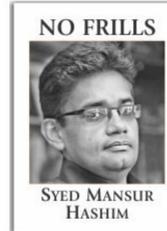


Proofing infrastructure against climate change



NO FRILLS
 SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THE Asian Development Bank (ADB) believes that countries like Bangladesh are in the forefront of Asian nations that are suffering infrastructure breakdown due to climate-induced changes. We suffer broken power lines every time a storm hits us, floods cause fractured roads and shatter rail links, landslides, erosion – all have an impact on infrastructure. Indeed, by the ADB's estimates, no less than 45 developing member countries suffered losses averaging USD 126 million a day between 2006 and 2015 due to natural disasters. This brings us to the question: what exactly can Bangladesh do to protect the huge infrastructure developments that have commenced of late and those already in place?

The concept of "climate proofing" means taking measures such as elevating road embankments in areas prone to flooding, relocation of water intake and treatment facilities away from vulnerable areas and most importantly, improving design and maintenance of infrastructure. As pointed out in "Meeting Asia's Infrastructure Needs", a policy document published by ADB, "greener" infrastructure will pay an increasingly important role as global temperatures rise. We have no option but to adapt to changing conditions. Yes, going "green" is going to be expensive in the short run, but the long term benefits are obvious. It is estimated that adaption costs will raise the bill USD 200 billion for Asian economies between 2016 and 2030; and by mitigation we mean Asian economies moving away from fossil fuels to cleaner technologies. Asia's adaptation costs could be as high as USD 41 billion annually, most of which will go into the transportation infrastructure.

So, how would we go about protecting our infrastructure? As stated before, road and rail links will continue to suffer from increasing floods and erosion damage. With more hot days than cold in our seasons, we will see faster degradation of roads and railways as materials used will wear out faster. The monsoon will involve more intense rainfall which too will result in faster wear-and-tear for roads and rail. Cyclones and saline water have the same effect. According to an Information Brief



Houses damaged by Cyclone Mora.

PHOTO: STAR

titled "Climate Change and Infrastructure in Bangladesh" by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (in collaboration with IUCN), "future climate change induced high intensity events pose huge threats to existing physical infrastructure. Damage to highways due to flood alone is estimated to be around 1,011 and 3,315 kilometers by the year 2030 and 2050, respectively. The corresponding damage to embankments is estimated to be about 4,271 and 13,996 km by the year 2030 and 2050, respectively."

We can adopt measures to mitigate the fallout from climate-induced changes. To protect embankments that carry roads and rail links, vegetation such as trees can be planted to decrease chances of erosion. The plants also help remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. We need to invest in research and technology to develop materials that are more resistant to extreme temperatures. If we want to protect our roads against heavy rainfall, we must start constructing roads adhering to standards with better surface

drainage capacity around road links, putting in pump facilities to drain out water around critical infrastructure. There is need to do modelling studies to protect areas around major rivers, i.e. to find out precisely how high our embankments need to be, usage of advance materials like geo-textiles to protect embankments, what sort of drainage structures we need in terms of culverts regulators, etc. to effect smoother outflow of water during floods.

These are some of the measures that can be adopted. But what is obvious is that all this will require serious financing. And it also has a lot to do with capacity building of the civil bureaucracy to improve their understanding about project economics and execution. In Bangladesh, we are suffering from acute shortage of power and other infrastructure facilities. We are also suffering from an acute shortage of capacity to implement many of the projects being undertaken over the last few years on infrastructure. In

addition, traditional means of construction and planning needs to be overhauled.

We need multi-stakeholder involvement that includes the government, the business community, and bi-lateral and multi-lateral development agencies to undertake modelling studies on probable impact of climate-induced changes. It is not just about making commitments in the budget for maintenance work. National policies need to be adapted to take cognisance of the fact that there will be more freak weather changes in the coming years and decades. We need to be prepared for the toll it will take on our investments, and yes, we need to make investments to help maintain the shelf life of the billions going into infrastructure development. ADB is correct in its assessment that the long term benefits of mitigation and adaptation far outweighs the huge costs involved in the short run.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

For a stronger prosecution to fight militancy

Stop terror suspects from getting bail

The proposal to have a permanent attorney service with competent lawyers to fight militancy, is a welcome development although this kind of service should have been introduced much earlier. The government's task force, formed to prevent terror financing and money laundering, has realised that their work is significantly hampered if suspected militants get bail, giving them opportunity to carry out further attacks. This paper reports that around 150 suspected militants got bail over the last six months, mainly because the prosecutors failed to build up strong cases due to their lack of competence and efficiency. In fact officials of the taskforce have said that these prosecutors do not even inform the Attorney General's office when a suspected militant gets bail, as they are supposed to do. All this dilutes, to a large extent, the efforts by the government to fight militancy.

