

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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Stop patronising reckless driving Bus operators must be held accountable

WE deeply mourn for the two college students whose lives were lost on Sunday for the lawlessness that plagues our roads. For the recklessness of two buses, which were racing with each other near the Airport Road flyover, Rajib, aged 18, and Mim, aged 17, both students of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College, had to pay the price. A further nine were also critically injured when the bus ploughed through the crowd. We hope they recover.

Our shipping minister's flippant remarks about the incident only enrage us further—how can he, as an elected official and a transport leader, suggest that too much was being made of the incident, drawing the example of the recent road crash in India which killed 33? Neither are his assurances of justice very assuring, judging from past examples. This was in no way an ordinary accident—it was outright manslaughter.

For years now, we have been trying to attract the attention of the authorities about the complete absurdity that is our roads. With almost certain impunity, bus operators have been free to do whatever they please—from flouting traffic rules and racing with each other in an unhealthy competition for picking up the maximum number of passengers, to hiring unskilled drivers and operating street-unsafe vehicles. This has been possible because of the patronage and backing of influential leaders who have a stake in the sector.

Only a few days back, we witnessed how the bus staff of another operator threw the unconscious body of a student into a canal to avoid the responsibility of taking him for medical care. And as the father of one of the victims in the latest incident, who was himself a bus driver, said, hiring unskilled drivers is the trend in the sector. With so many irregularities, and the leaders being blind to them, can we expect justice? We hope that the drivers whose negligence caused these deaths will be punished and that the victims and their families paid due reparation. Most of all, we hope that this serves as a wakeup call to transport leaders and the government that the sector needs urgent reform and that our roads and lives cannot continue to be at the mercy of these people who in effect are driving with a license to kill.

Pathetically low conviction rate of traffickers

Impunity allows them to get away

WE are quite dismayed to know that between February 2012 and June 2018, despite a recorded number of 4,152 cases of human trafficking, only 25 people have been convicted. To understand the implications of such a low conviction rate, let us point out that these cases involve the trafficking of over five thousand men, a thousand women and over 800 children. Yesterday was World Day against Trafficking in Persons and this is a poor show of our commitment to stop this nefarious trade in humans.

The gravity of the situation has been regularly reported by the media including this paper. A study by Indian Border Security Force states that around 50,000 Bangladeshi girls are trafficked to or through India every year. In 2015, mass graves of Rohingya and Bangladeshis were found in bordering areas of Malaysia and Thailand. There have been extensive reports of human trafficking gangs in Libya and Iran who have kidnapped Bangladeshis seeking jobs abroad and held them hostage for ransom.

Human trafficking is one of the most difficult crimes to combat because of the complex nexus between various actors that include the actual trafficking gangs, corrupt law enforcers and public officials as well as very influential people. It is complex because it occurs across borders. But every country that is affected by this crime must do its best to make sure these gangs are caught and convicted. Bangladesh has enacted the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act in 2012, but the pathetic number of convictions since then is an indication that there are loopholes in the legal process and a culture of impunity that allows those who are at the helm of these rings, to get away. Seven tribunals were apparently supposed to be set up by the government to exclusively deal with cases of human trafficking. But till date this has not materialised.

Unless the investigation process is efficient and thorough and until the masterminds of human trafficking are caught and convicted, this terrible curse will continue to rob our people of livelihoods, dignity and sometimes, their very lives.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Punish Payel's killers

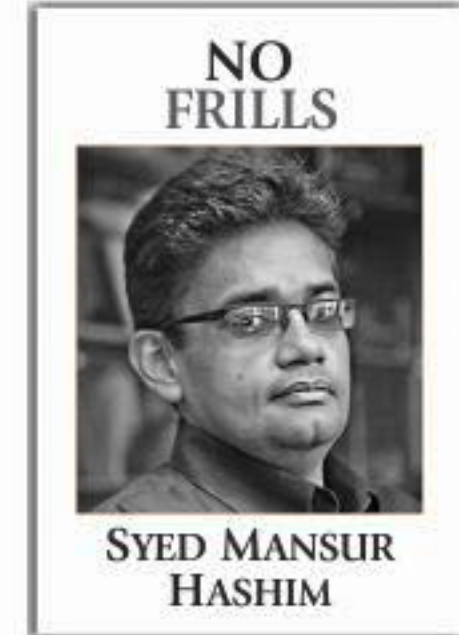
The death of Saidur Rahman Payel, a student of North South University, who was brutally killed by workers of Hanif Paribahan, was absolutely heart-wrenching. We, as a society, must be ashamed of what happened. And we owe his parents an apology.

What kind of a society do we live in where something like this can happen? And what is even more shocking is that no one from the government has as yet come out with any statement. Neither has the NSU authorities expressed any protest against such brutality.

All the big transport owners are well connected with government high-ups and law enforcing agencies. This is why no stern actions are taken against recklessness, and why this continues to happen. In this case, however, we must demand action. We must demand that the culprits be exemplarily punished.

