as mobile phones and tablets.

According to a study, children all over the world, on an average, spend more than seven hours a day in front of the screen. They watch videos and movies, do facebook and play games on the internet. It is extremely worrisome that some games have indecent and objectionable contents which can make kids violent and aggressive. On the other hand, playing outdoor games helps children build good health and character.

When parents limit the screen time of their children, they get more time to interact with parents and friends, sleep and play outdoors. Real life relationships are more important than spending time on the social media. Make sure that you spend enough quality time with your kids.

Zeeshan Ali, On email

Free the footpaths of Gulistan

The footpaths and its adjacent areas at Gulistan area always remain occupied by hawkers, vendors and ticket counters of buses, creating severe traffic gridlocks. Gulistan is an important area of the capital city. Therefore, keeping the footpaths of that area neat and free from hawkers is very important. We hope the authority will look into the matter and take necessary steps.

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The tragedy of 9/11 and the search for truth

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FIFTEEN years ago today, the whole world's attention was drawn towards the United States of America and the scenes that were unfolding there. Although the exact details were, at first, unclear to all, everyone knew what they were witnessing was, somehow, of major significance; that they had seen a world changing event. And that is exactly what the attacks in America on September 11, 2001, did. It changed the world.

The attack — dubbed the worst terrorist attack in world history — killed 2,996 people and injured over 6,000 others, causing mass hysteria in the country, understandably. But the tragedy, as grave as it was for the Americans, and the rest of the world, did not end there. In fact, for some, it was only the beginning.

Since the commencement of the 'War on Terror' following the 9/11 attack, hundreds of thousands more lives have been lost. With the number of dead growing rapidly even after all these years, signs of the war ending remain nowhere in sight. Thus, it is safe to say, that the American War on Terror, if it was indeed meant to curb terrorism and bring an end to loss of life, has failed. As most said it would.

Yet, despite the magnitude of the catastrophe that had befallen America on that day, and the world ever since, what really happened on that day, remains a mystery. According to a joint *New York Times* and CBS poll, 84 percent of Americans do not believe the official 9/11 story (Truth and lies: Conspiracy theories are running rampant thanks to modern technology, *The Independent*, November 11, 2011). The official story that has been presented to the public simply does not seem to add up.

It is riddled in anomalies and glaring inconsistencies. Take the fact that three skyscrapers in total had come down that day after being hit by two planes. That's right. Remember Building 7? Which came down after 'not' being hit by a plane, becoming the first steel-framed high-rise building to have collapsed because of fire alone (The Mysterious Collapse of World Trade Centre 7: Case Far From Closed, *Foreign Policy Journal*, February 15, 2011)?

Then the official story includes the fact that the twin towers were the only skyscrapers in history anywhere in the world to ever even fall down from a fire, let alone vertically on its own footprint,

which thousands of engineers and other experts, through their combined efforts, *Architects & Engineers* for 9/11, have refuted. This is because according to the official story, the buildings collapsed as they did, after jet fuel had melted the steel beams holding them up. But experts rejecting the official story have pointed out, jet fuel — an ordinary hydrocarbon — has a maximum burning temperature of 1200°F, while steel doesn't start melting until it reaches a temperature of 2750°F. Then how is it possible for the jet fuel to have melted the steel beams leading to their collapse?

The mainstream media in America

Even prior to its release, on April 28, 2016, the London-based Saudi daily *Al-Hayat* published an article written by Saudi legal expert Katib Al-Shammari, arguing that "The US itself had planned and carried out the 9/11 attacks, placing the blame on a shifting series of others — first Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, then Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, and now Saudi Arabia" (Article In Saudi Daily: US Planned, Carried Out 9/11 Attacks — But Blames Others For Them, *Middle East Media Research Institute*, May 19, 2016).

In response, *The New York Times* in an editorial on May 27, 2016, wrote that "Saudi Arabia has frustrated American policy makers for years". As according to

story is eroding as a result of growing expert opinion that challenges the official line. In order to redirect the public's scepticism, a red herring is being pulled across the trail. The Saudi angle satisfies the belief that some sort of government coverup is involved but 'redirects' the suspicion from Washington to the Saudis" (9/11 Disinformation: Saudi Arabia Attacked America, *PaulCraigRoberts.org*, May 27, 2016).

Disappointingly, however, in spite of the latest revelations made clear by the 28 pages and the blame game that has played out before its release, there is no way, as of yet, to conclusively say what had actually happened on September



The rubble of the World Trade Center smoulders following a terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 in New York. PHOTO: AFP

has, unfortunately, failed to ask these questions or give those asking, a voice. Yet, despite the media silence, it is many of the 9/11 victims' families that have refused to give in and have courageously continued to seek the truth for fifteen long years. And it is because of their courage and perseverance, that a classified 28 page section of the 9/11 Commission Report was only recently released to the public. With the addition of this missing puzzle piece, it can only be hoped that the picture of what really happened will continue to get clearer. Perhaps it already has.

the editorial, the Saudis have sponsored "extremist clerics" who are "fostering violent jihad", creating a "fertile ground for recruitment to radical ideology". Other western media outlets have since tied Saudi funding to what had happened on 9/11. Now the question is, why after all these years, is the US turning on its close ally, blaming it for parts of what had happened?

