

HERITAGE BLUES

"Khamarbari"— destruction of a heritage site



IMAGINE yourself in the year 1905. Governor General Lord Curzon has just implemented the Partition of Bengal. Curzon Hall and the Supreme Court were yet to be built.

East Bengal was predominantly rural, mostly a collection of villages. Not much was going on in this part of Bengal. The areas around present day Farmgate, Indira Road and Argargaon were predominantly vast tracts of paddy fields with almost no buildings. This was the northern fringe of the city.

In that rural landscape, a two storied red brick colonial building was built, to house scientific agricultural research. This building later became known as "Khamarbari". The building was not as spectacular as Curzon Hall or the Supreme Court. Yet, the building's historic significance lay in heralding not only the beginning of institutionalised scientific research on agriculture, but also a culture of research in general in East Bengal. Lest we forget, the establishment of the University of Dhaka was still 15 years away (it was established in 1921).

Khamarbari is the site of many agricultural innovations. Among many other innovations, the paddy "Najirshail" was invented here. The building's architectural features include characteristic colonial red brick, verandas that serve as transitional spaces between the indoor and the outdoor, oblong multi-bay plan, and many other details derived from both Mughal and European architectural sources.

Recently, the Public Works Department (PWD) has claimed that the building was unsafe and its structural integrity compromised. Without any expert consultation, the PWD unilaterally decided that the building should face the wrecker's



The century-old laboratory building in the capital's Khamarbari is being demolished as the PWD authorities term it risky. The two-storey building has historical and architectural significance and is testimony to major agricultural research works. ARTIST: SAJID BIN DOZA

ball. Despite a massive public outcry and protest from heritage advocacy groups, design professionals, environmentalist and civil society members, the demolition crews started to take down the building brick by brick.

This is outrageous and unacceptable. A nation that is not sensitive to its heritage is a nation suffering from cultural poverty. Culturally rich cities around the world are

preserving their cultural patrimony with utmost care. A building may not be architecturally spectacular but it may present rich histories of a nation's evolution. Any sensible community will preserve heritage buildings as a way to showcase the people's progress.

Examples abound. Consider New York City's High Line Project. The High Line presents a fascinating story. It was an elevated

freight train track, built in the late 1920s in Manhattan, New York City. The elevated track allowed freight trains to bring goods from the port to the warehouses in downtown Manhattan. In the 1980s, the nature of storing goods in the city changed. The train track was soon abandoned. In the early 2000s, the city decided to knock it down as it was deemed unsafe and a hindrance to new development. But the local community, led

by two enlightened activists, organised an all-out campaign to preserve this industrial relic, even though it was not a spectacular piece of infrastructure or architecture.

A design competition was organised and New Yorkers soon witnessed the birth of a beautiful, elevated urban park. Today, the High Line Project is one of the most visited sites in New York city.

In Bangladesh we have failed on multiple heritage frontiers. We failed to identify what is important culturally, socially and aesthetically. When it comes to heritage preservation in this country, we live in an absurdly bureaucratized world of mindless list-making. If a building is on the list, the building lives. If it is not, it dies. What are the criteria for making that list in the first place? Who make that list and based on what?

We need a sea change in how we deal with our cultural history. A body of historic preservation experts, comprising members from various disciplines, should research, deliberate, and present a reasoned policy to the public forum as to why certain buildings deserve to be preserved for the present and the future.

We, the civil society, strongly condemn the barbaric destruction of Khamarbari which, not only pioneered scientific agricultural research during the Bengal Partition but also offered an architectural gateway, Farmgate, to a vast experimental agricultural zone in the city.

The destruction of Khamarbari is no less a cultural suicide. When will we ever learn from history?

Adnan Morshed, PhD, is an architect, architectural historian, and urbanist, and currently serving as Chairperson of the Department of Architecture at BRAC University. He is the author of *Impossible Heights: Skyscrapers, Flight, and the Master Builder* (2015) and *Oculus: A Decade of Insights in Bangladeshi Affairs* (2012). He can be reached at amorshed@bracu.ac.bd.

