

Land grabbing in the hills

Blatant disregard for the law

We are deeply disturbed by the news that a housing society has flattened 150 acres of hilly land in Kolatoli of Cox's Bazar town. What is perplexing is that the housing estate has no Department of Environment or deputy commissioner's approval for the project, and yet we find that plots have been allotted and building has commenced. *The Daily Star* has been covering extensively the issue of illegal cutting of hills by unscrupulous real estate agents with disastrous results. Looking beyond the damage to biodiversity, we have seen the death count soar to more than 143 in the latest landslides that affected Rangamati, Chittagong, Bandarban and Cox's Bazar. Whenever there is a report in the media we find a flurry of activity in the administration about why and how such business entities get round established laws. One cannot forget that Bangladesh is a hugely populated country and land is a scarce commodity. Environmental laws are there for a reason. Natural resources, such as land, need to be protected from misuse and the hills are protected by law for the sake of both safety of people and the ecology. Over the last two decades, we have been silent witnesses to the indiscriminate pollution of our rivers and their encroachment. And now the same is happening with the hills and hillocks of Cox's Bazaar and the Hill Tracts. Unless the government takes a tough stance on what is clearly a violation of set rules, regulations and laws, there will be no let up by powerful interest groups that will keep bending the laws in the absence of their enforcement, and entire communities will continue to pay the price with their lives.

Dead workers accused for Gazipur boiler blast

Authorities' responsibility cannot be side-lined

THE police have sued ten unidentified persons, and three staff who lost their lives in the boiler explosion in Multifabs Ltd. Thirteen people died in the explosion last Monday, and it was to be expected that the police would act immediately. But, to ignore all the other information available, and take the shortest route by suing the operators for turning on the boiler is not only ridiculous, but as families of the victims fear, raises questions whether those responsible would be brought to justice. We know that the disaster could have been avoided. A machine may malfunction at any time, but in this case, it was kept running even after 9 days of its expiry period. Even if the argument is made that it would be difficult to assume that a mishap would occur so soon after the date of expiry, it still does not in any way justify blaming the workers. If anything, it was the duty of the management to replace it well before it reached its expiry. The management is claiming that the operators were asked to only work in the day—as if it was the time of running the boilers which caused the explosion. A factory cannot run, as it was on the day, without the knowledge and direction of the authorities. The case is not only disrespectful to the lives lost, but also an attempt to divert the course of justice. Blaming the workers for their deaths is an odious attempt to hide the negligence of labour rights and factory safety. Would it be remiss to ask why the workers, and not those who are responsible for the safety of workers, are being charged?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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We need a proper drainage system

Most drains across our cities are clogged up by garbage, while others are either broken, or are manholes without lids. This makes things especially difficult during monsoon when the roads fill up with filthy water. Traffic is made worse, so that people have to wait hours to reach a destination.

The reasons behind these out-of-order drains are the inadvisable mixture of concrete and tar, the low quality of raw materials, and the inefficiency of the authorities involved.

Bangladesh may be planning to grow into a middle income country by 2021, but our infrastructure is not well prepared to meet the entailed challenges. The government must step in through penalty for the convicted, immediate reformation of the damaged parts in the sewerage system, and more awareness regarding issues related to waste management. **Sukamal Datta Tonmoy**
University of Rajshahi

Wi-Fi services in Tangail

The government, in order to distribute internet services to the students, had worked on a Wi-Fi connection line from Kalihati Sadar upazila to the Bangabandhu Textile Engineering College (BTEC) campus through optical fiber cable in November 2015. One and a half years after the completion of the work, services are still not being provided for unknown reasons. As a result, students have no internet access.

Despite repeatedly informing the Bangladesh Telecommunication Company Limited (BTCL) and BTEC authorities, the problem persists. We urge the concerned authorities to start the Wi-Fi connection at the BTEC campus immediately so that we, the students, can have access to the internet for our studies. **Abir Basak**
Bangabandhu Textile Engineering College (BTEC) Tangail

Boiler blast kills again!

