

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## Police HQ won't take blame for misdeeds

*Isn't it abdication of responsibility?*

WHILE directing the higher command echelons of the police to take stern actions against its errant members, the Police HQ's refusal to take responsibility for misdeeds of any police personnel is surprising. Why then is there a chain of command within the police? Doesn't the function of command include oversight of activities of those being commanded? And as an automatic extension to that, aren't those in position of command then supposed to take responsibility for the actions—both good and bad—of their subordinates?

Regrettably, a culture has developed within the force where involvement in unlawful activities by some of its members has become the norm. And the police will require time to purge such a culture and get rid of the bad apples within the force who are responsible for bringing it about. However, what must be admitted is that such a culture has not developed overnight, but has been established one step at a time, mainly because the policymakers in the force have not taken a long-term plan to purge a pervasive culture from the force. Mere punishment is not enough, since in most cases the nature of the penalties imposed on the guilty members rarely acts as a deterrent.

But be that as it may, we are encouraged by the Police HQ's instruction for taking "stern action" against members involved in criminal activities. And we do hope that is followed through; replacing the usual practice of handing out a small slap on the wrist which will, under no circumstances, clean up the force. How the police function is crucial for the state of law and order in any country and hence, the police always have a big responsibility on their shoulders. It cannot have bad apples that spoil its credibility.

## Planned urbanisation hamstrung

*Empower local governments with expertise*

EXPERTS at an international conference held recently in Dhaka have identified the lack of professionals at the local government institutions as a fundamental barrier to planned urbanisation in the country. As of now, out of the country's 328 municipalities, only 30 have a town planner each and there is not even a post for an architect. No wonder unplanned urbanisation has been taking its toll on our cities, especially Dhaka.

Studies done by experts have also found that only 20 percent of our qualified town planners are currently involved in town planning whereas each of the 172 first-category municipalities is supposed to have one town planner.

According to 1992 service rules, the local government ministry has the power to appoint town planners and architects to the municipalities. The ministry must use its decision-making power. At the same time, our municipalities and city corporations must be empowered with proper funds and administrative authority. Moreover, a national urban development council and a national commission should be formed and a national urbanisation policy be made for effective functioning of the local government institutions, as suggested by the experts.

Unless these basic demands made by the professionals are met, the government's initiatives to develop the country and achieve the sustainable development goals with regard to urbanisation, are bound to fail. For planned urbanisation, we need comprehensive planning. And to do that, city planners, architects and the local government institutions must work in coordination. Already, our capital city Dhaka has been ranked as one of the least liveable cities in the world. It is high time that we took steps for planned urbanisation of our cities.

# Letter from London

**KNOT SO TRUE**



RUBANA HUQ

Dear reader,

I have not written for the last three months. In this time, I have looked down and noticed signs of tremors in my own hands. I have wondered why one side of my face feels numb, why I wake up with a headache and why it feels as though life has come to a screeching halt. My brain has also suffered a deep insult because I am tied to my partner Annis in flesh and spirit. But instead of asking why life unfolds the way it does, or why it arbitrarily serves cruelty on its platter, I have put a hold on asking questions to which I have no answers.

While many of us lead our lives and work independently, there's always the other to look forward to, to come home to, irrespective of the noise of the outside world. These are private moments not to be shared. But when the private becomes public, when the line between the two blurs, every bit of the personal becomes the subject of public query.

My husband is no longer a private man. For the last two years, he has been holding a public office, serving as the mayor of North Dhaka. Quite expectedly, after he took oath, he most happily and willfully got trapped in the process, perennially obsessing about the ceilings that could be raised. I consoled myself—very few have the opportunity of being around and living with such rare and passionate performers. While active within their private lives, their attempt to remain relevant in the contemporary landscape, with the hope of contributing to a better tomorrow for the "tomorrow people", is exemplary. Living with them is both rewarding and challenging for obvious reasons. While these overachievers seek to push ceilings and exceed their own expectations, there are also many who cherish a walk by the sea, look forward to the noise of love, feel the dirty grass, and enjoy singular silence.

Your columnist's life today is caught between the two, in a limbo and frozen in time. And today, as my husband is strapped to his own world, disconnected from workplace clatter, the fresh *cha*, the noise, the arguments, the stress, the pride, the remorse, the sense of failure and momentary ease, I find myself wondering whether life is a worthy price to pay for

passion. To me, the answer is "yes". My usual dose of "This too shall pass" philosophy at times ceases to work. The promise of tomorrow often seems like an overreach. Over the last three months, while aimlessly walking the streets of London, trying to catch up with breaking news, debates, controversies and often disappointing discourses, I have tried to scratch the surface of what a "brain" can do. It's natural. When a loved one is involved, without expertise, we indulge in Google, scholarly articles, rewarding consultations and opinions. Without proper knowledge, how far can one go, really? But while there are endless questions about the brain, neurology has no definite answers to what it can or cannot do.

In the end, it's still all left to Time for the sceptics, and God for the believers. In the

invisibility. Even today, I am staying loyal to my role and keeping with our routine. Every morning, I read out the news to Annis, chuckling with every Trumpian tweet as he would, raising eyebrows with every questionable incident, and occasionally swearing as he would. I assume he is listening.

