

## A dark day in history

Still waiting for justice

THE month of August for us is laced with two most painful events in history. It is Providential that the aim of the perpetrators of the grenade attack 13 years ago on August 21, to take out the entire top leadership of the Awami League, was not successful. But the attack nonetheless took 24 lives and caused severe injuries to several hundred people. Among the dead was the wife of the then secretary general of the party, later the president of Bangladesh.

While we commiserate with the kins of the killed and the wounded, there are two aspects that we would like to flag here. First, the attempt on the life of Sheikh Hasina and the AL leadership, and secondly, the attempt to kill the case by a deliberately flawed investigation to hide the facts.

As far as the investigation is concerned, we recall with horror the total lack of sincerity on the part of the government to find out the truth and catch the real culprits. It was regrettable to see how the state machinery was used to spoil the case by throwing up red herrings including the Joj Mia saga. We do not know how service grenades came to be in the possession of the perpetrators. Evidence that should have been preserved and the integrity of the scene of occurrence were destroyed in a hurry; and that can lead to only one surmise—the administration had something to hide.

We hope that such instances would never be repeated. But for that to happen the state must find out all those behind the attempt on Sheikh Hasina's life and bring them to justice as well. We hope the trial, which we understand is in the closing stages, would be able to get to the bottom of the matter and the truth and the identity of the planners would be revealed.

## Eid home-goers to face tough journey

Take urgent steps to ease travel

EVERY year people leaving the capital to celebrate Eid festivals experience immense sufferings on roads due to traffic congestions. It is feared that this time during Eid-ul-Adha, their sufferings will multiply. As *The Daily Star* reported on Sunday, excessive rains and flooding have left most of the roads in a miserable state.

This daily in its report has pointed out the normal choke points on our major highways, which are the main reasons for traffic snarl-ups. Now, floods and rains have aggravated the situation of the roads pushing up the average travel hours.

Furthermore, this time train operations have been suspended at some points in the northern region because floodwater has submerged rail tracks. So home-goers who prefer to have train journeys will be forced to go by road this time, which will also add to the traffic jam.

As around 80 lakh people are supposed to leave the city before Eid holidays, to mitigate their sufferings, the government should take some emergency measures.

First of all, the government should identify which roads are usable, partly usable or totally unusable, and develop an early warning system to let travellers know the road conditions. This way the travellers will have a choice to decide which roads they want to use before they start their journey home.

Then comes the issue of traffic management. More teams from the highway police should be deployed during that time to ease traffic movement at major choke points. Lastly, the totally unusable and partly unusable roads need to be repaired in order to make them usable before Eid-ul-Adha.

# Haor project in a shambles?

NO FRILLS



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THE Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) has successfully bungled up a haor project taken up in 2011 that was supposed to protect some 289,000 hectares of land in more than 50 haors over six low-lying districts of Sunamganj, Sylhet, Hagbiganj, Moulvibazar, Netrokona and Kishoreganj. The Tk 704 crore project was supposed to protect these areas from flash floods but failed to deliver the goods. Indeed, the "Pre-monsoon Flood Protection and Drainage Improvement in Haor Areas" was supposed to end in June 2015 but in reality the project timeline has overrun by two years now and about 20 percent of work has been completed.

It was dogged by mismanagement from inception and has seen 11 project directors come and go, and now we know from media reports that lawyers in the most adversely affected district of Sunamganj sued 140 people, including BWDB officials and contractors for negligence and "irregularities" in construction of embankments that collapsed back in April. The anti-corruption watchdog body ACC has, as of July 2 filed a case with the Sunamganj Model Police Station accusing 61 people, including BWDB officials and contractors, of "purposeful mismanagement" and corruption in building dams in the district.

