

## Romel's death Confusion be cleared

THE circumstances of the death of Romel Chakma of Nanyarchar remains shrouded in confusion. The young man died on April 20, allegedly, while in custody of the army, who had picked him up from Nanyarchar Bazaar on April 5 this year.

The matter has been confounded by different versions of the Army and the Police. The Army account that he was handed over to the police has been contested by the latter who denies that it had ever taken custody of Romel.

The fact is that a visually impaired youth has died under unexplained situation and one has not come by a sound explanation of the cause and circumstances of his death, the matter mystified even more by the fact that he was cremated, reportedly, without the family being informed about it.

We feel that a credible account is in order since silence in matters such as this, where the reputation of a national institution like the Army is at issue, breeds speculation which becomes difficult to control.

We feel that truth and transparency does not discredit an institution, on the contrary it strengthens credibility and enhances its image. It could well be that there were transgressions by certain members of the army in this instance, who might well have been working outside their writ, quite unbeknownst to their superior officers. And it is only being fair to the good name of the Army that transgressions, if any, are enquired into and the responsible members made examples of.

Over the years Bangladesh Army has acquired global fame through its contribution to UN Peacekeeping, and for its disaster management efforts within the country. And its professionalism has been given due recognition. So nothing should be allowed to happen that spoils the image of the Army in the public eye.

## Dhaka and Chittagong under water again

### Free water bodies of encroachers

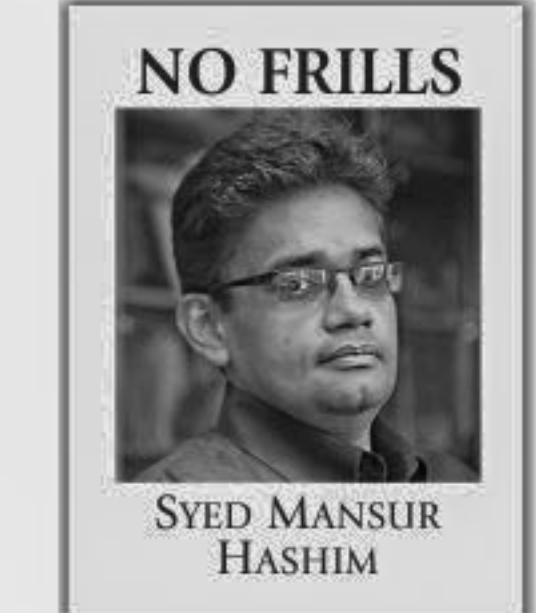
THE last few days' rain has exposed the dire straits of the drainage system of Dhaka and Chittagong.

Bangladesh is no stranger to water-logging caused by Nor'westers and torrential downpours. But for the residents of the two major cities, the situation has turned for the worse this time. The absence of a proper drainage system and catchment areas have resulted in prolonged water-logging. This has caused untold sufferings to the city dwellers. Not only that, a World Bank study predicts a cumulative financial loss of Tk 11,000 crore in the next 35 years, if the downward spiraling of the situation is not arrested soon.

Major parts of the two cities are bearing the brunt of the unplanned development. Over the last few years, low-lying areas that retain water are being filled up in the name of development, totally ignoring the natural requirement of running off. Ponds and water-bodies are encroached and rivulets and canals that work as arteries of the cities are filled up to build housing estates and industrial parks. It is not understandable how we can expect to join the ranks of middle-income countries without building the bare minimum infrastructure required for a modern urban life.

The solution lies in fixing structural issues and building the necessary capacities. The first step should be to evict all illegal occupation of water bodies, especially the channels that once helped to drain out run-off waters. This is the job of the government. There are many cases against canal grabbers pending in the court, which must be disposed of quickly so as to make sure the canals become free and can hold the extra water during rains. Also, the drainage system needs to be improved.

# Making our cities shine



NO FRILLS  
SYED MANSUR HASHIM

WHILE many of us lament on how our cities are increasingly overpopulated and how run down services are, the global trend points to one inescapable fact, i.e. mega

cities are here to stay and they are magnets for businesses and foreign direct investment (FDI). With 54 percent of the world population living in cities, rapid urbanisation is no longer a buzz word for discussion in seminars and roundtable conferences. The problems associated with established megacities or metropolises is well known to us, viz. rising wages, inadequate infrastructure and very high cost of real estate. This brings to the fore the question of second or even third tier cities all vying to wrest the laurels from 1st tier cities in attracting both talent (human resources) and investments (FDI).

Indeed, if we take the words of Paul Philipp Hermann (co-founder and managing director of online property portal Lamudi Global) at face value when he describes 2nd and 3rd tier cities to be the future driving force for economic growth that is to come, then we are presented with a whole different scenario: "These cities have large, young working populations, [who are] not only contributing more to the economy through their employment, but spending more on consumer goods." When one

looks at urbanisation trends in Bangladesh, who would have thought that Dhaka and Chittagong would emerge as major population centres in the course of the last 30 years?