This week we transition to a new phase of being moved out of Critical Care to a High Dependency Unit. After a few days there, we move to a ward. Friendly neurologists tell me that familiarity heals the brain fastest and that a white ceiling in the ward is not the best site for someone ill. I believe them. Annis loves the sound of *adda*. Often tired after a full day's work, he would fall asleep on the couch to the noise of the chatter from his daughter or his friends. Ideally home is where he should be. Rescuing the brain is a process that demands time,

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end, in spite of the claim to being Homo Deus, we all end up being believers of the Higher Consciousness, simply because there is no justifiable rationale to prove otherwise. For a believer, the answers to very complicated questions are effortlessly simple. For a believer, it's "whatever happens, happens for the best". What else can I do? Prophesising dooms, optimism disappoints, rationality kills hope. Thus, I just live with the hope of watching a meaningful recovery and take into account his wishes to impact, change and contribute.

With time, I am learning not to regret not having taken enough vacations or for not having indulged in more leisurely activities together. My husband does what inspires him. And I, for the last three decades, have been his complying partner. I have happily hugged the backstage satisfaction of relative

stimulation, nursing and faith. And so be it.

While Annis takes a break from his daily chores, I cannot afford to lose heart, sight, vision or hope. After all, he will have a lot to catch up with after he is up and who's going to be his best newsfeed source if not me?

Life stretches way beyond barely living. Although life courts uncertainties, it has its own rhythm of returning favours. While Annis steps into his new phase of recovery, my hands are clasped in faith, hoping for a more meaningful return for him. Please continue to pray for him with me. I will continue writing my weekly column from London, sharing a perspective on the current times, without the danger of proximity or bias.

As ever.

Rubana Huq is managing director of Mohammadi Group.

# State of climate change discourse in the United States

**POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**



SALEEMUL HUQ

I have just returned from a three-week lecture tour of universities in the United States which took me to New York (Columbia University), Washington, DC (George

Washington University), Maryland (University of Maryland) and Nashville (Vanderbilt University). I also participated in the weeklong annual Resilience Academy at the Woodrow Wilson Centre and gave a talk at the World Resources Institute in Washington, DC during which I met a number of scholars, funders, policymakers and practitioners from academia, foundations, the World Bank, USAID, the State Department, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as well as Congress.

I will share below my impression of the state of climate change discourse in the country, in light of the views expressed by different stakeholders at federal, state and local levels.

The first and most obvious point involves the non-acceptance of climate change by the president and his head of EPA, which has reached such a point that even the words "climate change" have become taboo in all

change." However, by making the name change and discussing more practical ways of addressing coastal resilience, it was indeed possible to hold very constructive discussions with a wide range of stakeholders on how to deal with such extreme weather events in future.

This leads to my second observation, which is that the people on the ground, who have to deal with

probably attributable to human-induced climate change having enhanced global atmospheric and ocean temperatures this year. They are, therefore, also willing to accept that these extreme events are likely to be more frequent in future and it makes sense to be better prepared for them.

The third stakeholder group with whom I spent some time were the students and faculty members of

change was not the issue; there was a heightened sense of anxiety due to the increase in anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant rhetoric amongst some Americans. While most of them were quite well-settled and doing well economically, some of them did admit to feeling more anxious, especially for young girls who wear hijab.

I will conclude with my impression of where things stand in the US with



Category 5 storm Hurricane Irma left a trail of destruction across the Caribbean.

PHOTO: REUTERS

*The people of the US are taking a much more pragmatic approach with regard to the need to enhance resilience in the face of the increased frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events as well as investments in cleaner renewable energy rather than dirty fossil fuels.*

federal websites and documents. We learned this the hard way as we had originally named our theme for this year's Academy "Resilience to Climate Change"—but our hosts in Washington advised us to change it to "Enhancing Coastal Resilience to Extreme Weather Events" in light of the succession of hurricanes that had recently hit Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico. By doing so we were able to attract participants from all the federal agencies who might not have been able to attend a meeting on "climate

such extreme events, particularly at the state and city levels, are quite pragmatic and willing to learn from other countries on what works best in tackling these problems. Hence, they were very open to learning lessons from other countries, including Bangladesh, as well as sharing their own lessons. This is because most sensible people in the US now accept that the succession of four category-four and -five hurricanes in the Atlantic and Caribbean in one season was indeed unprecedented, and was

several universities where the atmosphere was refreshingly open to discussion of human-induced climate change as a reality and trying to find solutions through research on both mitigation and adaptation. It was also evident that this is taking place without much hindrance (although some academics did admit that they did not use the term "climate change" anymore when applying for federal research funds!).

There was also a general interest from several universities in developing collaborative research, especially on adaptation, with Bangladesh and in sending research students to study here for master's and PhDs as well as taking students from Bangladesh. There was a special interest in trying to link top-down satellite-based big data collection in the US with more ground-reality based research in Bangladesh.

And finally, there were Bangladeshi expatriates in the US for whom climate

regard to climate change discourse and actions under President Trump. My impression is that despite his anti-climate change rhetoric, the people of the US, by and large, are taking a much more pragmatic approach with regard to the need to enhance resilience in the face of the increased frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events as well as investments in cleaner renewable energy rather than dirty fossil fuels. The latter is a purely market-driven, profit-making strategy, whereas investment in renewable energy, such as wind and solar, is creating more green jobs and making more profits than coal and other fossil fuels. Thus, despite the anti-climate change rhetoric of their president, the people of the US are indeed tackling climate change in their own way, even if they don't call it that.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Waterlogging in Dhaka must end

Every year during the monsoon season, Dhaka's streets are flooded after just a few minutes of rain. During the dry season, this problem can be solved by setting up a proper drainage system across the city. And for this to happen, the rivers and canals need to be recovered from the clutches of the powerful people.

Plastic bottles and bags should also be recycled. These items end up clogging the drains and rivers, blocking the flow of water during the monsoon season.

I hope the city mayors will live up to their promises of mitigating this never-ending problem of flooding and waterlogging in the city.

Aminur Rahim, Mohakhali



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN