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Rohingya children in danger

Int'l community must respond urgently

IT is the nature of war that its biggest sufferers are women and children. The fact that children constitute about 60 percent of six lakh Rohingya refugees who have made it to Bangladesh has just reaffirmed it. The remaining refugees are predominantly women—many of them are pregnant, lactating mothers—and elderly people.

They all face a wide range of threats, even in the apparent safe havens in Bangladesh. But those in extreme danger are the orphans, who lost their parents before fleeing to Bangladesh.

The administration deserves credit for allowing the refugees to enter Bangladesh, but the condition in the areas where they have since lived is dire, to say the least. After having walked miles after miles to reach Bangladesh, they are in acute need of food and sanitary sanctuary. Estimated 25,000 orphans face particular dangers from human traffickers.

Amid concerns over a possible outbreak of waterborne diseases, UNICEF on Friday urged its donors to respond to the requirements of the updated Bangladesh Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). United Nations' children programme has called for USD 434 million to address the crisis.

The international community must understand that this humanitarian disaster is too big for a country like Bangladesh to manage single-handedly. The government with its overstretched and overwhelmed resources and manpower continues to do its best to meet the needs of the refugees. The world community must come forward to prevent the human catastrophe from spiralling further.

Unless the world pressurises the Burmese government into agreeing to stop the persecution of Rohingya, take back the refugees, and grant them full citizenship, the crisis will present imponderable consequences.

Pollution takes its toll globally

Causes 1 out of 4 deaths in Bangladesh

THE Lancet published a report on October 20 on air pollution and the havoc it causes in peoples' lives at a global level. The facts are mindboggling. It kills the poor and vulnerable and 92 percent of pollution-related deaths are in middle-income and lower-middle-income countries. While the most of the death toll comes from China and India, rapidly industrialising countries such as Bangladesh record a massive one out of every four deaths from pollution.

When we talk about pollution, it is not just outdoor pollution, but indoor too. As the poor and ultra-poor are more adversely affected, we have to take into account the unhealthy manner with which we cook our food indoors. A minuscule fraction of the population has access to piped gas or LPG cylinders to cook. Although both government and non-government agencies have been trying to introduce clean cooking stoves at household level for some time now, the fact is that "clean" technology like this has not been adopted nationwide.

We now know that there is even workplace pollution where people are exposed to toxins and carcinogens linked to 0.8 million deaths out of a total of 6.5 million deaths worldwide. While exact data on how many people in Bangladesh are dying due to pollution of different kinds is not known, we do know that our public policies on pollution remain ineffective. We have ample laws and rules that are supposed to check pollution. But in the absence of proper enforcement, there is no way to check the rising death toll. We hope the findings of the report serve as a wakeup call to the policy level because deaths by pollution is estimated to be costing developing countries (like Bangladesh) an estimated 8.3 percent of their gross national income.



BADIZHAMAN BAY

THERE are times when I feel that I am living in a lunatic asylum where sanity is an expensive commodity. And common sense is not only not common, it is an aberration. I keep getting this strange feeling especially when I'm on the road.

Facing Dhaka's notorious gridlock as I do every day, on my way out of home and back, or watching it from the seventh-floor balcony of my office overlooking a busy intersection, I feel like the Mad King whose mantra for survival was rather simple: "Burn 'em all!"

Old news: Dhaka has become one of the least livable cities in the world. Older still: it also happens to be one of the most densely populated cities. Whether or not these two facts have any connection, this city that I call home continues to surprise me by its ability to occupy the very bottom tier of livability in global rankings year after year.

The overall quality of life in Dhaka has been in constant decline for a number of years. Corruption has become rampant. Prices of essential goods are soaring. Pollution is endangering lives. Dhaka's performance in the five categories generally used to measure a city's livability standards—stability, healthcare, culture/environment, education, and infrastructure—has been, to say the least, frustrating.

So why should our life on the road be any different?

It's true that the quality of life in a city may depend on the neighbourhood one lives in, as subject poverty and crime can be found just blocks away from prosperity. But Dhaka's roads can be notoriously hazardous no matter which part of the city you are in.

Consider the outdoor hazards/risks that one faces while walking to work, or taking a public bus or driving an automobile. If you are not stuck in traffic, for example, you have speeding drivers who have little respect for traffic regulations. If you're not mugged in a quieter street, or pushed off the



pavement by a motorist/cyclist, you have traffic officers harassing you for reasons only known to them.