The whole idea of this so-called priority project was to save massive croplands that go underwater during monsoon every year. The idea was to

re-excavate some 333 km internal canal but work has been done on a mere 45 km. While BWDB officials have cited reasons like inclement weather and fund shortage, it is becoming increasingly clear that there was massive mismanagement in implementation. That contractors with party affiliation became prime contractors in many of the project works has not helped matters. It merely brings to the fore the problems of project execution and the

on. With so many deliverables undelivered like less than half the 39 drainage regulators and not a single of the 29 drainage outlets, 35 causeways and 22 irrigation inlets set up, precisely what excuse does BWDB have? Adverse weather conditions?

As we take stock of works done and not done, it is obvious that there have been massive irregularities in project execution. The net result of this irregularity is of course the loss of the



The haor project failure points to some systemic problems that most projects seem to experience in our country.

PHOTO: STAR

largely absent monitoring and evaluation of public works that has worked to the detriment of both the national exchequer and livelihoods of farmers in these districts. The flash floods have effectively wiped out the Boro crop in the haor areas and although the prime minister has promised compensation for farmers, it leaves a gaping question as to how no administrative measures were taken in the five years it has been allowed to stumble

Boro crop in that area, which is one of the three main crops of the country. It is understandable why the court case came from Sunamganj as 36 out of 52 targeted haors under the project belonged to that district and farmers there bore the brunt of incomplete work. That the project could have changed its project directorship 11 times in 5 years shows quite clearly the project was hardly prioritised. Had it

been so, then the fate of 6 million people tied to the land and agriculture would not have been trifled with so easily.

We will have to wait for the ACC to make its findings on the allegations of graft and who was involved in what capacity. But more important than that, it has dealt a serious blow to government credibility about its ability to get development projects off the ground in a timely fashion and the quality of projects undertaken by it. Something has to be done about the weak institutional capacity to implement projects. The haor project failure points to some systemic problems that most projects seem to experience in our country. The frequent change of project directors throws work plans in disarray and at least in this case, it has contributed significantly; we have witnessed serious lapses in transparency and accountability of public officials in giving contracts, and of course, there is the question of collusion between officials and contractors in profit making.

A recent CPD study found that on average, 66.2 percent of completed projects were declared completed without 100 percent physical progress being done during the FY 2001-2015 period. This explains public expenditure leakages, weak financial governance and bad work plans to begin with. It is time policymakers went back to the drawing board to basically implement policies already in place so that the government may get its money's worth and the people may get some benefit from the development projects. It is time to deliver on what was promised and to stop making excuses.

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# The long hot summer of the Arab Spring



ANDREW SHENG

WHAT has happened in Charlottesville showed that temperatures and tempers are flaring in this long hot summer. Is the Arab Spring spreading worldwide due to climate warming? The Arab Spring broke out in 2011 with a wave of demonstrations and protests in Oman, Yemen, Egypt, Syria, and Morocco. This was hailed as the outbreak of democracy against authoritarian regimes, but what went unnoticed were the underlying causes of three interconnected factors—a growing youth unemployment bulge from rapid population growth, the inability of existing governance structures to deal with growing social stresses and the catalyst for social breakdown—climate change.

From February to August 2010, a large-scale, drought and famine occurred in Africa's Sahel region, the belt below Sahara desert stretching from Senegal, Northern Nigeria, Mali to Sudan. The drought killed an estimated 260,000 people and caused migration northwards to North Africa. Indeed, before the fall of Libyan leader Gaddafi in late 2011, the EU paid Libya Euro 50 million in October 2010 to stop African migrants passing into Europe. From 2006 to 2011, Syria suffered one of the worst droughts and famine that covered 60 percent of its land area, causing massive crop failure and loss of herds.

In February this year, the United Nations declared another famine in South Sudan, with famine risks in Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen. The famine in Yemen is already threatening 7 million people. The UN blamed the cholera outbreak there as man-made by the current civil war.

2016 was the hottest year in recorded history, since records began to be kept in 1880. 16 of the 17 hottest years have occurred since 2000. Indeed, by mid-year, 2017 may be the second hottest year ever, with increasing scientific evidence that the continual temperature rise will lead to more cyclones, rise in sea levels, faster decline in the polar ice caps and more unpredictable weather changes.

