

## Dhaka's polluted water source

### Residents' health put at risk

YESTERDAY we printed the picture of a heavily polluted Demra-Matuil canal in the capital city. The reason being that this is the canal from which Dhaka Wasa (Water Supply & Sewage Authority) draws its water to supply to city residents after treating it. The only problem is, as is evident from the picture itself, the canal is thoroughly polluted and garbage is dumped into it liberally, since there is apparently no functioning authority to oversee that this does not happen.

We have been highlighting the sorry plight of canals in Dhaka for years. Since relevant authorities turn a blind eye to canal encroachment, where unplanned urbanisation is allowed to flourish resulting in the city's population to explode forcing the need to supply more and more water, it is hardly surprising that such vital canals are in such a sorry state. Environmentalists and urban planners have for years highlighted the need for city authorities to take long-term measures to preserve both the canals and the quality of water.

There is need for canal excavation and keeping the mouths of canals open so that these may be connected to the principal rivers. If we want to stop polluters, then regular vigilance is needed to remove illegal structures and prevent unscrupulous entities from re-establishing their foothold by encroaching on canals like this one. As we move near a 20 million strong population in Dhaka, Dhaka Wasa needs ample pumps in working condition to properly treat the water coming out of Demra-Matuil canal and make it fit for human consumption. These are some of the measures, which if undertaken, could potentially save vital canals like the Demra-Matuil; which in turn would save Dhaka and its residents from doom.

## Footbridges occupied

### How are people to use them?

A photograph published in this newspaper on Thursday, of illegal shops occupying the staircase of the footbridge near Sadarghat in the capital, explains why most people in Dhaka refuse to use footbridges located across the city. The photograph also shows cables dangling on the stairs, forcing pedestrians to duck when using the footbridge or risk injuries.

In such circumstances, who can blame pedestrians for being unwilling to use the footbridge? And if other footbridges across the city are equally unusable, which pedestrians often complain is the case, who can blame them for jaywalking to get across by risking their lives, when footbridges are no safer? And how can people even use footbridges when they are often occupied by hawkers, illegal shops, etc?

We know that jaywalking is a major cause for accidents and loss of life. We also know from the World Bank's data that Bangladesh has one of the highest death rates from road accidents. Unfortunately, the most common response from the authorities to this is to launch spontaneous drives against jaywalkers. But what is the alternative available to pedestrians when the authorities fail time and again to make footbridges and underpasses safe and usable for them?

We call on the authorities to make footbridges, underpasses, and footpaths across the city fit for use. Otherwise, the problem of jaywalking cannot be addressed and neither can the loss of lives from road accidents be minimised.

# Roadblocks to our potential growth

## OPEN SKY



BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

WHEN a mother claims that her son could have achieved a grade of A though he actually earned B+, we understand the son performed below his potential and did not work to his fullest capacity for the test. A similar logic is applicable to Bangladesh's growth which now hovers over 7 percent whereas the country has the potential to grow by around 8 percent. This piece argues that Bangladesh is performing below its potential – a sustainable measure of growth that can be achieved through capital, labour and technology. Although Bangladesh's output stands at USD 225 billion dollars, the use of capital, labour and technology is not optimal.

The US Congressional Budget Office asserts that most developing countries underperform. While the developed countries can easily reach their potential growth and even exceed the potential level, developing nations are embroiled with disturbances and imperfections. An IMF study shows that most developing nations experience an output gap of around two to three percent. The output gap is derived by subtracting long-term trend output from actual output. Thus, it is positive when actual income is higher than long-term trend income and negative when actual income is less than the trend income. The US' recent output has a small positive gap, suggesting that the nation has gone above its potential level. But the output gap is mostly negative for developing countries.

In the same vein, Bangladesh's output is arguably lower than its potential level. Why? There are three major reasons: i) capital has not reached the optimal level; ii) a big part of the labour force remains outside the formal sector; and iii) technology is not widespread and updated. These deficiencies, while common in most developing countries, leave room for improvement. First, quality capital such as better machinery can increase output. Second, quality higher education can enhance a nation's

labour productivity (Korea being the best example). Third, technology is not upgraded and is not in widespread use. Bangladesh's internet penetration is around 14 percent while it is almost double for India. Even Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Pakistan are ahead of us.

Based on our neighbours' experiences, removing fifty percent of our deficiencies in capital, labour and technology is feasible. And that would ensure Bangladesh's potential growth at no less than 8 percent. Moreover, formulating

at least one type of vocational training compulsory for all students, it will enhance labour productivity and professionalism in the industry. Importing modern technology, if made part of the government's procurement policy, will boost output.

