The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI
DHAKA SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 23, 2017, ASHWIN 8, 1424 BS

Massive waste of water in RMG sector

Adopt water efficiency measures

BANGLADESH is the second largest player in the global apparels industry after China targeting USD 50 billion in exports by 2021. But that success comes at a huge environmental cost. The garments industry (RMG) uses a mammoth 1,500 billion litres of water to dye and wash the cotton and clothes made by the sector and this is the subject of an International Finance Corporation (IFC) study. We are fast depleting precious groundwater that Dhaka WASA supplies to industry at the throwaway price of Tk 0.0326 per litre. As we bask in the glory of our export success, our water tables are turning dry which opens up the prospect of earth caving in and dragging down structures made above ground.

What the Partnership for Cleaner Textile (PaCT) programme has shown is that 200 factories could save USD 16million a year just by reducing water consumption. We could be looking at a 25 percent reduction (nearly 400 billion litres per year) if changes are made industry wide in water consumption, which automatically leads to less energy use and chemicals. This technology obviously works and the government should undertake its own study to see what cost savings can be made on energy, water and chemical usage. Armed with such knowledge, a fund can be set up to give loans to factories at a concession rate and make it mandatory for the industry to become compliant within a stipulated time frame. Once the financing scheme is worked out, it will make sense for factory owners to retrofit and we can make "efficiency" a key component of the way we produce our goods.

Another death in Rab custody

High time for impartial internal investigation

WE have lost count of the number of times we have pointed out how cases of custodial deaths under mysterious circumstances, of people picked up by law enforcement agencies, is sapping the trust of citizens on the agencies. In most of these cases, what emerge are contradictory narratives by law enforcement officials and the victims' families. On September 19, we reported the death of Majharul Islam from Naogaon who was picked up by Rab and was later found dead at the hospital morgue.

Family members, who filed a case against company commander of Rab-5 camp of Joypurhat, claimed that led by the commander, plainclothesmen picked up Majharul near his house. They took him inside and kept beating him, and later dragged him through the village, continuing the beating. The family members were asked to look for him at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, where they found him, already dead. The family was also threatened with crossfire if they spoke out about the incident.

Rab gave a completely contradictory statement claiming that the victim was an arms dealer, and had died of heart attack when arrested. We believe that whatever may be the charges against an accused person, the legal processes must not be circumvented. It is all the more baffling, that instead of promising an investigation, the director of Rajshahi zone Rab said that it was "bad luck that he died; otherwise, we would have seized those firearms."

The claim of heart attack does not wash—post mortem shows signs of injury on the body. Unless proper investigation is conducted, the acts of these members who act outside the law will tarnish the image of the body as a whole. For its own credibility, we hope that finally Rab would conduct an internal investigation, additionally with the ongoing case, determine the truth and take appropriate action.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Rohingya crisis and remedies

A news report published by *The Daily Star* on September 21, 2017, read "Trump urges 'strong, swift' UN action". We appreciate the statement from the US President, Donald Trump and Vice President, Mike Pence. The positive statements of the prime ministers of Britain, Canada and the president of France have already put pressure on Myanmar.

Our government should also talk to the governments of India, China, and Russia, as advised by our diplomats and experts, so that those three superpowers can also come forward to help the Rohingya refugees as soon as possible as they are currently in great distress. This is how this crisis can be solved properly and the Rohingya refugees can return to their ancestral homeland in Myanmar the quickest.

Shafkat Rahman, *BIAM Model School and College*

Hawker free pavements

It feels as if I have arrived at the city of Chittagong after a very long time. The age-old New Market area doesn't look the same now that hawkers have been evicted from the pavements. The pedestrians can now walk freely on the footpaths.

It's a very welcome step, but where have the evicted hawkers gone? Did the authorities think about their rehabilitation before driving them out? Now that they have no work to do, many of them may very well get involved in crimes. The city mayor said he had consulted with the hawkers beforehand and pledged to rehabilitate them. We hope that he has made good on his promise.

Zabed Wali, *Chittagong*

WHAT HOPE IS THERE FOR *Rohingya women and children?*

NAZMUL AHASAN

IT is a well-documented fact that women and children fare worst in wars and conflicts irrespective of where they take place. The conflict zone in the northern Rakhine state of Myanmar is no exception. Horrific accounts from Rohingyas who have made it into Bangladesh include stories about babies being "beheaded and burned alive" and countless women and girls having endured sexual violence.

Out of the more than 400,000 Rohingya refugees who came to Bangladesh in the past few weeks, an "unprecedented" 60 percent (that's more than 200,000) are children. Most of the remaining refugees are women, many of whom are pregnant. *Dhaka Tribune* reported that within the first 15 days of the crisis beginning, around 100 babies were born in the no man's land between the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, while *The Guardian* reported on September 17 that more than 400 babies were born in the past 15 days in the same area.

I saw people commenting in disgust on social media that Rohingyas "breed like rabbits". But a friend of mine, who is working at a temporary medical camp at Shah Porir Dwip, offered a different explanation. There are, on average, three to four children with each Rohingya woman coming for treatment, she says. Irritated, a doctor at the camp asked a woman why they had so many children. "Burmese soldiers don't take pregnant women," she answered. About 13 percent of Rohingya women of the latest batch of refugees are either pregnant or lactating mothers, according to UNFPA, who along with their newborn babies require emergency medical attention—to little avail.

