

The road belongs to us, the public



CHINTITO SINCE 1995
NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

THAT does not imply we can do anything with it, on it and besides it. This license of ownership is rather a delegation of responsibility that very few of us understand, and therefore are unable to fulfil. As mentioned

elsewhere in my columns, social education should begin at preschool or kindergarten. The claim of ownership again is not an advocacy to accord authorisation to any, some or all of us (read public) to rampantly occupy our city and rural roads, and often even highways. Far from it!

Neither is this in accusation of our political parties, which hardly have any control over their respective followers, and vice versa. They therefore dwell at will on our roads and crossroads day and night. Yet our democratic practices are growing.

For the sceptics, here is my take: the very fact that any Amar, Akbar and Anthony can 365/12 boldly state (shout) on fifty TV channels (and counting) that "there is no democracy in the country" is democracy itself. I wonder if they do radio talk shows, which is more compatible with speech, but I doubt if any of our all-knowing opinionated "artists" would at all be interested in only lending their voice. No powdering of the sweaty cheeks and forehead? Some would be hardly interested.

Discipline has to exude from within. No government agency, penalty or threat of the stick, no amount of social rebuke or awareness campaign can keep our highways, roads and pavements clean if we owners of the road do not realise that there are other



PHOTO: BISWARUP GANGULY/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

owners besides "I". Yes, there are economic conditions which compel people to occupy roads and pavements for particularly trading and peddling, but not always necessarily so.

Why should goods of a retail outlet spill over to encroach the pavement where pedestrians should walk? Why should restaurants make parota and fry kabab on the footpath, making it look and work like a kitchen? In the dust? And making people sit and eat them inside? Why should shops straddle the road and throttle the plying of vehicles?

The reason for such illegal occupation is simple: the owners of the roaring restaurants, the sparkling shops and the vending vans truly believe that the road and the sidewalk around their businesses belong

to them. I know they do not, you do too, but we are too busy to stop by and tell them so. I walk on because my words would fall on deaf ears, and if perchance they could understand my statement, they would burst into guffaws out of sheer disbelief. No one likes to be thought of as a mad man.

Speaking about roads bring into vision other compulsory uses. Absence of proper latrines is not an incentive to suppress your natural movements. After New Market the next set of public toilets southeast are at Osmani Udyan and northwards at Dhanmondi Lake. Try walking with a loaded bladder. I can't even imagine how our womenfolk cope under duress and these dire conditions. Medically speaking, checking natural release may lead to health issues.

There are a couple of mobile toilets (symbolically painted yellow) at Katabon, experimental contrivances perhaps of some city agency. What if they start to move when someone is inside? Therefore, I have never seen them in use.

Helpless, the men feel they own the deserted parts of the street, and some think no one can see them in broad daylight. Even if they do, tough luck. Till such time our municipalities can organise (plan and build) standard facilities for public utilities, we have to understand why for some the road and its tributaries are the only options.

While we can sympathise with the urban poor for lack of facilities, let it not remain unsaid that the shohure babu would hardly think twice before alighting from his vehicle to water the highway flanks when nature does beckon. Raise your hand if you have not done so. I can't see any. The situation has improved one hundred percent over the past decade mainly due to commercial enterprises, restaurants and fuel stations, offering travellers reason to smile a sigh of relief.

Some urban well-to-do are however guilty of fake ownership of public property. It is now quite common to find the road front of residential buildings barricaded to make an extended garden, pushing the real owner (the public) on to the vehicular road. What right do they have? Ask RAJUK, because their inspectors do not allow an inch of encroachment on mandatory open spaces if they are in a state of displeasure.

I have been astounded to see in Dhanmandi area house owners smearing the pavement in front of their buildings with sewage from the adjacent sewer so that young men and women (mostly students from nearby unis) do not sit on public property to gossip or quietly spend some time. Okay, on some romantic evenings they do sing in chorus (or try to) but you can't legitimately send them home with soiled bottoms.

Then there are some house owners who spend good money to construct chained railings along the length of their property so that people cannot sit on the pavement. This calls for action by RAJUK and the municipal corporation to dismantle the contraption immediately because it prevents members of the public from getting on and off the pavement as they please, a clear infringement of civic rights. But, the landlords are certain they own the road as well as the pedestrian walkways.

Let it be understood, the roads and pavements belong to us, but there are many owners beside "I". We own them collectively, and have to ensure public use and freedom of movement by responsibly protecting them.

