

Poverty reduced

Sustain the efforts to reduce further

It is indeed heartening to note that the number of poor in the country has reduced to 12.9 percent. There is no denying that the social safety net programmes of the government, along with economic growth and the tireless efforts of some non-government organisations, have contributed to this success.

Significant hurdles, however, remain. According to the World Bank's revised estimate, a whopping 20 million people, larger than the total population of many countries, are extremely poor, consuming below 1,805 calories a day. While we rejoice at the very significant reduction in the number of poor, there is a dire need to raise the nutritional standards of the populace, as extreme poverty is chronic and can adversely affect the physical and mental development of children.

That being the reality, it is time to carry out institutional policy reforms keeping in mind the unique needs of those who are yet to taste the fruit of the country's economic growth. Also it must not be forgotten that the campaign against poverty will run dry if it is not carried out in a transparent manner and partisan people are allowed to lay their hands on what should be going to the poor. Also, the number of landless farmers, which is shooting up by the day needs to be arrested on an urgent basis. There is little question that while social safety net programmes are essential in the short run, any poverty reduction strategy ought to consider skill development, which, we believe, is essential for long term sustainable economic growth.

Unfit marine vessels cost lives

Poor monitoring!

DISORDER rules on the waterways of the country because according to the department of shipping 10,000 registered marine vessels operate on our rivers while some 20,000 unfit vessels ply them without registration or fitness certificate. This flies in the face of the Shipping Minister's statement on September 28 in parliament that there are no unfit passenger launches operating in the country. Unfit vessels are the primary reason why there are so many fatalities on our rivers as launches sink with disturbing regularity. The excuse by authorities that unfit vessels area allowed to operate to meet public demand is unacceptable given the hundreds of lives being lost yearly. According to the law, the BIWTA is supposed to check the registration and fitness certificates issue by the shipping department prior to issuing route permits.

Indeed, the shipping department has no exact figures as to how many thousands of such unfit vessels are operating in the country. In fact, vessels with faulty designs are found to be running, and there is little by way of inspection to check whether they have permits and certificates to begin with.

Hence, we find ourselves in a situation where local water routes have thousands of vessels that operate without requisite papers, whose designs by way of architecture and engines are faulty, and which meet accidents due to overloading or are unfit to take on the weather conditions. All these anomalies are due to a serious lack of oversight by the very authorities that are entrusted with the task of making sure that vessels which do not meet safety standards, are not allowed to put people's lives in danger.

LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

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Why is our quality of education deteriorating?

The World University Rankings have placed Dhaka University lower than before, ranked below 700 out of 1,000 universities of the world. No other Bangladeshi university was in the list, which has over 5 Indian universities above 400. How are we making progress when our quality of education is deteriorating?

I also find that the quality of graduate and post graduate holders in banks and other institutions is rather poor these days.

Perhaps one of the main reasons is that educationists (good students, teachers, experts, etc.) are not valued enough in our country.

Luthfi Ali
On email

Stop advertising on walls and trees

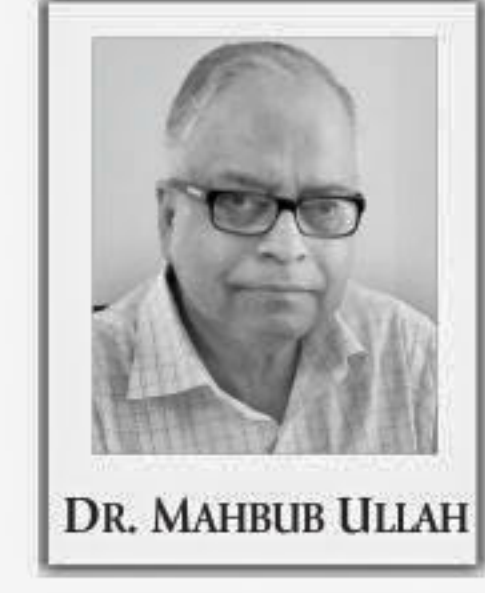
The common practice of advertising on walls and trees in Dhaka is ruining the beauty of the city. Businesses try to catch people's attention through these posters, wall writings or hanging banners on trees.

Earlier this year, the High Court asked DCC to take necessary steps to remove billboards and banners in Dhaka. According to High Court rules, anyone putting up such advertisements must take prior permission from the respective city corporation.

Sadly, it seems like no one actually cares about these rules and the whole situation is worsening by the day. The newly inaugurated Moghbazar-Mouchak Flyover pillars are covered with unauthorized posters. Hopefully, DSCC and DNCC will take necessary steps to remove these illegally advertised elements from the city very soon. This is our city- and the responsibility is ours, too.

