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FOUNDER EDITOR
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PM's recommendations merit serious consideration

Prosecution of perpetrators should also start

WE welcome our prime minister's three recommendations at a meeting on Global Compact for Refugees to end the Rohingya crisis. Being one of the few world leaders who have welcomed thousands of refugees fleeing horrific persecution, she is more than qualified to make such recommendations. She has pointed out that the first thing Myanmar must do is scrap the discriminatory laws, policies and practices against the minority group. The second recommendation—to build trust, guaranteeing protection and a pathway for citizenship for the Rohingyas—is also crucial to ensure the safe and dignified return to their homeland. Her third recommendation is to call for accountability and justice for the atrocious crimes committed in Myanmar as highlighted by the UN Human Rights Council.

Unfortunately, the stance of Myanmar's government is not very encouraging regarding its willingness to resolve the crisis that they themselves have created. It is disheartening that Myanmar has chosen to reject the UN fact-finding mission's call for the International Criminal Court (ICC) to prosecute members of the top brass in Myanmar's army for genocide against the Rohingya people. The army chief's statement that the Rohingyas are outsiders and Bengalis, and that the law that fails to recognise the group as part of Myanmar's citizenry would remain, contradicts the repatriation treaty between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Although Myanmar is not a signatory to the treaty that recognises the authority of the ICC, the international court can begin investigation of the crimes committed by members of Myanmar's army against the Rohingya people. The ICC has jurisdiction to prosecute individuals accused of international crimes, in this case genocide, when national courts are unwilling or unable to prosecute criminals and when the UNSC refers situations to the Court. In this case both conditions apply.

It goes without saying that the situation in the Rohingya camps is dire and unsustainable with international funding dropping and the host country's resources being overextended. It is the international community's responsibility to make sure that the perpetrators of this genocide are held accountable and that the Rohingya refugees can return safely to Myanmar as its citizens.

Empower NRCC

It can't combat river encroachers otherwise

THE media has for the last few decades highlighted the sorry state of our rivers, i.e. how powerful, vested quarters have taken advantage of the fact that the National River Conservation Commission (NRCC) was never given any legal or institutional capacity. The NRCC lacks teeth to do anything against polluters or river grabbers. Environmentalists have been voicing their concerns about this issue for many years, but the sad reality is that authorities are powerless to act because the NRCC cannot take any action in its present form.

It is not like there aren't enough laws to protect rivers. But who is going to implement those on behalf of the government, if not the NRCC? And whilst policymakers choose to turn a blind eye to the issue, we have thousands of fisherfolk out of jobs on the Buriganga River which is essentially a dead river. We see polluters wreaking havoc on other rivers like Norai, Debdholai and Balu rivers.

The media has covered the dual menace of pollution and river encroachment for years and yet nothing substantial has happened. The Buriganga may recover somewhere down the line as the tannery industry has been relocated to Savar, but the problem has basically been shifted to another river—Dhaleshwari—and while fishermen may one day fish again on the Buriganga, we may see new media reports in the coming years when the Dhaleshwari too begins to die due to pollution. If we are to save our rivers which are considered the lifeline of urban centres like Dhaka, then the time to act is now.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Digital Security Bill 2018

The much debated Digital Security Bill 2018 has recently been passed in the parliament with a provision that allows police officials to search or arrest anyone without any warrant. Certain sections of the Act pose serious threats to freedom of expression and independent journalism. People fear that the law will be used to gag the media. Moreover, this law will also be a threat to people's security. Opposition political parties have criticised the government for passing this controversial bill which they termed unconstitutional. It needs greater unity of all political parties, journalists as well as ordinary people to uphold people's rights.

Md Yamin Khan, Faridpur



ILLUSTRATION: AMIYA HALDER

The past still calls us to save the future



THE OVERTON WINDOW
ERESH OMAR JAMAL

THE United Nations International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons falls on the anniversary of an incident that happened in 1983, when the world was just

inches away from accidentally entering what would most likely have been a nuclear holocaust. It was during the time when relations between the US and USSR were at an all-time low that a Lieutenant Colonel in the Soviet Air Defence Forces in charge of an early warning radar system near Moscow, refused to follow instructions in response to not one, but two false warnings (unbeknownst to him at the time) showing that the US had launched nuclear missiles in the direction of the Soviet Union ("The man who saved the world", *The Daily Star*, September 22, 2017).

The name of that courageous man was Stanislav Petrov. But to many today, he is known simply as "The Man who Saved the World."

That incident should serve as a serious warning to the dangers posed to the world and all its inhabitants by the existence of nuclear weapons and the possibility of a nuclear Armageddon brought about by happenstance as a result. Besides that, it would also be extremely naïve to believe that a nuclear war could never be started intentionally either.

