

Suffering in landslide hit areas continues

Immediate action needed

THE tragedy of Tuesday's devastating landslides that killed at least 146 people in Rangamati, Bandarban, Khagrachhari, Chittagong and Cox's Bazar is not over. As with such catastrophes, apart from the danger of more landslides with torrential rains recurring, people of the region continue to suffer the post-disaster crises. This includes punishing shortage of food, fuel and water due to disruption of connections.

Our paper reports a bleak scenario in Rangamati, for instance, where people are living without water supply for three consecutive days and in some parts, without any clean drinking water and proper sanitation. With road communications cut off, food is in short supply and prices of essentials have skyrocketed. Fuel stocks have dried up. Such shortages are quite predictable after such a huge disaster and we are concerned about whether the response to it from the authorities has been prompt enough. As if losing loved ones, homes and personal belongings was not enough, now the people of these areas are having to live without power, water, food as well as basic healthcare facilities.

We urge the authorities to accelerate the relief and rehabilitation efforts. This includes providing immediate open market sale (OMS) of food, clean drinking water for people, alternative arrangements to restore power (for example, by getting fuel through waterways) and medicine free of cost. In addition, the authorities must formulate a plan to repair the roads so that communication with Chittagong (from where food and other essentials come in) is restored. We urge all out efforts by the government to bring back some semblance of normalcy to these people who have lost so much.

Abject lack of boiler safety monitoring

One inspector for 600 boilers!

ONE would have thought that the death of 23 people in boiler explosions over the last four years in the country would be a wakeup call for authorities, but that is not the case. The deadliest of these accidents in a Dinajpur rice mill on April 19 that killed 17 people appears to have faded from collective memory. We have some 600 mills (300 are rice mills) in Rangpur, Rajshahi and Khulna regions which are in general, neither well maintained nor are they operated by skilled technicians and there is also the age factor, i.e. many of these boilers are way beyond their normal operational life and are 30 to 40 years old. And while blaming mill owners, we should also point the finger at factory inspection authorities.

It is a mathematical impossibility for a single inspector to oversee such large numbers of boilers and we were promised that the concerned ministry would be initiating recruitment of new inspectors last year. We wonder what happened to that plan. The common explanation given by the authorities in the aftermath of any such incident is the formation of an inquiry committee to probe into any such incident that would provide pointers to mitigate such accidents in the future. Yet, as we all know no one is held to account for the loss of life. Mill owners are not taken to task and with factory inspection remaining only in name, boiler accidents continue to take place killing and injuring people. We fail to comprehend that a boiler is an essential piece of machinery — a prerequisite in a factory used to generate steam for sterilisation, drying, power generation, etc. Hence, it is high time factory inspectors are recruited, trained and inducted into service without any further delay.

LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

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Horrible load shedding in Agrabad, Chittagong

Agrabad has been facing troubles of clogged rainwater and high tide twice a day daily due to the removal of temporary barrage in Maheshkhali. Now there is the added trouble of load shedding.

We haven't gotten more than 8 hours of electricity in the past 48 hours. It stays for between five to 40 minutes, but then goes away again. None of the national dailies have reported any shortage of electricity production. Then why is this load shedding happening?

As all the water reservoirs of this area have been contaminated by sewer waste, they needed to be cleaned up and disinfected before being refilled. But now there isn't enough electricity to pump in water or run the distribution channel. We haven't been able to run our regular lives. How are we supposed to live this way, with high tide in the roads for 12 continuous hours every day and no electricity?

People in Dhaka can make reports for all kinds of petty issues, but here in Chittagong we hardly get the support we deserve. Who will solve these problems for us? I hope the authorities can pay heed to our voices.

Hasan Tanvir

By email



NEW ARCHITECTURE FOR GLOBALISATION

How Bangladesh fits into it

THE OVERTON WINDOW
ERESH OMAR JAMAL

GLOBALISATION conceived and led by the western world has failed to deliver on most of its promises to the majority of the globe's inhabitants. Based largely on destabilisation, exploitation, militarisation and financial parasitism, it has resulted in death, destruction, chaos and economic and social inequality of unmatched proportions.