The assessment of potential growth at 8 percent is by no means too optimistic. In October 2009, a group of Bangladeshi economists met in Boston and asserted the possibility for the country to achieve double-digit growth. If we ignore the

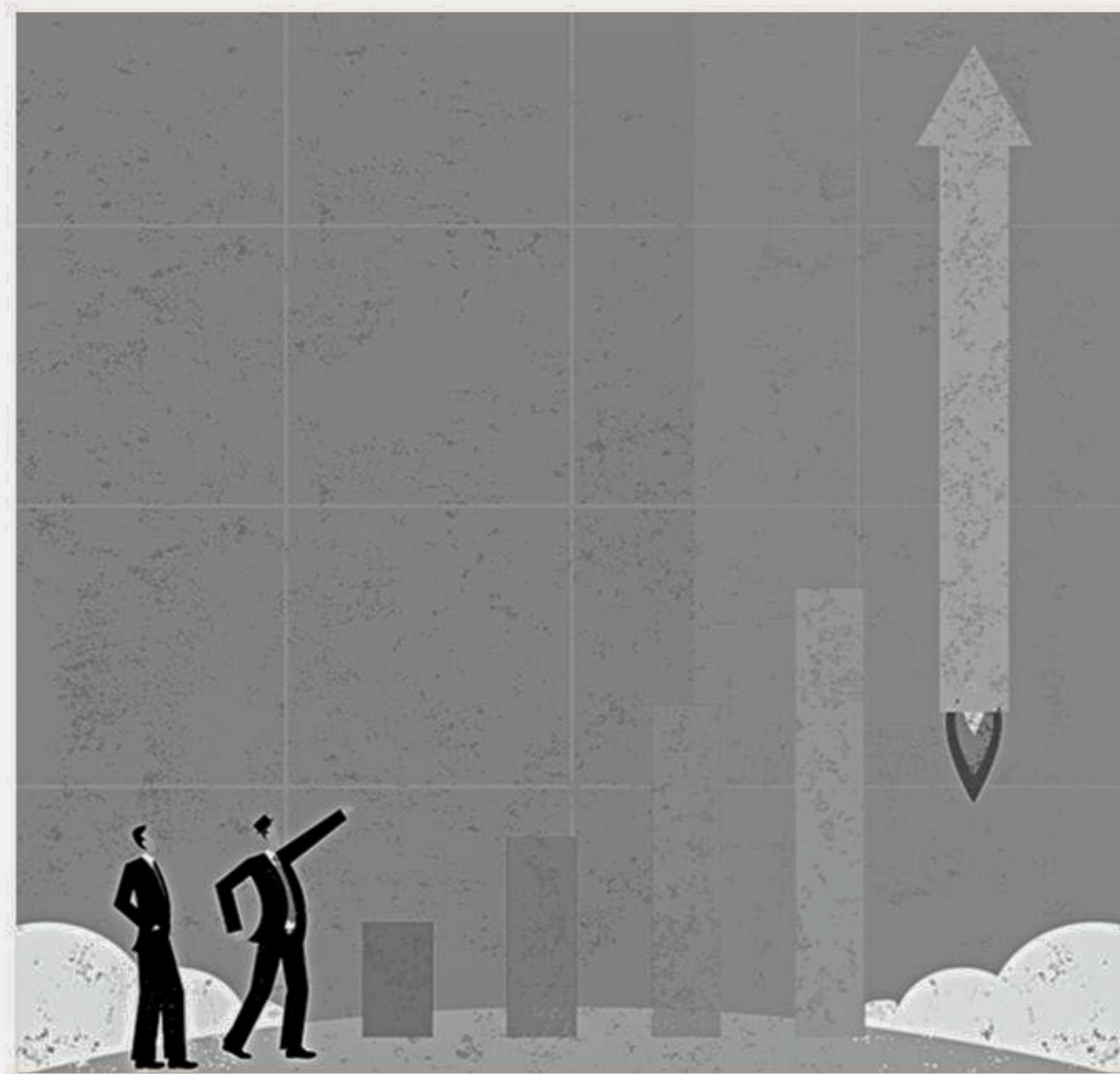
figures. We need to weather the storm of pessimism and always target a higher rate of growth. But the current budget seems to have been plagued by the WB's disheartening numbers.