NO FRILLS



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

SIX boiler inspectors for 5,500 factories in the country! One would have thought that the Tamapaco Foils factory fire last September that killed some 41 workers (although authorities contend that the fire was the result of a gas fire leak and not a boiler explosion) would have woken up policymakers to the dangers posed by the literally zero monitoring over boilers in industries. We have been reporting on the issue extensively over the last few years and going by data published in this paper, there have been between five to nine boiler accidents per year since 2012, totalling some 33 incidents that have killed 41 and injured 237 others. And this is not counting the latest incident in Gazipur that killed 13 people last Tuesday or those who died in the Tampaco incident.

We were assured by the Office of the Chief Inspector of Boiler that a proposal had been sent last March to the ministry of industry to expedite recruitment of 100 inspectors. The ministry forwarded the proposal to the public administration ministry for recruitment of 71 inspectors which, for whatever

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reason, was not acted upon. We are informed that the proposal has been sent back to the Office of Boiler last week with queries and now that we have another 13 dead on our hands, perhaps a fresh proposal is going to be sent for more manpower. This back and forth movement of proposals is an insult to the memory of those who continue to die or suffer injury because the paperwork gets bumped from one desk

25 years and such equipment was certified by Accord. Getting back to the issue of safety inspections, for the existing inspectors to examine and certify each boiler as safe, each inspector (six in total) would have to inspect 917 boilers per annum. If we break that down, each inspector would have to inspect 2.51 boilers on a daily basis (if they carried out inspection 365 days a year) including

safety cannot be put on the backburner because of the apathy of the government which translates into nonchalance of factory owners and management. Since 2007, locally produced boilers have also entered production and service in the country. So, if there is hardly any yearly inspection, how are we to know that the boilers installed conform to safety standards to begin with? What about the issue of



File photo of the 2016 Tampaco Foils Factory boiler explosion in Gazipur.

6
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The latest explosion in the garments factory may have carried a higher death toll but for the fact that it had just reopened after Eid festivities and not all sections were operational. Every factory needs a boiler to generate steam for sterilisation, drying, power generation, etc. and with the paltry number of inspectors we have, every date expired boiler or one that is run by untrained hands is an accident waiting to happen. Of the 5,500 boilers in operation, 3,000 are in the readymade garments (RMG) industry which brings forth the question of fire safety that is being overseen by Accord. We would like to ask whether the body is doing an exemplary job on boiler safety since it falls under the purview of fire safety. The question must be raised because Multifabs Ltd. is an Accord-covered factory and the chairman and managing director of the company has stated that he bought the boiler from Germany with a lifespan of

weekends. This of course is humanly impossible, but we do not see any ruffled feathers from either the management of the company in question or the ministry, which makes us believe that human life is so cheap in Bangladesh that a few dead workers is considered nothing in the grander scheme of things. The original proposal last September was to put in place the recruitment process for 350 inspectors, which as we see now, ultimately got slashed down to 71 and even that number never went anywhere because of the slow movement of paperwork between the various ministries. Given that thousands of factories never get to see an inspection at all in the lifetime of their boilers, there is little compunction for the management to check for safety. However, any incident involving a blast means a major setback in terms of reputation and the huge human misery they cause. Workers'

compensating those killed and injured in such industrial accidents? The DC of Gazipur has announced that Tk20,000 would be given to each family of the dead. So the going rate for every person killed due to negligence on the part of the management and lack of concern of authorities is Tk20,000? What about those injured? What is the value of their physical injury and emotional trauma? What about criminal negligence? Will we ever see criminal proceedings against those who bear responsibility for not replacing faulty equipment or not hiring professionals to run critical machinery like boilers? We have been passing the buck on safety for years now and given our lack of compassion for the common working man, we wonder if the factory inspectors will be recruited before another boiler goes bang somewhere else in the country.