Well, according to Dr Paul Craig Roberts, who was the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Economic Policy under Ronald Reagan and the associate editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, "One possible answer is that the public's confidence in the 9/11

11, 2001. Regardless, the loss of innocent life that occurred that day was surely a tragedy of massive proportions, not only for the US, but for the entire world.

And the injustices that have been done throughout the world ever since, justified by the events of 9/11, simply add to it. Yet, the tragedy which we so readily forget to mention, is the denial of truth to the families of those who died on September 11, 2001, and to those who died ever since. And until that is set right, justice will forever elude the injustice that was done, on 9/11, fifteen years ago.

The writer is a member of the Editorial team.

Brexit's Pandora's Box

NADIA KABIR BARB

NOW that the dust has settled on the EU referendum results, we can take stock of the full extent of the damage. Not only has Brexit had political and economic repercussions, it has had social implications with frightening consequences, namely a sudden increase in xenophobic and racist attacks. The most recent being the assault in the small town of Harlow on 40-year-old Polish Arkadiusz Jóźwik, by a group of British youths, resulting in his death. The police are treating this attack as a hate crime.

Latent Euroscepticism and anti-EU sentiment has been simmering in the political underbelly of UK politics for some time, with its supporters becoming far more belligerent in the past decade. So when David

the list. Almost overnight people who were considered part of the local community became social pariahs. Just a week before the referendum and even before the results had been out, Jo Cox, a young MP was shot and then stabbed to death by a 52-year-old man who allegedly chanted 'Britain First' when he brutally killed her. Cox was known for her strong pro-immigration stance.

Far from an edifying discussion on the pros and cons of EU membership and a serious debate on the longer term political, economic, demographic and ecological implications of remaining, throughout the run up to the referendum, we were subjected to a tidal wave of misinformation and fear mongering from both sides. The Remain campaign tried to scare

Current British Prime Minister Theresa May known for her hard line on immigration may have fanned the flames of prejudice during her time as Home Secretary. The controversial billboard campaign by the Home Office consisting of vans carrying messages saying "Go home or face arrest" were thought to be both offensive and divisive. Similarly with Brexit slogans such as "We want our country back" and "Let's make Britain Great again" the inferences were that immigrants were responsible for the current economic climate and needed to be expelled from the UK. Of course what they failed to mention were inconvenient truths such as the fact that according to the Office for National Statistics EU migrants contributed 2.5 billion more in taxes than they received in benefits and State services (1999/2000).

Over the last few years, Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims have been on the rise. Particularly affected have been women in hijabs and niqabs, facing abuse on a regular basis. Mosques and community centres have also been vandalised and attacked. But Brexit has expanded the net and included anyone who appears to be 'different' whether in appearance, religion or speech. You no longer need to look 'foreign', you just have to sound 'foreign' to be targeted.

Those who previously might have kept their racist views to themselves seem to have become emboldened and empowered by the results of the referendum. Verbal abuse towards foreigners has risen sharply and we now hear and read about reports of excrement being put through letter boxes, people being told to "go home", laminated cards with "No more Polish vermin" written on them being distributed, a Polish community centre being vandalised with racist graffiti, a fire bombing of a halal butcher shop, to name a few incidents. There were even requests in restaurants by customers not to be served by "foreign waiters". What is frightening is these types of racist views are held not only by adults but have filtered down to school-going children. In one case a child told his teacher he was not going to be told what to do by a foreigner, in another case a black woman was taunted on the bus by a boy calling her a 'monkey'.

Racial slurs such as 'Paki' which encompasses people of South Asian origin seems to have made a reappearance. A few days ago my son was on his way home when he saw a man stumbling towards him. When he asked out of concern if the man was alright, the response was "Move on, Paki".

It is unacceptable that people should have to now live in fear of being abused or assaulted on the streets, their place of work and even in their homes. Sadly this kind of bigotry and xenophobia is a step backwards in the UK's social development and might just have taken the "Great" out of Great Britain.

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A demonstrator holds up an anti-immigration flag during a demonstration by far-right protesters in Dover, U.K. on May 28, 2016. PHOTO: AFP

Cameron promised the nation an in/out referendum on the UK's membership of the EU in 2013, he thought he was healing the Tory party for the upcoming general election and buying the time and the platform from which to secure a deal which would silence the EU's detractors. Little did he or any of us realise what the referendum would unleash. It has not only divided the nation but also brought to the surface and almost given licence to bigotry and racism across the country.

Leading up to and following the referendum, the number of racist attacks, ranging from verbal abuse to destruction of property and actual physical violence, has significantly increased. The brunt of the racial violence post Brexit is being directed at the East European communities with the Polish at the top of

people into voting to stay within the EU out of fear of impending economic disaster. The Leave Campaign or Brexit team initially focused on reclaiming money and jobs from the Brussels kleptocracy then changed tack and centred their campaign on the negative impact of immigration and free trade. Their whole campaign was based on misrepresentation and dishonesty. Anti-immigration rhetoric used by the Brexit camp has been fundamental to the way people ultimately decided to vote with many of the population feeling threatened by foreigners and immigrants. The propaganda used implied that not only were immigrants taking their jobs but also implementing their local culture and customs thereby eroding the British way of life.