For example, a review of the US general nuclear war plan by the Joint Staff in 1964 recently published by the George Washington University's National Security Archive project, shows how the Pentagon studied options "to destroy the USSR and China as viable societies" using nuclear weapons.

The war plan, conducted two years after the Cuban Missile Crisis, conceived the destruction of the Soviet Union "as a viable society" by annihilating 70 percent of its industrial floor space during pre-emptive and retaliatory nuclear strikes and included a slightly tweaked plan of attack against China, given that it was largely an agrarian society back then. According to the plan,



UN sculpture of a dragon created from fragments of Soviet SS-20 and United States Pershing nuclear missiles being slain, depicting the elimination of nuclear weapons.

PHOTO: UN/MILTON GRANT

the US would wipe out 30 major Chinese cities, killing off 30 percent of the nation's urban population and reducing its industrial capabilities by around 50 percent.

The Joint Staff had proposed to use "population loss as the primary yardstick for effectiveness in destroying the enemy society with only collateral attention to industrial damage." This meant that as long as urban workers and managers were killed, the actual damage to industrial targets "might not be as important," researchers at the George Washington University said.

Although the number of expected casualties was not specified in the 1964 plans, researchers noted that an earlier estimate from 1961 projected that a US attack would kill 71 percent of residents in major Soviet urban centres and 53 percent of residents in Chinese ones.

In regards to similar plans conceived by the Soviet Union and its allies, a map and other documents discovered in Poland show how members of the Warsaw Pact had aimed to launch a large-scale invasion on their Cold War adversaries to the west, aided by the use of nuclear weapons. Moreover, according to a Chinese historian quoted by *The Telegraph* (UK), in 1969 the

Soviet Union was on the "brink of launching a nuclear attack against China" only to back down "after the US told Moscow such a move would start World War Three."

What this shows is that despite the large-scale ignorance of the general masses, the world has come close to being destroyed by nuclear weapons on a number of occasions in the past. Thus, there is no reason to believe that it would not come close to that point again in the future, especially given the turbulence that we see in the world today.

This is why it is extremely important to, first, have nuclear armed powers constantly maintain channels of discussion to avoid any "accidental" collisions that would involve the use of nuclear weapons and, second, to slowly rid the world of nuclear weapons altogether. To that end, the announced denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula is indeed a big step in the right direction.

Also, following the heightened danger caused by the unilateral withdrawal of the US from key nuclear treaties under the Bush administration, US President Donald Trump's announcement to work with Russian President Vladimir Putin to "denuclearise the world" during the

Helsinki Summit earlier this year, too, was extremely encouraging. Although, realistically, the world is still a long way away from achieving anything even close to that, the fact that two world leaders have publicly acknowledged that nuclear weapons (or any weapons for that matter) pose a serious danger to our planet should be seen as a positive step.

This year's International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons is being observed as world leaders gather in New York for the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly, and is just prior to deliberations of the UN Disarmament and International Security Committee starting and continuing throughout October 2018. Which means that now is the perfect time for them to draw from the various lessons of the past, and to begin working together for the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

One can only hope that 35 years after Stanislav Petrov saved our world from complete destruction, his example will still speak to us loud and clear, reminding us of how blessed we are to have this world as our home, calling us to save it today, as he did long before.

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The prospects and power of growth

Notes from Summer Davos in Tianjin



KNOT SO TRUE
RUBANA HUQ

THE high-speed train from Hong Kong to Mainland began four days ago. It will now only take 50 minutes to reach Guangzhou from Hong Kong. So one could

effectively have lunch at Guangzhou and be back by the end of the day, if one so desires.

The new bullet trains to southern China are far quicker than existing cross-border rail links, and long-haul services will cut journey times to Beijing from 24 hours to nine hours.

There have been critics arguing about not having followed the law of Hong Kong to the letter. Apparently, boundaries are not supposed to be crossed so easily, so simply with all that ease and so fast. According to Hong Kong's mini-constitution, China's national laws do not apply to the city apart from in limited areas. At Hong Kong's end, its rights, including freedom of speech, are protected by a deal made earlier in 1997. At China's end, it has ascended to a position of global supremacy.

Your columnist was in China when the high-speed train was officially announced and incidentally, as luck would have it, she was in Hong Kong when the service began. There was a lot of excitement around it. China has undeniably fast-tracked its infrastructure journey focusing on bringing the region together. Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Bank has proved China's point of ascendancy and many including Russia have joined its platform. However, this too has also come under critical examination. The reference to China's "debt colonialism" or debt diplomacy is all over the globe. The most recent reference can be made to Sri Lanka's financial failure forcing it to formally hand over the strategic port of Hambantota to China on a 99-year lease in a deal that government critics have said threatens the country's sovereignty.

Way back post-1995, China was building cities overnight out of literally empty spaces, and today it makes sense to imagine the next China and what it's all set to conquer. Thus in spite of any criticism, your columnist is happy to travel to China whenever presented with an opportunity.

Davos, she gladly accepted and became a happy party to witness what China really means today. Tianjin was the destination where Summer Davos was bringing around 2,000 people together who would collaborate, exchange ideas and celebrate tomorrows filled with artificial intelligence and automation. However, it wasn't just business. Even ethics and women's empowerment had been chalked out to give the platform a more balanced appearance. Unfortunately, the discourses on ethics and women's empowerment from a western perspective seemed a bit removed from our part of the world. But then, lack of representation from our end is to be blamed for that disconnect.

So, what was Summer Davos offering

Following this, another session on the big picture of inequality, once again, drew attention to the Third World reality. In spite of China being 40 times richer since 1970s, in spite of 700 million being lifted out of poverty, inequality in China is up. One percent Chinese have a third of all wealth. In America the top one percent has 40 percent of the country's wealth. After all, it is a country where it takes a billion dollars to be elected as the president and at least ten million to become a congressman. There is millions and billions of dollars' worth lobby power behind that position. Eventually, the session linked freedom and democracy to inequality and drew a picture that the world cannot deny. It is the same world where there are nine

challenges? A lot of talk is currently ongoing about forecasting humanity being faced with the aggression of AI and automation. According to one particular session at the conference, by 2022, everyone would need 101 days of learning for re-skilling and adaptation to the new world where first movers like financial investors and services will use 23 percent of humanised robots, automotive and aerospace supply chain will use 37 percent of stationary robots, oil and gas will use 19 percent of aerial and underwater robots, and automotive, aerospace supply chain will use 33 percent of non-humanoid land robots. While in 2018, 71 percent of task hours are being done by humans and the rest 29 percent by machines, by 2022, 58 percent task hours will be done by humans and the rest 42 percent by machines and by 2025, man task hours will be down to 48 percent and those of machines will be up to 52 percent.

Amongst the ones to be jobless first are data entry clerks, accounting clerks, assembly and factory workers, customer service workers, auditors, and general and operational managers. This prompted a fierce discussion on the impact of the human cost. What would happen to the old economy 20-30 years from now? Will wealth be redistributed and will the wealthy be taxed more? Will universal income become inevitable? These were the questions which were addressed but not necessarily answered. But then again, who has the human intelligence or intuition to answer now for a world that's going to be taken over by the powers of artificial intelligence in a decade or two? Almost none.

In Tianjin, Jack Ma, Alibaba's founder, while urging all to avoid anxiety, wondered whether machine intelligence will outsmart us or if human wisdom will cease to grow.

One point is clear though. Right and timely policy support can help us all avert the disaster. Just as China once did to promote women's education and grew a huge pool of female entrepreneurs, can we also take education and interest to a completely new level? Can we equip our low-level manufacturing workers to face the extinction challenge that AI will deliver in less than a decade?

Point is, no, we are still not ready. And, no Alexa, we don't need you till we are. Not just yet.

(Alexa is the newest product from Amazon that acts as one's personal assistant, a step up from Apple's Siri.)



Saadia Zahidi (C), managing director and head of Social and Economics Agendas of World Economic Forum, speaks at a press conference on "The Future of Jobs Report" during the Summer Davos Forum held in Tianjin, north China, September 19, 2018.

PHOTO: LI RAN/XINHUA

in Tianjin that no other part of Asia could have done? It offered us a glimpse of a melting pot, where ideas came together and found a new home.

Discussions on different hubs marked the character of the forum. One session on the agility of ethics and the place it should hold in our future captivated much attention. While governance is related to ethics, the panel concluded that societal engineering should now decide what principles humanity would like to put in place for the future and what the penalties would be if accountability and ethics fail. Much to our delight, the session also questioned whether it was right to bring in technology to industries where humans would suffer.

million deaths due to pollution, 15 times larger than those resulting from war and murder.

But have our current afflictions stopped the world from evolving to the next tech level? No. The next level is all set for AI. A tree caught our attention at the World Economic Forum event. The tree that was standing where delegates were lining up just to experience being soaked in the soil, smelling the earth. That was apparently a true VR (virtual reality) experience. All one had to do was carry a sensory, vibrating backpack and one would be able to experience things otherwise not possible in the world of virtual reality.

How good is AI going to be for us? Do we have the skill set to face the potential

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