Tabibul Islam, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Recycled plastic for roads



NO FRILLS
SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THE idea of using discarded plastic to build roads was brought to fruition by a company called VolkerWessels in 2015. But the country where roads are now being built with this new technology is India. Indeed, the man who made it possible was Dr Rajagopalan Vasudevan, a professor of chemistry at the Thiagarajar College of Engineering in Madurai, who was honoured with one of India's highest civilian awards, the Padma Shri, in January 2018 for his ground-breaking research on re-using plastic waste in road construction.

Dr Vasudevan perfected the techniques to transform solid plastic into a molten condition which could effectively be mixed with bitumen, the black tarry substance that is combined with gravel to lay roads. The bitumen-plastic combination strengthens the road by making it both durable and flexible, and the plastic in the compound helps prevent rain water which in turn helps prevent structural defects such as potholes. The shredded plastic came from all the usual suspects: water bottles, single-use bags, chocolate wrappers with a thickness of less than 50 microns. According to Dr Vasudevan, "When using plastic as a binder, we're reducing the quantity of bitumen that is normally utilised for road laying by 6-8%." (*The Guardian*) Whereas a regular road needs 10 tonnes of bitumen for each kilometre, a plastic road would require only nine tonnes of bitumen for coating, and this means solid waste management for plastics has found a new way to be useful.

Disposal of plastic waste is a global problem and innovative ways such as this are being implemented in several cities across India. For instance, the Jamshedpur Utility and Services Company (JUSCO) has been using plastic waste drawn from polybags to biscuit packets, which are combined with bitumen to make roads. The JUSCO has constructed 12 to 15 kilometres of road in the steel city utilising plastic waste.



Plastic roads are quite the rage in India now.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

According to JUSCO, the savings in bitumen for every one km long and 4m wide road are Rs 50,000. It is not only the cost savings that are the selling point for this technology. Apparently, the quality and longevity of roads made with plastic waste is twice that of bitumen roads and those require no maintenance for the first five years.

The implications of this material are not lost on the Indian government. Back in 2015, the government made it mandatory to use plastic waste in construction of highways in India. The implementation of the regulation will of course take time as some states lag behind in segregating plastic waste. Nonetheless, the fact that 11 states across India have used the technology to build some 100,000 km of roads is a testament to its strength and durability. It certainly goes a long way in finding a commercial use for plastic waste.

In Bangladesh, we have seen what havoc plastic waste has caused over the years. With our inadequate and largely unplanned waste management practices, particularly in the urban areas, these

wastes (which are non-biodegradable) are a major headache for the city planners. According to the Waste Concern, the rise in plastic consumption in urban areas increased substantially from 5.56 kg per person in 2005 to 14.9 kg per person in 2014. The result is an exponential growth in the volume of waste. Indeed, according to their data, plastic waste in Dhaka City increased from 1.74 percent in overall landfills in 1992 to 4.1 percent in 2005 and 6.5 percent in 2014. Plastic consumption is increasing every day but we are failing in waste management. There is a general absence of legal framework, institutional structure and industrial base for recycling to handle the waste that is being generated. Whatever waste recycling we see in our municipal areas is being done with a commercial outlook where a minuscule portion of plastic waste is being shredded for export. While the government has been trying out the 3R (reduce, reuse and recycle) initiative in Dhaka and Chittagong cities, it is merely the starting point of much bigger initiatives that the government must

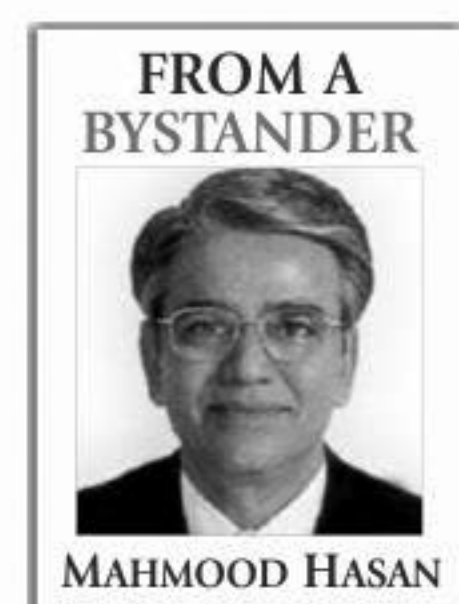
undertake.

Today, our roads are made primarily with bricks that are essentially made from clay. Hence during the rainy season and floods, roads become undone, requiring expensive repair which is invariably washed out during the next rainy season. While a debate rages on about substituting plastic, we should take lessons from neighbouring India which is transforming this environmentally-degrading product and putting it to good use. It would solve two problems with one stone: we could find a ready use for the increasing solid plastic waste that has no place to go, and reduce the maintenance cost of essential infrastructure, i.e. roads. Naturally, there will be a lot of resistance from brick kiln owners but what have we to lose (and everything to gain) from this exercise? Here's a clear prospect of having roads that are strong, durable and will at least free us from the growing mountains of plastic waste.