Much to our disappointment, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) projects the growth rate for FY2018 at 7.4 percent in the upcoming budget. A low target set by the government always dampens the spirit of the economic agents. Would the National Board of Revenue (NBR) have been able to achieve the current higher rate in revenue collection if the MoF had not targeted high output growth? No. A positive force always works in the economy because economic agents are primarily psychological beings who thrive on incentives and pressures. Targeting low is a disservice to the nation whose emerging economy deserves an ambitious vision.

Why are we not targeting at least 7.5 percent? Inflation is under control, at slightly over 5 percent. Studies find that Bangladesh can easily go up to 6 to 7 percent inflation without hurting growth. We achieved 7.1 percent growth in FY2016, and expect to achieve 7.2 percent in FY2017. Given this momentum amid political stability, targeting at least 7.5 percent for FY2018 would be desirable. Otherwise, the government would give off a signal of a slowing trend in growth.

A fall in remittances does not necessarily mean a drastic loss of remittances. A considerable part of remittances are entering the recipient families through *hundis*, boosting consumption in the rural economy. A rise in rural deposit is a sign of this. Slowdown in export can partly be corrected by depreciating the exchange rate. A rise in import, a large part of which comprises capital goods, translates into output growth in the lagged periods or even in the same year. The weakest area is the banking sector though, and it must be revamped to get the economy going. With all these positive elements, Bangladesh can, and deserves to, achieve 8 percent growth easily.

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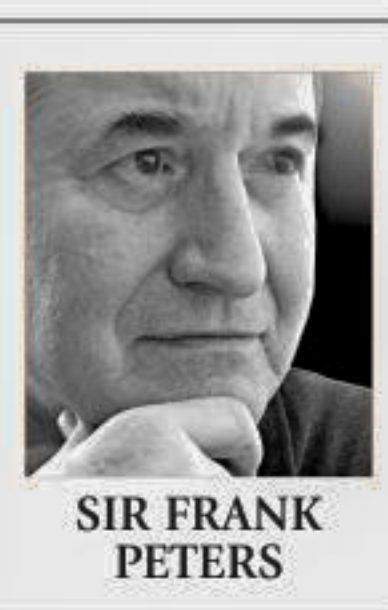


pro-growth policies and strengthening institutions will further empower the economy to accelerate its growth. Thus, Bangladesh's potential growth can be realised by: i) modernising capital; ii) providing technical education for a more productive labour force; iii) importing the latest technology; iv) making institutions transparent; and v) constantly adopting optimal fiscal and monetary policies.

For example, if the government makes

gloomy projections of the World Bank (WB) for Bangladesh's growth, as very much expected, registering 8 percent growth will not be difficult by 2020. The WB sees 6.8 percent growth for Bangladesh in FY2017 and 6.4 percent growth for FY2018. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is less pessimistic in its assessment of 6.9 percent growth for Bangladesh over the fiscal years of 2017 and 2018. The IMF will perhaps have slightly different

# An evil that mustn't triumph



SIR FRANK PETERS

COMMENTS by an American pastor on the evils of corporal punishment have set the social media ablaze. Reverend Thomas E. Sagendorf has been a staunch critic of corporal

punishment in public and private schools for years, calling the practice "criminal, cruel, and a sign of gross administrative incompetence, ineffective and totally unnecessary".

He is vigorously campaigning to abolish corporal punishment wherever it is practiced, especially in his native America. His hard-hitting, no-holds-barred, wake-up-to reality comments that call a spade a spade, are gaining new supporters by the hour, including from reformed born-again teachers of the outdated cruel practice. Mr. Sagendorf emphasises that any school that practices corporal punishment is run by a failed administration and teachers, who are unworthy of being members of an otherwise noble profession.

He points out that no other public institution keeps order using fear and violent retaliation. "There are literally thousands of school systems in America that can keep order and provide quality education without even the threat of physically assaulting students. Why not all of them? Those that cannot — or won't — are guilty of gross administrative incompetence," he said.

The compassionate outspoken reverend said the practice of corporal punishment could be summarised with four C's.

Firstly, it is *criminal*. Corporal punishment is the practice of intentional assault and battery upon a student by a school official. In every other arena of public life, assault and battery is punishable by the legal system.

Secondly, it is *cowardly*. To willingly inflict extreme pain upon a student for violating adult-established rules, usually with an intensity arbitrated by an adult who has no fear of consequences (physical or legal) is gross cowardice. It is the kind of bullying that quality schools seek to eliminate. The administrator of the corporal punishment may well enjoy the rush of domination, control, intimidation, or just a sick joy of hitting kids. It also may signal sexual perversion (sadism).

