

Korail slum

Break the syndicate stronghold

THE exorbitant rates which syndicates are charging for providing illegal lines of gas, power and water to inhabitants of Korail slum are staggering, and amount to extortion of the most marginalised in the city. A report published in this paper on Monday highlighted that at least 20 such groups were engaged in this business, earning them Tk 1.5 crore a month.

Officials have claimed that drives against these connections have failed to stop these elements. The number of connections, going into the thousands, reveal why they managed to thrive in the first place: they are filling a gap that Wasa, Dasa and Titas failed to fill. Therefore, these syndicates can get away with charging ridiculously high prices for basic amenities, illustrated by the example of charging Tk 150 a month for providing five minutes of tap water per day. At the same time, the illegal gas lines they provide are safety hazards. We have seen cases of fires that have broken out in the slum due to these connections before. As with the collusion of utility officials and law enforcement, there has been total denial, even though sources have claimed paying from Tk 50,000 to 1 lakh to power office, Wasa and law enforcement officials.

The issue of the Korail slum is not a new one. There has been talk of evicting the inhabitants, but that cannot be the solution as it is the first ensured. On the other hand, if the government provides these services free or at a nominal price to the inhabitants, it could solve the safety issues, the stealing of public resources, and the criminal activities which are part and parcel of these rival groups. In any case government resources are being appropriated by these syndicates that exploit the poor of the slum only because there is a vacuum. Thus any solution must start from addressing that shortage.

SC orders removal of Hanif flyover stairs

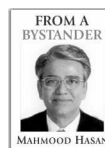
What was the city corporation doing?

LET'S face it: the proponents of flyover have, by and large, failed to deliver on the promises of a safe, quick journey for the commuters. And of late, it has become more of a bane than a boon, with the flawed design of some flyovers, defective expansion joints, girder collapse, unplanned bus stands and stairs, and the often deadly accidents.

The Supreme Court on Monday partly addressed the problem as it upheld a High Court order to remove all stairs located at different points of the Mayor Mohammad Hanif Flyover in Dhaka. The decision came over a month after the HC took suo moto notice of the scourge of stairs, the existence of which has long baffled the experts. While we appreciate the move, we fail to understand why a dispute on something as mundane as the stairs had to be settled by the apex court when the city corporation, as the supervising authority of the flyover, could have done that easily.

It shows poor governance on the part of the corporation. The city fathers are also expected to work on a number of things related to flyovers that are causing public nuisance, including the haphazardly built parking spaces, car repair shops and other illegal structures underneath the flyovers. Hopefully they will act on their own initiative before the court has to intervene again.

On that note, we would like to urge the government to take all measures necessary to make the flyovers function properly.



MAHMOOD HASAN

THIS year the annual G20 summit was held in Hamburg, Germany, on July 7-8. Nineteen leaders of the world's richest nations and emerging economies, representing 85 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP), 80 percent of world trade and two-thirds of the world population, met with the aim to stabilise the global economic and financial infrastructures. With the European Union attending the summit, the group became G20. Leaders of 7 other countries were also invited as guests.

This year the summit was different as two newly elected leaders attended the summit for the first time—French President Emmanuel Macron and US President Donald Trump. All eyes were riveted on how Donald Trump behaved at this important gathering and handled himself when he met his arch rival, Russian President Vladimir Putin, for the first time.

Trump did raise the issue of Russian meddling in the last US election with Putin. Putin categorically denied any involvement, which, according to Russian officials, was accepted by Trump though Americans denied any acceptance. Even if Trump accepted Putin's explanation it is not going to stop the CIA investigation on Russian meddling in the 2016 election. To say that Russia did interfere will delegitimise Trump's election as president. It is a Catch 22 situation for Trump. Since there were neither note takers nor any tapes, it is difficult to ascertain who was speaking the truth.

The meeting, originally scheduled for 30 minutes, lasted for more than two hours. However, the Trump-Putin meeting produced one decision—ceasefire in southwest Syria which began on July 9. Interestingly, the ceasefire was decided on without any representation from Syria. However, Trump did not succeed in dissuading Putin from intervening in Ukraine. From the body language of the two leaders that appeared in video clips, it seems that Putin had full control over Trump. One wonders why Trump is so meek in front of Putin.

The other incident that hit the headlines was the massive protests organised by thousands of anti-capitalism activists that turned Hamburg into a veritable battlefield as they fought with armed police, indulged in arson, looted stores and burned vehicles. Apparently, the protesters hated Trump, Putin and Erdogan visiting their country. Nearly



Demonstrators dressed as clowns face policemen as they take part in a protest on July 7, 2017 in Hamburg, northern Germany, where leaders of the world's top economies gathered for a G20 summit.