And then there are road accidents, dysfunctional transport, illegal parking, overcrowded streets, unpredictable bumps and potholes, dustbins filled to the brim, gender-based harassment, jaywalking, pavements occupied by illegal traders, endless road repairs, spitting, waterlogging, careless throwing of cigarette butts, chewed bet leaf—the list goes on.

And on days like this past Friday and Saturday, with rainstorms sweeping across the city and elsewhere, you can't even think of going out unless you must.

While there is a general consensus that this shouldn't be the picture of roads in a capital city, the journey from expectation to actuality is a long and tough one. If I am to make a list of all the hazards and risks associated with our roads, three would definitely come out on top: gridlock, accidents, and overcrowding.

According to an analysis by the Accident Research Institute (ARI) of BUJET, Dhaka's roads are the most dangerous for people compared to other metropolises in Bangladesh. About 74 percent of road accidents occur in Dhaka alone, while 72 percent of Dhaka's road fatalities involve pedestrians. In the last six years, 189 people were killed in traffic accidents near 954 intersections, which were identified as dangerous.

When we talk about road safety, we don't only mean the safety of commuters. It is also intrinsically related to a quality of outdoor life expected by the public in general, an absence of all potential risks and hazards. Road safety, thus, is important for a city to function properly and its people to have a satisfactory outdoor life.

The other day, a friend described how her 67-year-old father was forced to walk all the way from Mohakkali intersection to his residence near Mohamadpur Bus Stand, a good 6-km driving distance, because there were too many people against too few public transports and he couldn't muscle his way into any one of them. This is a daily reality for a lot of people who have to depend on public transports.

Dhaka has to face the additional challenge of an ever-growing population that may render any measure to address the gridlock and road accident issues futile. While no direct link can be established between overpopulation and road accidents, as far as statistics are concerned, there is a groundswell of opinion that controlling the former can lead to a solution for the latter. But that's not an easy task.

In a world whose human population is now more than 50 percent urban, the tide of people migrating to Dhaka—for security, employment, education and climate change—may never be fully held back.

Unless there are viable alternatives, people will keep coming here and the streets will get riskier and more crowded

by the day. No government may be willing to preside over the unpopular task of wholesale decentralisation one time soon either, which leaves us with no choice but to use whatever resources we have left judiciously and educate the commuters, pedestrians and drivers alike about the importance of responsible behaviour on the streets.

How to make people behave responsibly? There are a lot of theories as to how to solve the traffic issue and make roads safer. I found one symbolic attempt particularly interesting. Last week, according to a report by BBC, motorists caught speeding outside a primary school in Northern Ireland were given the option of avoiding a fine by attending a special court where the judges are children.

In front of a panel of young pupils, the drivers had to explain why they had broken the 30mph speed limit set for the road!

The idea behind the initiative was that meeting the children face-to-face might change the drivers' behaviour. This may not be a feasible option in Bangladesh but surely our city fathers can find something to keep the overall quality of our life on the roads from sliding further downwards.

It's important that we understand the urgency of the situation and work together to find and implement solutions, however drastic, that may help us in the long run.

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Ten Years of The Great Recession

The American economy is back on its feet

OPEN SKY

BIRU PAKSHIA PAUL

THE US economy has faced three "Greats" since the early twentieth century: the Great Depression of the 1930s; the Great Inflation of the 1970s; and the Great Recession of the late 2010s. My colleague at the college saw me as a harbinger of bad days because I joined here in 2007, whose December marked the beginning of the Great Recession in the US. The tenth anniversary of the recession now tells us a different story. The US economy has turned back. The last quarter posted three percent growth—much higher than their long-term two percent growth. US GDP has crossed the USD 19 trillion mark for a population size of 326 million, making per capita income USD 59,000 annually. Very soon, the largest economy in the world is going to touch its potential output line after a full decade of

Robert Barro argued that the theory on spending multiplier (if the government spending rises by one dollar, output rises by more than double or so) was not working in the economy. Economist Paul Krugman counterattacked and insisted on the government to stick to Keynesian economics that encourages aggressively raising government investment in the absence of robust private investment to defuse further collapse in the aggregate demand. None of the economists faced displeasure from the government for being so critical of the regime. Academics began to interact with students and new topics on the crisis emerged at universities. Grants for research on the recession also piled up.