Vivian Tan of UNHCR described to *The Guardian* how a man approached their clinic at the Nayapara camp. "He took us to this little basket covered by a blanket...he opened it and showed us two tiny babies. His wife had just given birth to twins while they were on the run," she said. One died soon after. It is also hard to shake off the heart-wrenching photo of a Rohingya mother cradling her 40-day-old dead son, which made front-page news in many newspapers.

Worse is the fact that as many as 1,312 children arrived here without any family members. Surely, the actual number is higher as many remain undocumented. Christophe Boulierac, a UNICEF HQ spokesperson now stationed here in Bangladesh, met one such unaccompanied teenage Rohingya boy.

He told Boulierac that he had seen his mother and sister being shot dead in front of him. Asked how he was feeling, the boy replied, "I'm not feeling anything. I just want to eat, some shelter and then maybe I will start thinking." Indeed, at this moment, only satisfying the basic needs of food and shelter is all that preoccupies them.

Meanwhile, UNICEF made an urgent appeal for funds because of the fear of a major outbreak of disease among the malnourished, weak and child refugees. Many children, who witnessed the brutality or lost their dear ones, are, as you would expect, traumatised. There are those, who, after a long exhausting journey by foot, didn't sleep and eat for days. In the chaotic temporary camps, where the struggle to get their hands on food is so intense that three people already died in a stampede, malnourished children and women barely stand a chance.

Aid agencies also pointed out that amidst the very unhygienic conditions at the camps and extreme shortage of clean water and basic sanitation, children are being exposed to water-borne diseases that could prove fatal. *Prothom Alo* reported that as much as 85 percent of children are already suffering from different kinds of diseases.

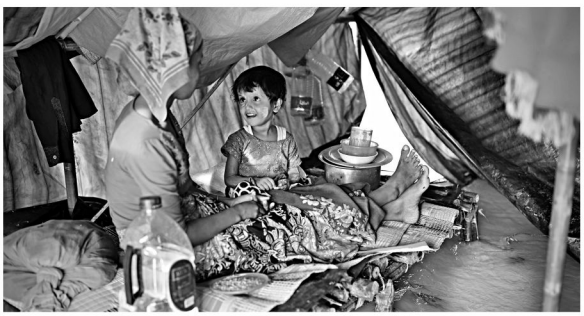
The most vulnerable of all are the unaccompanied minors. Who will look after these lonely children? Without parents or relatives, there is no one to make sure that they have a proper meal and place to sleep peacefully. "We are particularly concerned about the separated children," Jean-Jacques Simon at UNICEF South Asia told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Trafficking, child labour, exploitation—you name it, these children are vulnerable."

In many countries, a devastating humanitarian crisis of such magnitude had paved the way for ruthless criminals to exploit the situation. In Haiti, for example, three years after an earthquake of magnitude 7.0 had ruined the country, between 150,000–500,000 children were found to be exploited in some way or the other. Again, in 2013, after Hurricane Matthew left at least 2,000 children separated from their parents in Haiti, traffickers disguised themselves as aid or health workers to abduct or exploit orphans. We have a lesson to learn from these examples. We must establish a mechanism to scrutinise any organisation seeking to work for Rohingya refugees.

The US State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons Report, which downgraded Bangladesh to a Tier 2 Watch List country, expressed particular concerns about the Rohingya population living in Bangladesh, stating that their "stateless status and inability to receive aid and work legally increases their vulnerability to human trafficking."

Managing hundreds of thousands of refugees is a task a country like Bangladesh cannot do alone. We need help from other countries and organisations. Unfortunately, if previous cases are any indication, there will be plenty of promises and pledges from the international community, but eventually, many children will die of what otherwise would be termed, not life-threatening diseases. Even if they do survive, their futures—especially of the unaccompanied ones'—are still shrouded in total uncertainty.

We do, however, have experience of handing Rohingya refugee camps whose occupants mostly consisted of children. Some of the Rohingya families who had fled their homes in the early 90s settled in two government-run camps—Kutupalong and Nayapara. Nearly 70 percent of the registered Rohingyas at the two camps were either born in Bangladesh or arrived when they were under 10 years-old. Now, twenty-five years later, maybe they have what is needed to survive, but their future is as elusive as ever.



Out of the more than 400,000 Rohingya refugees who came to Bangladesh in the past few weeks, an "unprecedented" 60 percent are children. PHOTO: STAR

There is, as of now, little indication that Myanmar will take the newly arrived refugees back, let alone those who came here twenty-five years ago. When we call them "illegal intruders" instead of what they really are—refugees, who fled because their lives were in peril—we are also complicating the situation. If we don't want to be ready to integrate these children into our mainstream society in case they aren't taken back soon, they will perhaps end up joining drug gangs like the previous batches of refugees. Thus, any effort of Bangladesh and the international community to address the issue of women and children (refugees) must include their long-term future, rather than only confining them in camps.