PHOTO: AFP/DPA

500 policemen were injured as they fought to keep protesters away from the summit venues. Hundreds of far-left militants were detained.

The problem with Donald Trump is his "America First" doctrine—disengaging from several important issues facing the world today. His isolationist policy had earlier facilitated the unity of G7 (summit held in May 2017 in Italy) and now G20. As the largest economy in the world, American abdication in these important issues is likely to have serious consequences for the global economy and may likely lead to unsustainable warning of planet Earth.

Summit host German Chancellor Angela Merkel had prioritised three issues for the summit—globalisation, climate change and immigration. The Trump Administration had difficulties with all these issues, which was reflected while adopting the Final Declaration. Compromises were made to keep unity of the club.

On climate change, the Declaration says, "We take note of the US decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. The US announced that it will immediately cease implementation of its current nationally-defined contribution and reaffirmed its strong commitment to an approach that reduces emissions..." The

Final Declaration categorically stated that the 2015 Paris Agreement is irreversible. Merkel obtained the support on this issue from China and India—the two biggest emitters of carbon after the US. Merkel closing the summit went further with a rebuke to President Trump's stance on climate change saying, "Unfortunately, and I deplore this, the United States of America left the Climate Agreement..." Clearly, Trump was badly isolated on this issue.

Though America objected to globalisation, the Declaration rejected protectionism. Merkel warned, "There can be no return to a pre-globalisation world." The Declaration identified poverty and inequality as the root causes of migration and committed to contribute to sustainable economic growth and job creation in Africa and other less developed countries to stem the flow of migrants.

G20 summit rituals as with G7, BRICS or with other national groupings fall woefully short of addressing the welfare of the world's poorer sections of peoples.

The rich nations club make tall commitments to alleviate the conditions of the poor but little seems to be done. For instance, since the last G20 summit in Hangzhou, China in September 2016, there has been any perceptible change in

the global economy? Actually, by creating these groupings the United Nations has been made ineffective.

What is noteworthy is that G20 member nations are vastly different from one another. Several members would fail to get the required marks on democracy and governance. Democracy is actually on the wane, while nationalism fervour is on the rise in some member countries. On income inequality, technological advancement and industrial growth, several members are way behind others in the group. It is only natural, therefore, that there would be differences of views and perceptions on global issues.

However, summits are good in a sense that it provides opportunities for bilateral meetings, where leaders push their respective national agenda. The outcome of bilateral negotiation becomes more important than the Final Declaration. The European project was indeed moving beyond the summit. Summits Declarations as these are finalised long before leaders arrive at the summit venue. Results of Declaration follow-up are hardly perceptible.

The Hamburg G20 summit has laid bare the disunity among the group.

Mahmood Hasan is former Ambassador and Secretary.

The less spoken but fundamental causes of Brexit



MUHAMMAD AZIZUL HAQUE

IN the aftermath of World War II, some European politicians and political thinkers contemplated forging unity among democratic countries in that continent. This was viewed by

them as a way to avert extreme forms of nationalism and future wars in Europe and also as a means to ensure peace among European nations. Winston Churchill, then Prime Minister of Britain, envisaged a United States of Europe in a speech on September 19, 1946 at the University of Zürich, Switzerland. "We must build a kind of United States of Europe. In this way only, will hundreds of millions of toilers be able to regain the simple joys and hopes..." However, in the same speech, he made it clear that he did not visualise Britain as a part of that United States of Europe: "We British have our own Commonwealth of Nations... France and Germany must take the lead together..." said Churchill.

The creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952 was declared to be "a first step towards the federation of Europe". The UK, however, kept itself aloof from the first initiatives toward European integration. It did not join the European Economic Community (EEC) until 1973. But Britain didn't have smooth and unswerving relations with the EU for many years after joining it. Its relations were increasingly marked with ambivalence as the EU's integration process deepened.

The Brexit referendum was held on June 23, 2016 and more than half of the British people supporting the Leave campaign were increasingly marked with ambivalence as the EU's integration process deepened.

But why did the British people really vote for Brexit in the first place? Most analysts primarily focus on the economic causes of Brexit. Of course, there is no denying that there were economic dimensions to the Leave voters' choice for Brexit. People complained about the ever-increasing numbers of immigrants and the EU rules allowing free movement of

labour into Britain, thus creating pressure on the job market. While young immigrants from other EU countries got good jobs, many young Britons, especially from the country's rural backwaters, remained unemployed. So, the Leave vote was a kind of protest by those who felt economically left out in the present-day Britain.

However, there were more fundamental but less spoken of and less obvious causes behind it. The British attach immense value to the sovereignty of their country and consider it indivisible and inalienable. But under the EU, their sovereignty was being increasingly eroded away. The EU member states kept eroding more of their governing power to Brussels, with the

founding fathers of the EU, they wanted only trade and economic integration among the EU member states and loathed any political integration. The European project was indeed moving beyond the frontiers of mere economic integration, towards the envisioned USE in the fashion of the US.