A flawed prosecution system and poor remuneration of public prosecutors have resulted in many suspected militants to come out of jail and continue with their nefarious activities.

At a time when the threat of terror looms large and when we have still not recovered from all those horrible attacks that have taken so many precious lives, it is unthinkable that such lapses in security continue to occur. The government has been trying hard to clamp down on militancy and has achieved significant success. But if the prosecution system is not made strong, all their efforts will come to naught.

We urge the government to form a permanent attorney service that will employ qualified, competent and dedicated lawyers who will make sure that the real terrorists are kept behind bars and do not get a chance to get out of jail and carry out acts of terror.

Fatality on road continues

Take extra measures for safe Eid traffic

IN the first two days of this week ten people were killed and 21 injured in road accidents in five districts. Although there has been regular public outcry to make our roads safer there is no brake on such untimely deaths in road mishaps, particularly on highways. It is reported that at least 1,089 people were killed in the last 125 days. The statistics are alarming, but what is even more worrying is how little has been done over the years to address this gravest risk to public safety.

Majority of the road crashes occur due to reckless driving. A large number of drivers operate with faulty and expired licenses. Road safety activists have repeatedly urged for promulgation of stringent punishment for reckless driving but the administration seems to be slack on this issue. The traffic police department fails to play an effective role in identifying overloaded and unfit vehicles, and holding drunk and reckless drivers accountable. There are also problems of faulty road construction and dangerous bends that often cause deadly accidents.

During Eid, these problems turn acute due to enormous pressure of home bound traffic. Furthermore, the ongoing rainfall is damaging the roads. Reckless driving in this bad weather will make the journey particularly risky. The authorities should immediately repair faulty roads and enforce strict traffic vigilance to make the Eid journey safe and hassle-free.



CARL BILDT

WE are now in the final days of the industrial age. Just as the second generation of steam engines propelled the Industrial Revolution forward, so, too, are new technologies advancing today's digital revolution. But as technology races ahead of us, it is difficult to anticipate what the future holds.

One thing we do know is that the future will be shaped by two key trends: digitisation and urbanisation. And the possibilities introduced by the former will likely help us overcome the problems associated with the latter.

When the Industrial Revolution was first gaining momentum at the beginning of the nineteenth century, only a small percentage of the global population lived in cities. The world was still predominantly rural and agricultural, as it had been for thousands of years. But as industrialisation accelerated, so did urbanisation, as impoverished farmworkers flocked to factories.

We are now in another period of epochal change, and urbanisation is accelerating again. In 1950, approximately one-third of the planet's 2.5 billion people lived in cities, whereas today, just over half of the

world's 7.5 billion people do. And by 2050, when the global population is expected to reach nine billion, an estimated two-thirds of all people will live in cities.

Urban areas are magnets for young people and entrepreneurs, because they provide a wide range of opportunities and dense professional and social networks. It is no coincidence that 80 percent of economic output originates

how quickly Africa is catching up.

At the recent Chicago Forum on Global Cities, policy thinkers and practitioners — including past and current mayors from Amman, Chicago, Prague, Lahore, Rio de Janeiro, and Toronto — met for a couple of days to discuss common challenges on the road ahead. They all agreed that many solutions to future problems will come not from national governments, but from municipal and regional-level

period of hyper-urbanisation. Because all cities depend on energy, more needs to be done to improve sustainability and efficiency. Municipal and regional governments will need to step up their efforts to curb energy use, and introduce new green technologies, particularly in more rural areas.

The second challenge will be to address the effects of new digital technologies that are generally associated with the so-called sharing economy. Hardware and software applications that provide on-demand transportation, delivery, hospitality, and other services will revolutionise how cities operate and are organised; but adapting to these changes will require innovative new policies.

The third challenge relates to migration and its attendant security concerns. Global migration will likely continue to increase in the coming decades, with the very rich and the very poor alike flocking to megacities. Without the policies and infrastructure in place to absorb these new arrivals, megacities could fail, and degenerate into urban jungles that pose a security threat to surrounding regions and the world beyond.