Afrin Masud
East West University

Xi Jinping on the importance of scholarship



DR. MAHBUB ULLAH

CHINA is building socialism with Chinese characteristics. In this road to socialism with Chinese characteristics, two major policy thrusts are playing the key role, namely, reforms and opening up. The questions to be asked: why reforms and why opening up? China is at the moment the second largest economy in the world. Faster economic growth and accelerated reduction of poverty has been possible due to reforms and opening up. China has been a victim of imperialist encirclement, which kept the country isolated. China could not take advantage of gains from trade and technology transfer. Changed geopolitics since 1971 provided China opportunities for opening up. The policy of opening up took concrete shape with the beginning of reforms in 1978 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. Setting up special economic zones in the coastal areas and allowing foreign private investment provided China opportunities to learn about advanced technologies and the art of efficient management. In the rural areas, introduction of production responsibility system gave farmers incentives to grow higher yields. Under this system, farmers were granted freedom to sell surplus output in the market. The process of marketisation became visible first in the rural areas. All these apparently capitalist type features created confusion among many genuinely socialist minded persons that China was abandoning socialism. However, this was not the case. Before revolution, China was a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society. Transition to socialism in such a country is bound to be complex and lengthy, even peculiar too. China could not build socialism in one go without having strong foundation of advanced productive forces. Development of productive forces called for market incentives in many

areas. The theoretical premise is that an advanced production relation cannot be realized on the foundation of backward productive forces. It is quite natural that certain negative features may appear in the society. As we all know, it was predicted that opening windows would bring flies and mosquitoes. Despite isolated negative tendencies, the creative development of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought in the form of socialism with Chinese characteristics has elevated China to a new height as it stands now.

China's opening up policy also includes sending Chinese students to advanced capitalist countries to acquire advanced knowledge in science, technology and other disciplines. The importance of foreign returned scholars

emphasising on the importance of innovation for making China's dream come true. First, Xi Jinping expects foreign returned and overseas scholars to adhere to patriotism. Second, he urges that they will study hard. Third, he urges them to be more innovative and creative. Fourth, he hopes they will work for dynamic exchanges with other countries.

Xi Jinping also narrated the history of the Western Returned Scholars Association. He says, "Founded 100 years ago when the survival of the nation was at stake, the Western Returned Scholars Association practiced patriotism by organising its members to participate in patriotic and democratic movements and join the cause for national salvation and people's liberation, thus becoming a famous patriotic association for

says, "If you decide to stay abroad we will support you in serving the country in various ways. All of you should remember that wherever you are you are a member of the Chinese family; the country and the people back home always care about their sons and daughters, and your homeland is always a warm spiritual land for you." There is a lingering concern in the third world countries about brain drain. But the Chinese leadership has adopted a very pragmatic policy regarding scholars deciding to stay abroad. In a globalised world, scholars can serve their nation even by staying abroad, provided they are imbued with the spirit of patriotism. The Chinese state commits to support them in various ways.

To me the most fascinating part of this speech is Xi Jinping's emphasis on hard work. He has called upon the foreign educated scholars to keep the perseverance and diligence in reading as related in stories of Confucius, Sun Jing and Su Qin, Kuang Heng, Che Yin and Sun Kang. He also emphasises upon learning from other people's practical experience. The name of ancient Chinese scholars and philosophers referred by Xi Jinping were all arduous readers. Among them, the story of one scholar may be mentioned to press home the point about their persistence in reading and study. Sun Jing of the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) loved reading. He tied his hair to a roof beam to prevent himself from falling asleep when reading. Very few state leaders are found urging upon scholars to read following ancient scholars, who maintained serious reading habit under difficult circumstances. In our country there is the example of Scholar Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah who prayed to God to extend his life so that he could read more. Xi Jinping's speech successfully drives home the point that Chinese scholars, irrespective of the fact whether they live in the country or stay abroad, have a great role to play for China's modernisation and fulfilling the China dream.

The writer is a former Chairman and Professor of the Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka.

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and Chinese overseas scholars have been highlighted in a speech captioned 'Right Time to Innovate and Make Dreams Come True' by Xi Jinping, President of China. This speech is included in a book titled *The Governance of China* published by the Foreign Languages Publishing Co. Ltd, Beijing. Being an academician myself, I found the speech very enlightening. Admittedly, the whole book is a treasure for learning. The emphasis on innovation and making dreams come true is recognition of the imperatives of development process. Harvard Professor Sollow in his growth model gave innovation the central role. Economies tend to stagnate without innovation due to operation of the law of diminishing returns. The way out is innovation. Xi Jinping keeps on

democracy and science at that time. ...Since the beginning of China's reform and opening up, the Association has energetically carried out the serve the country program," making itself a people's organisation dedicated to socialism with Chinese characteristics. In 2003, with approval from the central authorities, the Association was given an additional name – the Chinese Overseas- educated Scholars Association – with its scope of operation expanded to cover the entire country and its members spreading all over the world."