Reclamation of sovereignty was actually the prime objective of the Leave campaign in the Brexit referendum. The Leave campaign complained that the EU had become "a suffocating bureaucracy" with its ever-expanding net of regulations. They detested the fact that the laws that governed Britain were decided by politicians from other nations who they never elected and couldn't throw out. Brexit campaigners argued



SOURCE: ANALOGICALWORKING.COM

Many Britons, especially from the country's rural backwaters, remained unemployed. The Leave vote was an act of protest by those who felt economically left out.

role of their national governments in governing their respective countries gradually diminishing. Brussels was becoming the de facto capital of an evolving United States of Europe (USE). As all this happened, London—once the pivot of the now-defunct British Empire on which it can never set its back steps, from time to time to keep itself relatively free from the EU's centripetal forces by negotiating opt-outs from some of its key policies, like the common (Euro) currency and the border-free Schengen area. London also negotiated a reduced budget contribution to the EU.

Viewed against what Churchill had said at the dawn of the European integration initiatives, all those steps taken by Britain were quite expected. Contrary to the objectives of the

reclamation of its national sovereignty would enable the UK to free itself from the shackles of the EU's burdensome regulations, to manage immigration better, and to stimulate more vibrant economic growth.

Leave voters were also concerned about the erosion and distortion of British culture under the pressure of inflows of immigrants from other EU countries like Poland, Hungary, Romania, etc., and longed for a return to their own distinct culture. They despised social and demographic changes due to unrestrained inflows of immigrants and grew averse to concepts like multiculturalism, social liberalism, etc.

live and work there. There were large waves of economic immigration from Eastern Europe following the EU's expansions in 2004 and 2007, boosting the rate of net immigration into Britain to more than 300,000 people annually by 2015. Such a high rate, which was never visualised by the UK, provoked xenophobia.

Some analysts argued that dissimilarities and conflicting features between the cultural and social values of the British people and those of the immigrant communities had more to do in forming the views of the Leave voters than income disparities and loss of employment opportunities used to baffle and unrestrained immigrant inflows.

Given the British psyche and the state of affairs the EU had arrived at, Brexit seemed inevitable. There are other EU countries with similar outlooks. Hence, a paradigm shift in the EU's existing policies and drastic reforms in other areas are imperative for its survival. EU countries like France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, etc., should act in this regard.

Much of the sovereignty ceded to Brussels must be returned to the national capitals of EU nations. The desire of the founding fathers of the EU to eventually establish a USE must be abandoned as it does not suit the European psyche. There must be an official renunciation of the push for an "ever closer union".

The change in the demographic composition of the EU member states through immigration from other EU countries or non-EU countries should be kept within acceptable limits. The EU must ensure that all segments of the EU's population in each EU nation benefit from the EU's integration. Simultaneously, dissipation of cultural distinctiveness of the European nations must be stemmed. And the excessive bureaucracy and lack of other areas are accountability in Brussels and its tangle of rules and regulations need to be reduced and streamlined.

If the EU's policies and objectives, rules and regulations, bureaucracy and its accountability in Brussels, etc., are not drastically reformed to reflect in them the changing views and preferences of EU nations, they (the nations) may eventually fall apart like the UK and Brussels may not be able to hold.

Muhammad Azizul Haque is former Ambassador and Secretary.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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A medical college in each district

Many workers from Bangladesh go abroad to earn a living. Most of them engage in manual labour that requires little professional or technical skills. Consequently their earnings are also quite low. In contrast, many other countries that export manpower earn significantly higher amounts per worker because they're more technically skilled or trained. Bangladesh needs to focus on exporting such professional manpower.

Sending physicians abroad for employment is a good option. But in order for that to happen, we need more medical schools across the country. The government is also committed to providing health services in all parts of the country. But it is difficult to dispatch medical facilities to rural areas. If each district town were equipped with the facilities to train its own physicians, things would be much easier.

Medical universities may be set up at the divisional cities to allow students to pursue higher studies. The country only needs to invest a substantial amount of public funds to set up and operate such medical colleges and universities. The government should take up a five-year action plan to set them up in each district in phases, and later set up post-graduate level medical universities in each divisional headquarters.

Md Ashraf Hossain, Central Bashabo

Brac Onnesha in orbit: A milestone

Last Friday, Bangladesh entered a new era of technological advancement with the historic deployment of the country's first nano-satellite Brac Onnesha. We want to congratulate the quick team at Dhaka's successful project, as it has taken Bangladesh to a new height! Md Tarek Aziz Bapji, University of Dhaka