Thirdly, it is *corrupting*. If the beating of students is accepted in school, the same disregard for the dignity of young people is sure to creep into the wider community. It gives community adults license to hit kids at will. The community becomes a far less hospitable place for kids to grow up in.

Lastly, it is *contagious*. It teaches that violence is a solution to problems in a world that's already bilious and retching in violence.

Every academic/scientific study of corporal punishment in public and private schools has concluded that corporal punishment does not make for better discipline or for better education. In many instances, the effect is the exact opposite. One unanimous conclusion, however, is that students subjected to corporal punishment in school may suffer long-term psychological damage — some even for a lifetime.

He concludes his thought-provoking observations saying that the practice of corporal punishment has no place in public or private schools. And neither does the adults, administrators or teachers, who employ it.

wrongdoings, are perceived to be educated, and to know what's best for the child among the illiterate and uneducated who know no better and trust them explicitly. How sad.

Corporal punishment is not only evil, but it brings out the darkest evil in humans who may not consider themselves to be evil. Take for example, the 'hellish nightmare' at the Talimul Quran Mahila Madrasa in Kadamtali, where 14 young girls were literally branded for life with a red-hot cooking spatula by their 'teacher' to demonstrate her concept of what hell would be like!

And what about the 'teacher' at a Sunamganj school who forced students of Class V to cut their hands and legs with used razor blades until they bled, as punishment for not doing their homework?

never did anyone any harm. That it didn't do them any harm and that the teacher had acted in their best interests! God love them, these parents are more to be pitied than laughed at, but even unblemished ignorance deserves admiration for its perfection!

A best-selling book entitled *Breaking the Paddle: Ending School Corporal Punishment* by Nadine A. Block of the Centre for Effective Discipline highlights the many dangers and long-term effects of corporal punishment on children — and society at large. "How is it possible for a child to simply ignore the humiliation and hurt of corporal punishment?" She asks. "It's like being slapped hard on the face and told to forget it."

Corporal punishment won't go away on its own. If you love your child, the



Where it remains, he said, the people who conduct such abuse must face criminal charges. Likewise, prosecutors and judges must have the wisdom and courage to adjudicate severe consequences for those who practice this kind of cruelty and brutality on children.

School children in Bangladesh are protected by law against the cruelty of corporal punishment in schools, at least on paper. On January 13, 2011, Justice Md. Imman Ali and Justice Md. Sheikh Hassan Arif declared corporal punishment "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and a clear violation of a child's fundamental right to life, liberty and freedom".

Has this put an end to the horrific practice? Of course not. It's business as usual in some schools in a society where 'teachers' are revered despite their

Corporal punishment instantly destroys trust between parent and child, teacher and pupil. It's been proved emphatically to be totally ineffective, immoral, humiliating, degrading, harmful and serving no useful purpose whatsoever and definitely doesn't help make people better well rounded and more balanced citizens. Fortunately, not all teachers are alike.

A 'teacher' who bullies has a flawed character and gripe against society. He takes his personal problems into the classroom where he has captive 'whipping boys' on whom he can release his frustrations without fear of repercussions.

Sadly, some children, beaten in the classroom by their 'teacher', complain to their parents only to be told that they must have deserved it. That discipline

very least you can do is visit your child's school or madrasah and make it known that you do not want your child to be given corporal punishment. It's really that simple. It sends a clear signal to the 'teachers', headmaster, and administrators.

I know of many fathers who took this approach, spoke to the 'teachers' face to face and their children were never hit again. Bullies lose power and back down when confronted. Remember the immortal words of Irish statesman Edmund Burke (1729-1797) who coined the phrase: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing".

The writer is a former newspaper and magazine publisher and editor, an award-winning writer, humanitarian and a royal Goodwill Ambassador.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Uranium contamination in haor areas

The headline 'Uranium behind deaths in haors?' (*The Daily Star*, April 21, 2017) grabbed my attention. Most people don't have much of an idea about its toxic effects. Uranium contamination of haor waters is a serious problem from the aquatic ecosystem. Experts have also warned that the presence of such toxic heavy metal could be responsible for the death of several aquatic species. The most serious concern is that if this is true, the contamination could spread from the water to land, affecting animals, plants and consequently human beings as well. Uranium is a radioactive heavy metal which is highly carcinogenic, and can cause serious health hazards to the people living near haor areas as well. I urge the concerned authorities to take necessary measures to protect the biodiversity and people of the regions from the possible threat of uranium contamination.

Tuhin Reza, Via Email



Fisheries department officials say the water in Matiyan Haor in Tahirpur has turned acidic and lacks oxygen.