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Courageous civil servants

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDEEP NAYAR

GOVERNMENT officers after retirement take to *sanyas*, but some courageous ones have spoken against the intolerant society that India is becoming. In their open letter they say, "It appears there is a growing religious intolerance that is aimed primarily at Muslims." Apparently, there has been no discussion or mention about the

to take up the point made by Justice Sachar. I understand that he even went to the Prime Minister (Manmohan Singh) at the time to complain that if the government was not serious about implementing its recommendations, why did it waste his time and the time of other members of the Commission? Manmohan Singh at the time expressed his helplessness. He reportedly told Justice Sachar the bureaucracy seemed to have come in the way and what was promised to the Muslims remained only on paper. The report had hardly any adherent when the BJP came to power. The Muslims, once in a while, do recall the report to

party, which used to be in the news, does not exist. One has never heard of the AICC, or the party President's elections. In an effort to let her son, Rahul, be an arbiter, Congress President Sonia Gandhi has seen to it that there would be no dissenting voice. Senior members of the party openly express their disappointment that new and fresh voices are not entertained by Mrs Gandhi because she is keeping the seat warm exclusively for Rahul. He is so much the apple of her eye that even daughter Priyanka—she goes down better with the masses—has been pushed into the background. Priyanka's most powerful selling

necks. Back in those days there were also a handful of serving and retired civil servants who dared to defy authoritative governance and suffered the punishment meted out to them for having shown courage during the Emergency. Indira was very particular that those who challenged her are sidelined. The government of Narendra Modi is not about promoting one man and his idiosyncrasies. It is more about ideology, the Hindutva. That makes it much more ominous. One person can always be removed but ideas are harder to dislodge. That is the difference between totalitarianism and democracy. In the first, it is one person who tries to change the people. In the other, it is the people who change top rulers. Unfortunately, today it is Hindutva versus pluralism. Despotism of one person has been replaced by the despotism of ideology. This can be seen in the way a 15-year-old Muslim, Junaid, was stabbed to death on his way back from a shopping spree to celebrate Eid. Those responsible for his killing first abused him on account of his religion. What is tragic is that those who struggled for independent India do not count and the ones who were never near the frontlines are ruling the country. Where were the Hindutva voices when Nehru, Gandhi and Maluana Azad were caned by the people in solar hats? There are some liberal voices who recall the independence movement and Mahatma Gandhi who led it, but the ruling party's emphasis is on their philosophy which was looked down upon in a pluralistic country for which the nation was fighting. It is tragic to see that the civil servants themselves are wearing the badge of Hindutva. In UP, where the BJP has come to power, Chief Minister Adityan Yogi has transferred 26 top secretaries to the government to make way for the people he considers nearer to his party's philosophy. This is different from the centre where the Prime Minister has reportedly seen to it that those secretaries who fail to do their jobs are given due warning. Modi is considered by the civil service to be a ruler who means business. So far there is very little evidence that Modi can rise above ideology. He still has two more years to go in his five-year tenure. Maybe, he would now take some hard decisions to put the country before the party.



PHOTO: AFP

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sentiments of this letter. The BJP which sets the tone of society probably did not want any discussion and let the matter die as it has. Yet, the fact remains that the Muslims do not get their due. They are 17 crores or 12 percent out of India's total population of 1.2 billion. As Justice Rajinder Sachar's report has pointed out, the treatment meted out to them was worse than what the Dalits go through. The report is a decade old but none of its recommendations has ever been implemented, not even under the Congress. What it means is that a soft kind of Hindutva had spread into the country even before the BJP came to power. One expected the Congress Party

underline their grievances, but the media has shown no interest. Even otherwise the media has come to tilt towards Hindutva. The voice of pluralism is hardly audible. Things have come to such a pass that those who talk about pluralism are looked down upon and considered pro-Muslim for some personal gain. The BJP philosophy has come to prevail. The Congress Party which draws its connection with those who struggled for independence and its ethos of one country for all without distinction of caste or creed is not credible any more. The dynasty rules the party and does not give space to anybody else. Even the Working Committee of the

point is that she resembles her grandmother, Indira Gandhi. Never mind that Indira had many negative points. For example, the excesses committed during the Emergency when one lakh people were detained without trial. The Shah Commission, which held open sittings to bring out how the common man was maltreated, said in its report that the Emergency was imposed because Indira wanted to save her seat after Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha disqualified her for six years. Instead of honouring the judgment she changed the whole system of governance. Subsequently, she allowed her younger son, Sanjay, to effectively rule the country with the support of his red

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