The January 2017 US National Intelligence Council's Global Trends report argued that global tensions will rise in the coming five years from five key stresses: economic, political, social, geopolitical and environmental. The economic stress comes from slowing global growth, creating fewer resources to deal with the huge welfare and social gaps that shape politics.

Political stress is rising because failing governments don't have the capacity to address the challenges that they face. This is particularly evident in the Middle East and North Africa, the most water-stressed region in the world.

The report argues that "societal confrontation and polarisation—often rooted in religion, traditional culture, or opposition to homogenising globalisation—will become

more prominent in a world of ever-improving communications." The improved communications have not only enabled militant extremists and terrorist groups to have transnational presence, but also faster spread of infectious diseases.

Geopolitical stress has arisen because of growing inter-state rivalry for power and resources.

Finally, environmental stress is moving centre stage as global warming generates greater freakish storms, melting ice, rising sea levels, worsening the abilities of fragile governments, already weakened by corruption, social dissent and insufficient resources to cope.

These five stresses are mutually reinforcing, because deterioration in one makes the other stresses worse. For example, if the sea level rises, not only would food producing zones, such as the Mekong delta, be subject to flooding, but the increased salt content would reduce rice production. It has already been claimed that greater ocean weight stresses on continental shelves may lead to more earthquakes and volcanic disruptions.

The costs of dealing with natural disasters are becoming serious. The economic damage caused by Hurricane Katrina in the US in

dismantling of a Civil War statue resulting in violence between white supremacists and other protestors suggest that long hot summers are associated with violence. According to a study by Berkeley and Princeton published in *Science* magazine, a global temperature rise of 2 degrees Celsius could increase the rate of intergroup conflicts, such as civil wars, by over 50 percent in many parts of the world.

Another study by psychologists Plante and Anderson 2017 suggested a high correlation between heat stress and aggression and violence. Children growing up in climate stressed countries may become more antisocial due to under-nourishment from food and water shortages. The other impact is emigration-driven conflict. The illegal migration of over 15 million Bangladeshis into India, according to a Carnegie India 2016 study, created social tension along border areas.

Europe faces today more than 1 million annual migrants if the water-stressed regions of Middle East and North Africa suffer further deterioration in food, water and security. The dilemma for Europe is not just about how to police its borders, but how to deal with the climate change stresses in her neighbours so

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PHOTO: CHIP SOMODEVILLA/AFP

White nationalists and neo-Nazis clash with counter-protesters during the "Unite the Right" rally on August 12, 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia.

that the emigration pressure will be lessened. No one has quantified how much such investments will cost.

Simply put, climate change is no longer a long-term issue, but a clear and present danger. Each of us has to take responsibility for climate change, because it is the collective human excessive consumption that is changing our eco-system. A hotter and more violent earth is not fake news.

That is why Earth First comes before America First or individuals first.

Hotter climates will need cooler heads than President Trump to think through what we should be doing to deal with climate change.

Andrew Sheng writes on global issues from an Asian perspective.

COURTESY: ANN.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### No unsupervised Internet access to children

Our country is moving fast in terms of Internet and smart-phone penetration, but moral and social values have been in decline. A survey conducted by Manusher Jonno Foundation shows that about 77 percent of the school-going children in Dhaka have either visited or are visiting websites with explicit content. Undoubtedly, it is alarming news for the nation.

Although under-18 children or those without NID cards are not supposed to directly be able to get mobile connection, they can manage it with their parents' NID cards. To save our future generation, parents need to make sure that their children do not have an unsupervised access to smart phone or Internet.

Biplob Biswas, Faridpur

### Roads in northern districts too dangerous

Every year, many people are killed in road accidents, particularly in the highways of the northern part of our country. The roads there are in terrible condition.

This problem is not often duly addressed. Some roads are narrow. Some turning points are also quite dangerous with no traffic directives available. For the sake of the thousands of people who will be on their way home during this Eid vacation, it is time for the authorities concerned to take the necessary steps to repair these roads to prevent accidents leading to the loss of lives.

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