The momentum of the danger, nevertheless, was hard to resist. Unemployment rose to as high as ten percent—quite unusual for the US economy whose natural rate of unemployment is around five percent. The education sector stopped hiring. The housing bubble that had formed burst terribly in 2008, sending the whole US financial system into a free fall. The

of the gloomy days in 2008, economists predicted that the US would face the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. But President Obama saved the nation by engaging a strong pool of ground-to-earth economists, brave policymakers, and conscientious politicians together.

The leadership says much of the story of why President Obama led the White House in January this year with one of the highest approval ratings from US citizens. Usually, outgoing presidents are always unpopular. Obama reversed that trend by working tirelessly for the economy and saving the world from further debacle. His energy policy changed America forever by making the US gradually more dependent on natural sources of power and, thus, relying less on the Middle East, dampening the future of oil-sparked political tensions. Now we see more energy efficient cars running on US roads and highways, reducing the fuel cost per family and helping consumption, and finally, serving justice to the environment.

The current unemployment rate, 4.2 percent, is the lowest in more than a decade and much lower than the natural rate of five percent. Still, it will be hard to say that the economy is overheated because 1) actual output is still slightly below the potential line, and 2) inflation remains as low as 1.5 percent—lower than the Fed's implied target of two percent. As a result, economists at the Fed will have heated debate on whether the policy rate should be raised or kept the same at 1.25 percent.

Seven directors from the Fed and five governors out of twelve regional Fed governors will give their opinion. Some of them are publicly advocating for not raising the Fed policy rate right now because of weak inflation and the strong dollar. A rate rise may further lower inflation sending it to the danger zone of deflation (negative inflation) that lies at the root of Japan's debility for twenty years. A rise in the US policy rate is likely to strengthen the US dollar against all major currencies such as yuan, euro, yen, rupee, and pound, making US goods more expensive than before and, thus, discouraging US exports overseas.

A few days ago, Richard Peck, senior vice-president of the Federal Reserve of New York, came to our campus to speak on the future stance of the Fed. As a macroeconomist, he is assigned to educate students and professors on monetary policy and the state of the economy. He takes lessons and suggestions from the academia to intellectually connect the US central bank with the people. In contrast, our public institutions including the central bank are advised to remain as non-public and as secret as possible, as if they are conducting wartime military operations on the public.

This culture breeds inefficiency and a festival of mediocrities at our public institutions. The US economy leaves a lesson to correct this culture. Active consultation and policymaking by engaging public officials and academics can help even a giant economy to recover from a doomsday-like scenario. The US economy leaves this lesson for the world to learn from, on the tenth anniversary of its Great Recession.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Making Dhaka safe for women

Recently, a survey conducted by Thomson Reuters Foundation revealed that Dhaka is the seventh worst megacity for women. This exposes a grim picture of our city. The fact that women don't feel safe on the streets of Dhaka should make us all ashamed.

Despite the increasing participation of women in all spheres of social, political and economic activities, they are still struggling hard to break the shackles of this patriarchal society. If we cannot make this city safe for women, it will not only affect our aspiration to build a society based on equity, but also hamper our economic prosperity. Therefore, it is urgent that the authorities take notice of the situation and take appropriate measures to make Dhaka safe for women.

Md Sadequr Rahman, Maniknagar, Dhaka



US GDP has crossed the USD 19 trillion mark for a population size of 326 million, making per capita income USD 59 thousand annually. PHOTO: AFP

underperformance. Good luck to Americans. They had a great leader in President Obama who won the election in late 2008. Seldom has the nation seen such a passionate leader who wouldn't spend a single day without brainstorming on how to make the US economy the strongest again.

President Obama often invited economist Ben Bernanke, who was the then central bank chair, to places where they could pass evenings quietly talking over the economy. The council of economic advisers kept on meeting the president routinely. Economist

government, which otherwise believes in the free market and less interference from the state, resorted to pronouncing the theory of "too-big-to-fail" and the Federal Reserve rescued the collapsing financial elephants by injecting emergency-time liquidity.

The Fed Chair Bernanke went as far as to warn President Obama sometime in October 2008 that if Obama doesn't act as per the Fed's wishes on Friday, there will be no economy on the following Monday. And the president complied promptly with that kind of a strong recommendation, rescuing the largest economy from an otherwise certain catastrophe. At the very onset