Veteran journalist Pepe Escobar sarcastically wrote that even the World Economic Forum during its last meeting, "suddenly discovered that globalisation as we know it fosters massive inequality, as much as globalisation's self-appointed managers remain inflexible about their moral right to bend whole nations to their will." The result: eight individuals on planet Earth today own as much wealth as the poorest 50 percent of the world combined, on account of the neo-liberal economic policies pursued by the western elites which they gladly shoved down the throats of everyone else.

Even the non-elites of the western world have not been spared. Countries like Greece and Cyprus for example, have been sucked dry, while most European governments are chuffed simply by the fact that their country's GDP is growing at all, albeit at embarrassingly low rates. This has understandably led the average westerner to detest western led globalisation. And the fact that they do has been made clear by Brexit, the election of Donald Trump, rise of political parties such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and Marine Le Pen's National Front, among many other indicators.

As the western world battles itself over which course of action to pursue next, a new form of globalisation, led by the likes of China, Russia and others is taking shape. Based on the concept of multi-polarity, development and mutual agreement the architecture for this new form of globalisation seemingly centres on China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. But what is it about OBOR that is appealing to so many countries across Eurasia?

For starters, it is the largest

infrastructure development project ever undertaken, involving about 65 countries, covering 60 percent of the world's population and a third of global economic output. According to *The Guardian*, "the Belt and Road initiative is an immensely ambitious development campaign through which China wants to boost trade and stimulate economic growth across Asia and beyond", by "building massive amounts of infrastructure connecting it to countries around the globe".

The global consultancy McKinsey says that "the plan has the potential to massively overshadow the US' post-war Marshall reconstruction plan," which basically helped rebuild Europe from

Cooperation Organisation.

Moreover, during the most recent St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, US journalist Megyn Kelly focused her questions to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the rivalry between India and China and how that could act as a significant roadblock. PM Modi's answers were telling. He made clear that India and Russia have historically had good relations based on "trust" and as long as President Putin is involved, India is willing to cooperate in these projects.

Given all of this, Russian analyst Andrew Korybko writes "Altogether, the crisscrossing trade networks in the Indian Ocean and CPEC's [China Pakistan Economic Corridor] central

major recipients of funds from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a key financier for OBOR projects. For example, it has been agreed that Bangladesh will receive USD 60 million to address its gas supply deficit from the AIIB. Also, back in June 2016, the AIIB had approved a loan worth USD 66 million for two power distribution projects to help improve transmission lines in the country.

Meanwhile, it is important to remember that Bangladesh is a member of The Bay Of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and had attended the last BRICS summit in India with other member countries. There are



SOURCE: MCKINSEY & COMPANY

rubble, after the devastation of the Second World War. Combining two main routes to form one circulatory system of trade, OBOR is just what Eurasia needs to rapidly move forward in improving both the economic livelihoods of its inhabitants, as well as promote peaceful co-existence amongst its diverse groups of people.

OBOR, however, is not the entire blueprint for this new globalisation. Russia has its Eurasian Economic Union which perfectly complements China's OBOR. And to reassure and bring India (which has been the most sceptical about OBOR because of Pakistan's involvement) into the fold, both India and Pakistan were only recently granted full membership into the Shanghai

location in enabling all of this adds credence to the argument that the world is moving towards an Indo-Pacific Century which will see South Asia become the focal point of global geopolitics and economic competition."

And here is where Bangladesh comes in. China has already promised to invest huge sums of money in Bangladesh. During President Xi's visit to Bangladesh last year, 27 deals worth USD 24.45 billion in soft loan to Bangladesh were signed between China and Bangladesh for various key development projects. On the sideline, 13 joint venture agreements involving USD 13.6 billion of Chinese investment was agreed upon by 13 Bangladeshi and 13 Chinese companies. Bangladesh has also been one of the

now rumours of a BRICS Plus forming in future and BIMSTEC countries would naturally be the ideal candidates to join it, should it become a reality.

Thus, like the other South Asian countries, Bangladesh has been presented with a once in a lifetime opportunity for developing at a rapid pace and taking its destiny into its own hands. It is no wonder then, why every country is scrambling to hop-on-board the OBOR train, as combined with all the other projects in the pipeline, OBOR truly is the new architecture for a new, much more promising and peaceful form of Globalisation. Undoubtedly, it is an opportunity we should not let slip.