What we are experiencing are part of a global trend where city planners (at least the prudent ones) are cashing in on the large-scale migration of younger people from less urban (or rural in our case) to urban centres in search of both jobs and other opportunities. What the 2nd and 3rd tier emerging cities have above 1st tier cities naturally revolves around costs and productivity. Yes, they suffer problems with infrastructure as stated

So, what does that mean for countries like Bangladesh? Do we have any chance of getting even one of our cities graduate to become a 3rd or a 2nd tier city that will draw in much needed FDI? Can we emulate what advanced economies like China have done over the decades where cities like Shenzhen and Nanjing have seen spectacular success? We have the demographic dividend certainly, where two-thirds of the population are aged under-30, and sustained GDP growth rates of around 6.5 percent, but are these going to be enough? The data certainly points in that direction, but for it to happen we will have to change our

city is emerging as a centre for financial services, industry and manufacturing. Demographic trends point to this city's population growing by about 50 percent by 2025. It has all the hallmarks for success but at the end of the day it essentially boils down to how savvy we are with managing that growth.

For years, the port city has suffered from chronic natural gas shortages (primary fuel source). We have been promised the arrival of LNG sometime in the future (timelines vary wildly in our country) and the necessary infrastructure development are still happening on paper. It is safe to say



Can Chittagong be the next Shenzhen?

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before, and yes, the schooling system lags behind the top cities, but these are challenges that can be overcome through efficient city management and good governance. Richard Yorke who heads research at commercial real estate firm DTZ, (DTZ is now part of the CBRE group, global leader in commercial real estate brokerage firms in 2016 with annual transaction value of more than USD 310 billion) insists that "increasingly, more GDP is being driven by those second and third-tier cities. Population and GDP growth per capita is very interesting for businesses as it creates new consumer markets globally and new sources of human capital and expertise." These predictions are not ill founded and it is estimated by some market analysts that as much as 50 percent of future global GDP growth will be generated by these emerging market cities.

mindset about how we do business in this country. For any city to want to graduate to one of the tiers mentioned here, we will have to make not only the environment business-friendly, but create conditions that allow the young to flourish. That means affordable housing for students, making a city attractive in terms of entertainment and easily accessible (efficient mass transport networks — road and rail). These are not buzz words anymore; these are doable when the right management is in the driving seat of a city that intends to go places.

As we look beyond China and India and move towards our realities in Bangladesh, one city, Chittagong, has been mentioned by *The Financial Times* as a potential economic powerhouse. It is the city with access to the sea and a city with a growing middle class. Chittagong which has always been known as the port

nothing is going to change in a very big way before 3-5 years. That leaves city planners ample time to make certain changes in the way the city is managed. For Chittagong to catch the next wave of emerging market cities, we have to take the word of Rosemary Feenan (a director with global research at JLL) who believes that smaller cities must market themselves in areas where they are competitive. This could be goods; it could be services and even technology. And this marketing must be based on the premise that cities like Chittagong are cheaper and more efficient alternatives to the established cities of the higher order (1st and 2nd tiers). Good governance is the real and only buzz word here; get that right and who knows what Chittagong could look like in 2025?

The writer is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

# France's Macron favourite for presidency in runoff with Le Pen

SYBILLE DE LA HAMAIDE and MATTHIAS BLAMONT

CENTRIST Emmanuel Macron took a big step towards the French presidency on Sunday by winning the first round of voting and qualifying for a May 7 runoff alongside far-right leader Marine Le Pen.

Though Macron, 39, is a comparative political novice who has never held elected office, new opinion polls on Sunday had him easily winning the final clash against the 48-year-old Le Pen.

Sunday's outcome is a huge defeat for the two centre-right and centre-left groupings that have dominated French politics for 60 years, and also reduces the prospect of an anti-establishment shock on the scale of Britain's vote last June to quit the European Union, and the election of Donald Trump as US president.

In a victory speech, Macron told supporters of his fledgling En Marche! (Onwards!) movement: "In one year, we have changed the face of French politics." He went on to say he would bring in new faces and talent to transform a stale political system if elected.

Conceding defeat even before figures from the count came in, rival conservative and Socialist candidates urged their supporters now to put their energies into backing Macron and stopping any chance of a second-round victory by Le Pen, whose anti-immigration and anti-Europe policies they said spelled disaster for France.

A Harris survey taken on Sunday saw Macron winning the runoff by 64 percent to 36, and an Ipsos/Sopra Steria poll gave a similar result.

As investors breathed a collective sigh of relief at what the market regarded as the best of several possible outcomes, the euro soared 2 percent to USD 1.09395 when markets opened in Asia before slipping back to around USD 1.0886.

It was the euro's highest level since November 10, the day after the results of the US presidential election.