As we read about the evolution of the Association, we see that all foreign educated scholars of China, whether they are living in the country or abroad, carry importance to the nation. Xi Jinping

RAMPAL POWER PLANT PROJECT

The undoing of a World Heritage Site

RUBY AMATULLA

TODAY, facing a governmental decision of enormous national and international consequences, we, on behalf of Women for Good Governance, appeal to the leaders, activists and people of Bangladesh as well as the world, to deter from the dangerous path we are about to embark on that could cause incalculable, irreversible damages to a natural treasure accepted by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Site – the Sundarbans. Situated at the coastal area of Bangladesh on the Bay of Bengal, the largest mangrove forest works as a shield to lessen the devastating effects of often visited cyclones and/or high tidal waves.

The Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company - consisting of the Bangladesh Power Development Board and the Indian 'National Thermal Power Corporation' [NTPC] - in 2010 decided to establish a 1320 megawatt coal-based power plant, occupying 1,834 acre land, only 14 kilometres away from the world heritage site. Environment and ecology experts predict that the plant, by burning a huge amount of coal, would release toxic gases that would put the surrounding areas, and most importantly the Sundarbans, at grave risk.

It is critically important to note that when the NTPC wanted to construct similar coal-based power plants in Gajmarra, Madhya Pradesh and in the Indian part of the Sundarbans, the plans were outright rejected by the Indian Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and by both the state and central authorities facing overwhelming public protests. These NTPC projects were stopped on ground of causing 'irreparable damage' to the forest and the environment ("NTPC's coal-based project in MP turned down", October 8, 2010, The Hindu)..

However, in case of Bangladesh, governments of both countries have been relentless in assuring public that 'state of the art' technology would prevent the detrimental effects and make the power plant safe. Why then has the NTPC and the Indian government failed to convince its own people of such safety measures? Why did their projects not get the approval, either from the authorities or the court or the people? The credentials of the said company is also under question considering the fact that numerous projects of NTPC were rejected by the Green Tribunal of India due to the past records of the company.

Even a bench of the Bangladesh High Court on March 1, 2011 asked the government why the construction of the plant should not be declared illegal ("HC seeks four past orders on Rampal power project", October 1, 2013, *The Daily Star*). The government has continuously been ignoring concerns like these as well as opinions of experts and outrage of the people, expressed through endless discussions and demonstrations.

The validity of safety measures assured by vested interests have also been questioned and even challenged by experts and professionals in this country as well as outside. The past records of such coal-based power plants in the world do not substantiate the effectiveness of such measures. The Department of Energy of Bangladesh in



Protesting the Rampal Power Plant.

PHOTO: STAR

August 2013 gave 50 conditions for the plant; the most prominent among which was to remove the site beyond 25 kilometre away from the heritage site that is ecologically sensitive. This project also violates the terms and conditions of the Ramsar Convention declaration of which Bangladesh itself is a signatory.

This beautiful forest - similar to the mangrove forest of Amazon or Florida that contribute to the ecosystem of the world - is nourished by a network of tributaries from the major rivers such as the Ganges, Padma, and Brahmaputra that flow through Bangladesh, making the country one of the biggest delta lands in the world. This forest still sustains endangered species such as the Royal Bengal Tiger, rare species of deer, alligators, crocodiles, turtles and other animals and plant life: 330 different types of plants and shrubs, 400 different types of fishes, 270 different kinds of birds, and 42 kinds of mammals, all making it one of the most bio-diverse forests in the world, contributing to the ecological balance not only of Bangladesh but the whole planet. Three million people live in the mangrove forest area and their livelihood depends on its produce – such as the fish, woods, honey, spices, medicinal herbs, agriculture etc. – that are distributed to the entire country and beyond.

It is understandable that more power-plants are necessary in Bangladesh to meet the growing electricity need of over 160 million people. However, the location, technology and alternative sources are serious concerns. Apart from establishing the plant 25 kms from the forest, the technology of the proposed plant should be supervised, monitored and approved by a team of world experts and not by

representatives of either of the two governments to avoid conflicts of interest and to gain public trust. Alternative sources, such as solar power, could be seriously considered, especially considering the burgeoning solar power industry in Bangladesh that installs over 65,000 solar home systems every month, making it the largest and fastest growing off-grid program in the world. A solar plant can be set up in slightly over a year, as opposed to the four to five years that a coal plant takes, thereby providing electricity very quickly to people who desperately need it. We vehemently advocate such clean and renewable power generation to meet the power need of this country.

The coal-based power generation plant in Rampal could have disastrous effects on the economy and ecology of this environmentally vulnerable country that is already threatened by global warming, shrinking coastal areas and increased salinity. The power plant would require 4.72 million tons of coal every year. The carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide emitted from the plant would threaten the ecosystem of the entire area. An estimated 59 barges, each carrying 80,000 tonnes of coal to the plant would scatter ashes, dirt and sulfur in the air and create a blanket of ash on the leaves, thereby seriously impeding the health of the forest. In addition, about 40 kilometre forest area along the banks of the Passur River has to be completely cleared up. Even though we've said it before, we can't stress enough that the irreversible damages of the power plant could severely affect the economy and quality of life of the country for generations to come.

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