Syed Mansur Hashim is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

BRICS SUMMIT 2018

Reminding the world of the importance of multilateralism



FROM A BYSTANDER
MAHMOOD HASAN

THE 10th BRICS summit (July 25-27, 2018) has just concluded in Johannesburg, South Africa. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa hosted China's President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Brazilian President Michel Temer. Eighteen African leaders, along with leaders from Turkey, Argentina and Jamaica, were also invited as guests. The main theme of the conference was "Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the 4th Industrial Revolution."

The summit came at a time when global trade war looms large—threatening world trade and commerce. With the summit President Ramaphosa also celebrated the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela, acknowledging his contribution to democracy and service to humanity.

trade war by working together to build an open world economy. Xi said trade wars should be rejected "because there will be no winner". Understandably global trade issues dominated the conference.

The 102-paragraph Final Declaration issued after the concluding session amply reflects the worries and anxieties of the five leaders. The declaration divided into four broad segments dealt with strengthening multilateralism, enhancing globalisation, reinforcing international peace and security, and strengthening international cooperation.

On strengthening multilateralism the summit raised several issues calling for greater cohesion in global-governance, i.e. stronger role of the United Nations in conflict resolution and representation in other world organisations. It raised the issues of the Syrian conflict, Afghan civil war, Palestinian-Israeli conflict, climate change, terrorism, etc. where the United Nations should play a strong role in establishing peace and ensuring security. With regard denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula the Declaration called for a peaceful diplomatic solution. As for JCPOA, the BRICS leaders

Interestingly while the summit demonstrated apparent signs of unity against the US-led challenges to the global economy, the two largest members—China and India—were actually vying for influence over the African continent. Before attending the summit, Xi Jinping made a quick tour of Senegal and Rwanda. Evidently Xi was drumming up support for his Belt and Road Initiative. Not to stay behind, Narendra Modi also visited Rwanda and Uganda before arriving at Johannesburg. Despite the informal summit bonhomie at Wuhan in late April—China and India remain rivals. But the fact remains that both China and India the two most populous nations and rapidly growing economies of BRICS—need to cement their energies to confront global challenges as their interests are convergent, at least on economic issues.

China is petrified that a trade war with US will cripple its growing economy, which is based on exporting to the consumer markets around the world. America constitutes the largest market—almost 20 percent (USD 431 billion, 2017) of Chinese exports went to that market. Xi Jinping needs Modi's support more to face the challenges from America, because the other three members do not have as much clout on the world economy as India.

Russia is not fully integrated with the global economy and certainly at odds with the West. However, after his recent talks with Donald Trump (Helsinki, July 16) Putin has been looking to enhance Russia's political position globally and within BRICS. But with economic sanctions over its head Moscow's ability to manoeuvre is limited.

Brazil's economy has not fully recovered (GDP growth one percent, 2017) from the depression it suffered in 2015 and 2016. Michel Temer's tenuous economy is threatened by various knock-on effects from the American trade and currency war. With a ballooning debt problem, Temer is seeking financial support from the New Development Bank to help Brazil's balance of payments.

And South Africa with a much smaller economy (GDP USD 280 billion, 2017) does not carry any global influence. Ramaphosa welcomed the Belt and Road Initiative as it is likely to bring fresh Chinese investment into his stagnated economy.

BRICS was formed in 2009 at a time when the world economy was going through a serious depression. The idea was to pursue the "other options" and reverse some of the evil trends and revive the global economy. Critics say that despite 10 summits the block which has 41 percent of world population, 23 percent of world GDP worth about USD 40.6 trillion and 18 percent of world trade—its impact and progress on the world stage has been rather slow.

As the world economy is going through profound transition and changes, the BRICS summit has once again reminded the world the importance of multilateralism and globalisation. Actually, unilateralism and trade wars do not increase the world's wealth—it only makes nations and people poorer.

Mahmood Hasan is former Ambassador and Secretary.



PHOTO: AFP

The American administration driven by aggressive nationalism has actually threatened imposing high tariffs on imports from China and European allies. These policies of Washington have seriously upset the global economic system that was devised after WWII. There are acrimonious debates among members of the Western alliance that reflect that the West is in serious dysfunction—both on global economic issues and with security matters. The recent G7 Summit in Quebec, Canada (June 8-9) and the NATO summit in Brussels (July 11-12) speaks loudly that the Western alliance is arguably in decline.

China, the second largest economy in the world, is actually the driving force behind BRICS. Xi Jinping, emphasising the importance of globalisation called upon member countries to resist the growing global

emphatically called on all parties to fully comply with the obligations of the agreement.

On global economic growth the leaders expressed concerns as the global trading system is facing serious challenges. The statement read, "We recognise that the multilateral trading system is facing unprecedented challenges. We underscore the importance of an open world economy." It called for strengthening the WTO mechanism to resolve trade disputes. The leaders welcomed the successful test-run of the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) and asked for closer cooperation between the IMF and CRA. The leaders also noted the role played by the New Development Bank in catalysing private sector financing of private sector infrastructure and investment.