Nazmul Ahasan is a member of the Editorial team at The Daily Star.

Why I find it hard to watch Vietnam War documentaries

ASHFAQUE SWAPAN

US documentary filmmaker Ken Burns' 10-part, 18-hour documentary on the Vietnam War (made in association with Lynn Novick) is making waves here, as well as it should.

Give Burns credit. In a world where filmmaking, one of the most prohibitively expensive of artistic media, is driven by the financial bottom line, Burns deserves enormous credit for persevering in the most challenging of genres—the long-form, multi-part documentary.

This is no small feat. Today what passes for reality TV in the US is an abomination—just consider its most famous star, our dear president. This new genre has given rise to a host of appalling TV confections like "The Real Housewives" franchise, and ribald, risqué riffs like "Temptation Island". Instead of provoking thought, the aim is to titillate—the TV equivalent of junk food.

Burns, on the other hand, has a long, distinguished record of producing documentaries that are thoughtful, sensitive ruminations on the American experience. His epic nine-part 1990 documentary on the American Civil War drew 40 million viewers, the largest viewership ever for a public television broadcast.

The USD 30 million "The Vietnam War" took over six years to make and "features testimony from nearly 80 witnesses, including many Americans who fought in the war and others who opposed it, as well as Vietnamese combatants and civilians from both the winning and losing sides," according to its website.

The Vietnam War (1955-1975), for readers too young to remember, was a violent, genocidal war of the last century. Driven by a ghoulish obsession to root out world communism, the United States got involved in a war which cost it dearly in terms of lives and moral standing.

Early reviews suggest the documentary series is a sensitive, thoughtful attempt at coming to terms with a controversial, decades-long war that tore America apart.

Yet I find it extraordinarily hard to summon the patience to watch it. No matter how sensitively portrayed, the attempt is crippled by an American insularity that I find too upsetting.

Perhaps a brief word on how I learned about the Vietnam War is in order. I first heard about Vietnam in the 1960s. I wasn't grown up enough to have an in-depth understanding, but I recall being horrified by a mindless, gruesome war against a hapless Third World country by one of the most powerful nations of the world. As I grew up some images remained hauntingly etched in my mind—a little girl running in agony after indiscriminate US bombing of napalm; I vividly recall those potbellied, ugly Huey helicopters that were instruments of wholesale slaughter.

I always feel particularly outraged when Americans refer to the Vietnam War as a great traumatic experience for the nation. Well, spare a thought for the Vietnamese. Estimates of Vietnamese deaths range from a million upwards (*vis-a-vis* 60,000 US deaths). More bombs were dropped on that tiny country than in World War II. And then there is the killing, raping and the dropping of the massive amounts of cancer-causing Agent Orange that has caused birth defects and maimed a generation of Vietnamese.

I think the big question is this: How brutally honest can you be? Historians raised questions about Burns' "The Civil War" as well. In a recent profile of Burns, *The New Yorker* magazine noted: "In a collection of essays by historians about 'The Civil War,' Leon Flitwick noted how the last episode jumps ahead to the gatherings of Union and Confederate veterans, at Gettysburg, in 1913 and 1938: the effect is 'to underscore and celebrate national reunification and the birth of the modern American nation, while ignoring the brutality, violence, and racial repression on which that reconciliation rested.'"

There is a telling detail in the *New Yorker* profile on the making of the Vietnam documentary. Former US Air Force Chief of Staff General Merrill McPeak, who flew 269 combat missions in Vietnam, was a consultant for the series. "In a section about the massacre of South Vietnamese civilians, in My Lai, in 1968, 'murder' became 'killing.' (The final script: 'The killing of civilians has happened in every war.') McPeak pressed for 'murder.' His argument, he said, was, 'Let's open the kimono—let's tell it all, see it the way it is.'

". . . Burns defended his change, on the ground that My Lai continues to have 'a toxic, radioactive effect' on opinion. 'Killing was the better word, he said, 'even though My Lai is murder.'"

The remark underscores the sobering reality that sometimes the truth is too horrendous, and nations, like individuals, can lack the gumption, the moral courage to face up to the horrors they have visited upon others.

To be fair, this is not unique to America. The Turks vehemently deny the Armenian massacre in the First World War. How ready are Pakistanis to face up to what they did in 1971? Closer to home, is India willing to be honest about what its army has done in Kashmir and the north-eastern states? Does Bangladesh acknowledge the terrible price paid by Chakmas during our prolonged anti-insurgency depredations?

It's really difficult, sometimes, to face up to the terrible things we do as nations, but nonetheless essential. Over half a century ago, the American author and activist James Baldwin observed with searing insight: "We, as a nation, modified and suppressed and lied about all the darker forces in our history…Whoever cannot tell himself the truth about his past is trapped in it, is immobilised in the prison of his undiscovered self. This is also true of nations."

More bombs were dropped on that tiny country than in World War II. And then there is the killing, raping and the dropping of the massive amounts of cancer causing Agent Orange. PHOTO: AP

Ashfaque Swapan is a contributing editor for Siliconeer, a monthly periodical for South Asians in the United States.