The writer is a member of the Editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Emmanuel Macron and the post-revolutionary idea

BERNARD-HENRI LÉVY

No, Parisian voters are not "vomitatis," as the pathetic Henri Guaino proclaimed Monday after losing his seat in the National Assembly. Staying home from the polls, which we have been told for 30 years benefits the National Front, cannot now be used to explain the surge of *La République en Marche!*, French President Emmanuel Macron's new political party. And no, Macron is not beginning a dictatorial career at 39, any more than

shaky coalitions, score the unprecedented achievement of ushering some 400 deputies into the 577-seat National Assembly under the banner of what was still, just a few months ago, virtually a party of one?

First, of course, there is virtuosity, the quality that, as Hannah Arendt described in her commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, artists and politicians shared. Next, there was the very mediocrity of the populists (Marine Le Pen on the right, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon on the left) who found themselves sucked down the drain of their own France-firstism.

But the main factor behind Macron's success, I believe, is the structural change that I described a decade ago in *Left in*

assembled those who viewed revolution as a permanent threat and worked to counter it.

But then, in the short span of time between the Chinese revolution of 1949 and the Cambodian nightmare of 1975-1979, a discovery was made: the more radical the revolution, the more bloody and barbaric it becomes. Revolution, it had now become clear, was not just difficult or elusive or impossible; it was downright detestable. The fixed star grew darker and became a black hole that swallowed its own light and that of lesser stars. At a certain point, the entire political system would implode.

We are at that point now. This is not the first time that the left-right divide has been blurred in France. It happened

and, ultimately, designations that made up the "French exception" that Macron's triumphs have brought to an end.

A thousand questions immediately arise: How will those swept to power under Macron's banner behave? If they are drunk with victory, from what direction, when, and at whose hand will come the necessary sobering slap? How, when, and where will the counterweights that are indispensable to the proper functioning of a democracy appear?

There's more. Where is the West headed? By what compass, toward what horizon? "At the same time" — the balancing of opposing facts and ideas — has been a staple of Macron's phrasebook. But how long can "at-the-same-time-ism" suffice as a policy?

If we are really at the end of the historical epoch that began in 1789, will we be returned to the Age of Enlightenment? Or to the moment before the Enlightenment when a new sense of natural rights and the concomitant Republican ideal took hold? Will we rewrite *Leviathan* or, what amounts to the same thing, the Peace of Westphalia, without this time having to pass through the tragic radicalisation of Europe and the brewing or raging of world wars?

Whatever the future holds, the central fact is abundantly clear: Macron has seen what his predecessors only glimpsed. He is the instrument or the foil of a long-term event taking shape before our eyes.

And to him now falls the task of rebuilding upon a ruined field, of working to ensure that the end of a certain way of conceiving politics does not mean the end of politics as such. It is incumbent upon Macron, along with those who elected him and those who voted against him or, worse, abstained, to do the best thing that one can do in dark times: to imagine, invent, and embody the art of "beginnings" which Arendt believed to be the beating heart of public action.

The writer is one of the founders of the "Nouveaux Philosophes" (New Philosophers) movement. His books include *Left in Dark Times: A Stand Against the New Barbarism*, *American Vertigo: Traveling America in the Footsteps of Tocqueville*, and most recently, *The Genius of Judaism*.

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The French presidential election victory made Emmanuel Macron the youngest leader of France since Napoleon.

Charles de Gaulle did at 67.

In short, pretty much nothing said about French politics in the last few days explains the apparent landslide that began with the first round of legislative elections on Sunday. And the riot of news since Sunday is so much tinnitus to those who, for years now, have preferred to hear nothing.

So what is happening? How did Macron, a political novice seemingly fated to preside over a thousand and one

Dark Times. That change has now reached its apogee.

It all began with the French Revolution. To put it more precisely, everything turns on the French invention of the concept of "revolution," which quickly rose to the summit of our political thinking, like a fixed star, with the rest of the stars arranging themselves around it. Those favourably inclined toward the revolutionary perspective gathered on the left; on the right

more or less at Valmy, at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, during the Vichy government, and around the issue of colonialism.

But it was in Cambodia's faraway killing fields of 40 years ago that revolutionary reason and imagination were smashed to bits and neutralised. And it was the prolonged shock, the slow explosion and the blast effect that accompanied it, the systematic invalidation of the divisions, disputes,