Md Samiur Rahman Bhuiyan and Tasmia Kamal Prama who teach at the Department of Architecture, BRAC University contributed in this article.

Prolonging the Rohingya crisis will work to China's disadvantage



THE Rohingya crisis, if not resolved soon, may haunt the entire Southeast Asian region. And China is a critical player in all

this. It is in China's best interest as well as that of the region to bring about a sustainable conflict resolution without losing any time.

Once the ARSA resistance gains momentum and links up with international terrorist networks there would be a real threat of radicalisation in this region. The difficult terrain of mountains and forests is most suitable to sustain long-term guerrilla warfare both against Myanmar and China, and that would be extremely costly to endure.

Prominent military generals have conceded that there is no military solution to neutralising radicalised groups. The deep-rooted issues that give rise to them must be addressed.

If the past is any reference, ignoring the causes of radicalisation has fuelled the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Middle East. Since 9/11, instead of addressing the grievances and injustices, the Western powers undertook a military strategy called the War on Terror to quell rebellion. The strategy has failed even after spending hundreds of billions of dollars for over a decade. Terrorism has increased many folds since then.

Tunisia has proved that a conflict resolution is the most powerful deterrent against radicalisation and violence. As the previously conflicting groups came together to establish a functioning democracy, a polarised

and confrontational society became more pluralistic and tolerant. The case of neighbouring Nepal is an example of that constructive process and so is El Salvador in the 1990s. The Balkans have a similar story.

China is the biggest stakeholder in this turmoil. A radicalised region is going to be a major roadblock for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as well as to maintain the gas-oil pipelines carrying 80 percent of China's imports that come from the Middle East and Africa.

For a peaceful, stable region nothing short of a comprehensive approach is going to work. That means Myanmar should take Rohingyas back, giving them full citizenship status, respecting their rights and dignity under the supervision of the international community. Rohingyas need to be rehabilitated, their homes rebuilt and their lives restored.

A few isolated terrorist attacks were used as an excuse to commit crimes against humanity and unleash a campaign of ethnic cleansing on the entire Rohingya population. Satellite imageries have confirmed that many areas of Rakhine were burned to ashes. Countless Rohingyas have lost everything they had. The horrible tales of torture and persecution, family members being killed in front of their very eyes and babies thrown into fire in front of mothers, have been echoed from one end of the vast refugee camps to the other.

This crisis indeed is going to be a stain on the leadership of China and other countries for a long time to come. Even a drop of conscience should compel Chinese policymakers to act responsibly for about one million refugees—according to the



Even a drop of conscience should compel Chinese policymakers to act responsibly for about one million refugees are living in dire and desperate conditions in Bangladesh. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

most recent UN assessment—are living in dire and desperate conditions in Bangladesh, a poor country itself.

Looking back, when Rakhine residents including Rohingyas revealed the damages they faced due to the Chinese gas-oil pipeline project (from Rakhine to Yunnan province of China), had China given the local residents fair compensation for the expropriated lands for China's pipeline project, things might have turned out differently. The compensations for Rakhine residents would have been only a tiny fraction of the enor-

mous benefit China would receive every year by bringing in gas and oil through Rakhine instead of through the distant Strait of Malacca and the risky South China Sea.

A stable and developed Rakhine would have been conducive to China's expressed greater vision of the regional developments in which China would remain an indispensable and dominant player. The possibility of a win-win state of affairs was nipped in the bud. Now, a costly quagmire in the form of a mega humanitarian crisis has emerged.

How costly can it become?