Addressing these challenges will require deeper dialogue among global cities themselves. In the recent discussions in Chicago, there was a general sense that national governments, while important, do not approach most of these issues practically, or with the urgency they require. The Chicago dialogues, on the other hand, epitomised practicality, by finding common ground across wide geographic and cultural boundaries.

This implies that we should be careful not to exaggerate the differences between the most and the least advanced global cities. Security solutions in Toronto might very well be applicable in Karachi; and digital services in Singapore could eventually take root in Kabul.

Just as industrialism ushered in a new age for cities and countries, so, too, will digitisation. To see the future that is taking shape, one need only look to the cities that are already shaping it.

The writer is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden.
 Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2017.
 www.project-syndicate.org
 (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Urbanisation 2.0

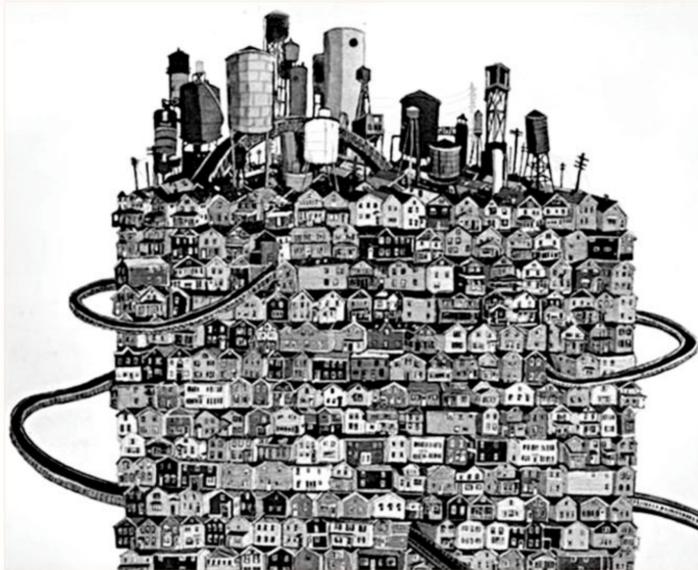


ILLUSTRATION: AMY CASEY

in cities: urbanisation is the engine of economic growth.

But while it is easy to focus on success stories such as Singapore and Dubai, or on the impressive features of cosmopolitan centres such as New York or London, urbanisation is not without its challenges.

By 2050, some 600 million people will live in the world's 25 largest cities, none of which are in the European Union. Most are in Asia, followed by Africa, including Karachi, Pakistan; Kabul, Afghanistan; Khartoum, Sudan; and Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. And some believe that by 2100, Lagos, Nigeria, will be the world's largest city — showing

policy-makers.

Many cities and states in the United States are already bringing this point home, by ignoring US President Donald Trump's renunciation of the Paris climate agreement, and doubling down on their own efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and achieve energy sustainability. Indeed, Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo have now joined forces to combat climate change, giving the lie to Trump's claim that he was elected to "represent Pittsburgh, not Paris."

Climate change is one of three major challenges that will confront us in this new

The future will be shaped by two key trends: digitisation and urbanisation. And the possibilities introduced by the former will likely help us overcome the problems associated with the latter.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Protect our forests

The wildfire in central Portugal has killed over 62 people, sending shockwaves across the world. Deforestation and dry weather, which causes immense exposure to sunlight, adds to the chances of wildfire. Similar instances have been seen in dense forest areas of Tamil Nadu, India. These incidents remind us that failure to protect our forest areas from deforestation, excessive urbanisation and the perils of climate change will have serious repercussions in the near future.

P. Senthil Saravana Durai
 Mumbai

Prevent Zakat-related accidents

Zakat related tragedies have become a common occurrence in our country, with statistics claiming a total of 251 deaths in the last 35 years. 27 people died in 2015, five among whom were children. No punitive actions were taken after the incidents.

Donations from the local rich to the poor are laudable, but they must be dealt with in a practical way. People tend to announce that Zakat will be donated in small areas of towns and villages. This invites thousands of poor people to rush to the venues, which aren't large enough to accommodate them. The stampede that takes place causes death and injuries.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Zakat Board and the individual contributors should come up with a solution to this problem. The board should implement mandatory rules to be followed by private Zakat contributors. Prior announcements in congested locations could be prohibited. Islamic scholars' committees formed in every union can collect Zakat from contributors and distribute them accordingly. They should also hold awareness programmes to educate people about how Zakat should not be organised in a way that costs human lives.

Md. Sharifur Rahmani
 Feni South East Degree College