In a race that was too close to call up to the last minute, Macron, a pro-EU banker and former economy minister who founded his own party only a year ago, had 23.9 percent of the votes against 21.4 percent for Le Pen,

according to figures from the Interior Ministry with 96 percent of votes counted.

Seconds after the first projections came through, Macron supporters at a Paris conference centre burst into the national anthem, the Marseillaise. Many were under 25, reflecting some of the appeal of a man aiming to become France's youngest head of state since Napoleon.

"PRESIDENT OF PATRIOTS" With an eye to Le Pen's avowedly France-first policies, Macron told the crowd: "I want to be the president of patriots in the face of a threat from nationalists."

If he wins, Macron's biggest challenges will lie ahead, as he first tries

history as France's first female president, follows in the footsteps of her father, who founded the National Front and reached the second round of the presidential election in 2002.

Jean-Marie Le Pen was ultimately crushed when voters from right and left rallied around the conservative Jacques Chirac in order to keep out a party whose far-right, anti-immigrant views they considered unpalatably xenophobic.

His daughter has done much to soften her party's image, and found widespread support among young voters by pitching herself as an anti-establishment defender of French workers and French interests against global corporations and an economically constricting EU.

similar fate to her father when she goes up against Macron in two weeks' time.

Defeated Socialist candidate Benoit Hamon, Socialist Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve and defeated right-wing candidate Francois Fillon all urged voters to rally behind Macron in the second round.

In Berlin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman hailed Macron's success, tweeting: "Good that @EmmanuelMacron succeeded with his policy for a strong EU and social market economy. Wishing him all the best for the next two weeks."

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker expressed similar good wishes for the second round, his spokesman said in Brussels.

The two politicians left in the race offer radically contrasting economic visions for a country whose economy lags behind that of its neighbours, and where a quarter of young people are unemployed.

Macron's gradual deregulation measures are likely to be welcomed by global financial markets, as are cuts in state expenditure and the civil service. Le Pen wants to print money to finance expanded welfare payments and tax cuts, ditch the euro currency and possibly pull out of the EU.

"Markets will be reassured that the dreaded Le Pen versus Mélenchon runoff has been avoided," said Diego Iscaro, an economist from IHS Markit.

"As a result, we expect some recovery in French bond prices, while the euro is also likely to benefit," he said. "However, a lot can happen in two weeks and French assets are likely under some pressure until the second round is out of the way."

Timothy Ash, an economist at Bluebay asset management, said Trump's victory last November marked a turning point for electorates playing the protest card.

"Despite all the hype about the rise of populism, 60 percent of voters went for mainstream candidates... In an uncertain world, they would rather go for what they know best and want to take fewer risks," he said.

The writers are Senior Correspondent, and General News and Economics correspondent, respectively, at Reuters. Copyright: Reuters



French presidential election candidate Emmanuel Macron waves at the audience during a meeting at the Parc des Expositions in Paris on April 23, 2017, after the first round of the presidential election.

to secure a working parliamentary majority for his young party in June, and then seeks broad popular support for labour reforms that are sure to meet resistance.

Addressing the battle ahead, he declared he would seek to break with a system that "has been incapable of responding to the problems of our country for more than 30 years".

"From today I want to build a majority for a government and for a new transformation. It will be made up of new faces and new talent in which every man and woman can have a place," he said. Le Pen, who is herself bidding to make

"The great issue in this election is the rampant globalisation that is putting our civilisation at risk," she declared in her first word after results came through.

She went on to launch an attack on the policies of Macron, whom she again described as "the money king" in a disparaging swipe at his investment banker background.

His deregulation policies, she said, would lead to unjust international competition against France's business interests, mass immigration and free movement of terrorists.

Nevertheless, with several defeated candidates calling on supporters to stop her, Le Pen seems destined to suffer a

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Radioactive threat in haor areas

I was deeply concerned after reading the article titled "Uranium behind deaths in haors?" published by *The Daily Star* on April 21, 2017. It is worrying that this toxic heavy metal is contaminating our waterways and ecosystems. Unless it is tackled soon, this highly infectious and carcinogenic threat will start killing cattle living near the haor area. If it really is a uranium contamination then it is likely to remain in the soil, water, and plants. Eventually it will infect humans as well, creating catastrophic health hazards. The authorities must take immediate measures to protect us from this radioactive threat.

Tuhin Reza, Mirpur, Dhaka

### Conservation of pollinators - an urgent need

Bees and other insect pollinators are crucial natural tools for pollen grain transfers in important commercial crops and tree species around the world. Unfortunately, the native bee population across the globe is showing signs of alarming decline due to over-application of pesticides in our agricultural fields, and also due to diseases, ecological stress, nutritional deficiency, and lack of quality bee habitats. This could have significant negative impacts for future global crop production, among other things. Quality bee habitats or sanctuaries must be developed in appropriate places - undisturbed farm areas, weedy unused patches, wetland areas, along irrigation canals, parks, gardens, and lawns, and highway areas.

Saikat Kumar Basu, By email