China does not need to go far to look for an answer. The story of Vietnam is good enough. More than half a century ago, if America had spent USD 500 million to help build the infrastructure of Vietnam (then an American ally) after the World War II devastation, and addressed the economic crisis the Vietnamese were facing, as was suggested by an expert and American official posted then in Vietnam and as Ho Chi Minh himself was eager to work with America at that time, the entire Vietnam war could have been avoided. Instead, the American

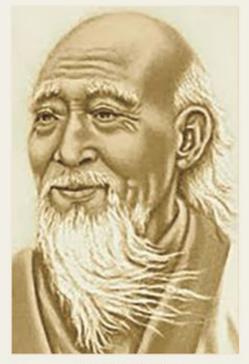
leadership abandoned the path of helping others who needed it most—the path advocated both by President Woodrow Wilson in the 1920s and Franklin D Roosevelt in the 1940s to help build a peaceful and progressive world—and embarked on a path of prejudice, cynicism and military confrontation. The vigorous persuasion of the vested interests, the military industrial complex, and the neoconservatives using fear-mongering has helped derail the decision-making process of the superpower. The consequence: a futile war that took about 55,000 American lives, killed over one million people in the region, and cost American taxpayers 2,000 times (USD 1 trillion in 2011 valuation) that of the meagre USD 500 million that was to be given to help Vietnam. The trust and political capital that this sum of money could have earned at that time would have brought about new heights of America's position in the world and a paradigm shift in our time. A golden opportunity was squandered in the early 1950s, which, if used, could have brought the Cold War to an end much sooner. Moreover, it could have achieved many of the foreign policy goals at the fraction of the price the US paid later.

This is the price for deviating from principles, for ignoring the sufferings of a people, and for having the arrogance to think that military power is going to fix everything. China and Myanmar today have a lot to learn from America's blunder.

Ruby Amatulla is Executive Director of the US-based Muslims for Peace, Justice and Progress, and the Bangladesh-based Women for Good Governance.

QUOTABLE Quote

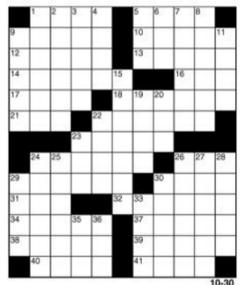
All streams flow to the sea because it is lower than they are. Humility gives it its power. If you want to govern the people, you must place yourself below them. If you want to lead the people, you must learn how to follow them.



LAO TZU
ANCIENT CHINESE PHILOSOPHER AND WRITER

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Snapshots
 - 5 Some nest eggs
 - 9 "Tiny Bubbles" singer
 - 10 Halloween costume
 - 12 Weasel's cousin
 - 13 "Rigoletto," for one
 - 14 Halloween hauntings
 - 16 Granola bit
 - 17 Department store section
 - 18 Locker art
 - 21 "You - Here"
 - 22 Halloween costume
 - 23 Composer Copland
 - 24 Halloween costume
 - 26 Halloween flyer
 - 29 Twilight sight
 - 30 " - Lisa"
 - 31 Building wing
 - 32 Halloween hauntings
 - 34 Chosen few
 - 37 Protractor measure
 - 38 Halloween costume
 - 39 Hog holders
 - 40 Abundant
 - 41 Casual tops
 - 7 Went to a restaurant
 - 8 Predicament
 - 9 Church doctrine
 - 11 Toppers
 - 15 Halloween hauntings
 - 19 Magnetic metal
 - 20 Palindromic nickname
 - 22 Lacking color
 - 23 Crunch targets
 - 24 Maw
 - 25 Broadcast as it happens
 - 26 Dance at
 - 27 Low joints
 - 28 Zaps, in a way
 - 29 Future flower
 - 30 - Carlo
 - 33 Days gone by
 - 35 Cravat
 - 36 Shade tree
- DOWN**
- 1 Commotion
 - 2 Chant
 - 3 Game with rooks
 - 4 Classify
 - 5 - Jima
 - 6 Tear



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

STEW LIKES
TENET INERT
UTTER ANGRY
NOR EAR GAL
GNAWAT GENE
SPACEPORT
ILIAD
DAVENPORT
SOLE TATERS
HOP ROY MAP
IDAHO ABOVE
ELCID SEVEN
SEATS DELT

BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