P.S. Dear City Fathers, we need decent and hygienic public toilets. Please hurry—you know why!

Let it be understood, the roads and pavements belong to us, but there are many owners beside "I". We own them collectively, and have to ensure public use and freedom of movement by responsibly protecting them.

Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed is a practising Architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

How can countries reduce poverty faster?

M NIAZ ASADULLAH and ANTONIO SAVOIA

CAN the world end poverty by 2030, the target set by the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development? The UN General Assembly recently reaffirmed this deadline but conceded that meeting it will require "accelerating global actions" to tackle poverty's causes. As the international community explores new solutions, lessons from the past could be instructive.

Poverty reduction has been central to development policy for decades. During the 15 years of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the predecessor to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the percentage of people living in poverty—defined as less than USD 1.90 a day—declined significantly, from nearly 27 percent in 2000, when the MDGs began, to about 9 percent in 2017.

At first glance, the rate of poverty reduction in the first few years of the SDGs has also been impressive. Between January 2016 and June 2018, an estimated 83 million people were lifted out of extreme poverty. And yet, to remain on track to meet the 2030 target date, about 120 million people should have escaped poverty during that period. Despite the welcome gains, the pace of progress has been less than satisfactory.

In a recent paper co-authored for the journal World Development, we examined what factors drive successful poverty reduction. Using poverty statistics from developing countries during the MDGs era, we assessed whether countries with higher levels of income poverty—that is, more people living on less money—experienced faster reductions in their poverty rates than economies with lower income-poverty levels. Using limits of USD 1.25 and USD 2 per person per day, we found that poverty tended to decrease faster in countries that started out poorer.

But these findings, while positive, tell only part of the story. In many countries, the end of poverty remains a distant goal. For example, at the current



According to a 2018 World Bank report, 27 of the world's 28 poorest countries are in Africa.

SOURCE: SHIPSANDPORTS.COM.NG

pace of poverty reduction, we estimate that Mali, where 86 percent of the population lived on less than USD 1.25 a day in 1990, will require another 31 years to eradicate extreme poverty altogether. But even in Ecuador, where only 7 percent of the population lived on less than USD 1.25 a day in 1990, eliminating poverty will take at least another decade.

The differing experiences of countries in Africa and Asia illustrate that while adoption of the MDG agenda did accelerate poverty reduction, the degree of progress has varied widely. In the early 1990s, poverty levels in Nigeria, Lesotho,

Madagascar, and Zambia were similar to those in China, Vietnam, and Indonesia. But by the time the MDGs ended in 2015, the Asian countries had reduced levels of poverty dramatically; the African countries had not.

This divergence continues. Today, extreme poverty is mostly contained to Africa; according to the World Bank's 2018 Poverty and Shared Prosperity report, 27 of the world's 28 poorest countries are on the continent, and each has a poverty rate above 30 percent. In fact, at current rates of poverty reduction, more than 300 million people in Sub-Saharan

Africa will still be poor in 2030.

Many factors have contributed to the shifting geography of poverty. In Africa, weak economic performance—fuelled by conflict, ineffective policies, ethnic fragmentation, and external shocks—has made it more difficult for countries to fund poverty-alleviation programmes. But the most important factor may be state capacity. After all, weak state institutions cannot effectively deliver public goods and services.

Of course, this leads to another question: what factors determine a state's capacity? In general, states work better when ruling elites are bound by limits on their power. But administrative experience also plays a role. China, with a slightly longer period of modern statehood than most of its younger African counterparts, may simply have developed a greater ability to administer its territory.

And yet, whatever the reason for the variation, there is no doubt that state capacity is one of the key ingredients for successful poverty reduction. We found that during the MDGs, high-poverty countries with strong state institutions were able to reduce poverty twice as fast as countries with feeble capacity, and were more likely to achieve the MDGs' target of halving poverty by 2015.

Poverty eradication remains a top priority for the 193 governments that have adopted the SDGs. But as the international community learned from the MDGs, goals do not guarantee progress. To ensure that the 725 million people who remained in poverty at the end of MDGs period can escape requires investing in programmes that aim at building effective states. Otherwise, an end date for poverty will remain elusive.

M Niaz Asadullah is Professor of Development Economics at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, and Head of the Southeast Asia cluster of the Global Labor Organization. Antonio Savoia is Senior Lecturer in Development Economics at the University of Manchester.

Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2018. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



November 29, 1987

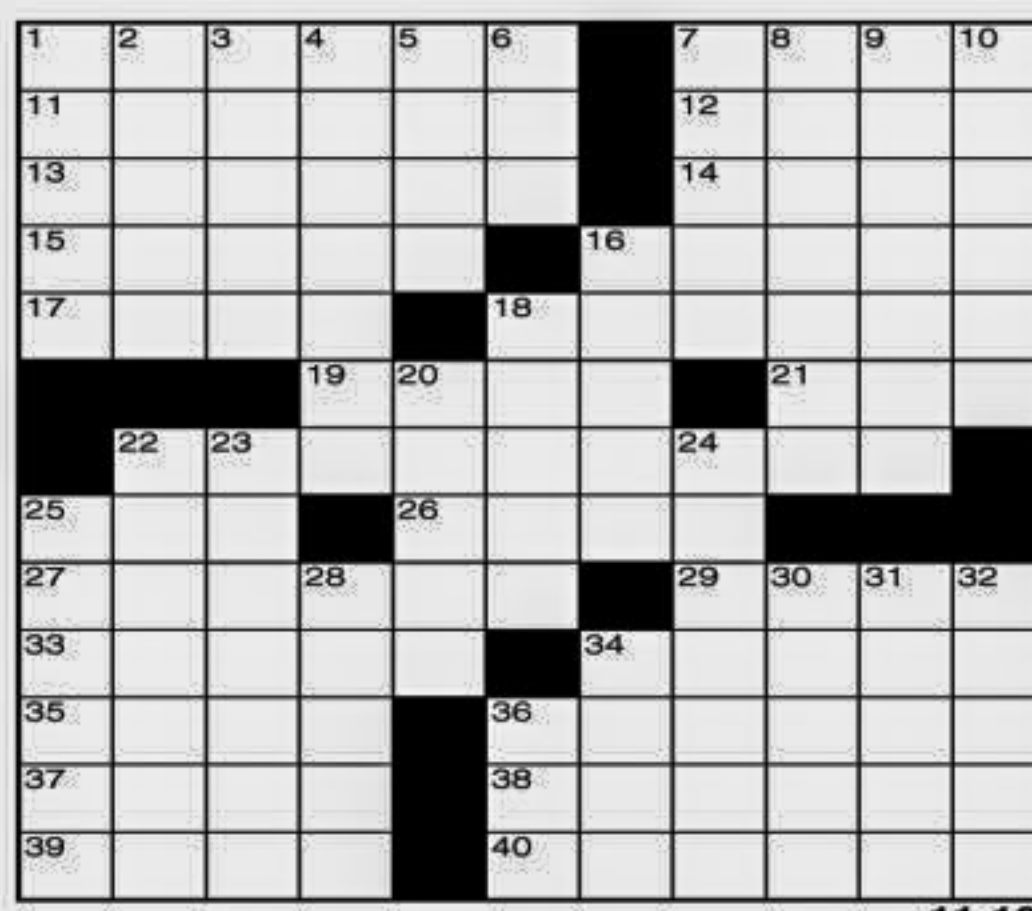
KOREAN AIR FLIGHT 858 BOMBING

The aircraft exploded in mid-air upon the detonation of a bomb planted inside an overhead storage bin in the airplane's passenger cabin by two North Korean agents. All 115 passengers and crew members perished.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- | | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| ACROSS | 29 Fail to fail | 8 Far from wordy |
| 1 Slender | 33 Perfume | 9 Communicating |
| 7 Glided | 34 Ham's assent | 10 Delicate |
| 11 Entered | 35 Valued wood | 16 "Paradise Lost" figure |
| 12 Tennis star | 36 Bottom-of-page line | 18 Intend to |
| Mandlikova | 37 St. Louis sight | 20 Poor sport's cry |
| 13 Voiced a view | 38 Mysterious | 22 Heartfelt |
| 14 Play start | 39 Neckline shapes | 23 Tranquil |
| 15 Creases | 40 More precious | 24 Pudding choice |
| 16 Feel faint | | 25 Composer |
| 17 On the house | | Mahler |
| 18 Brownie | DOWN | 28 Egyptian crosses |
| additive | 1 Express disbelief | 30 Worship site |
| 19 Mob action | 2 Mist | 31 Play part |
| 21 Far from cordial | 3 Hirsch of "Milk" | 32 More tender |
| 22 Yeti's cousin | 4 Banks, at times | 34 Had on |
| 25 "Vamoose!" | 5 Draws | 36 Rage |
| 26 Radius partner | 6 Break off | |
| 27 Outstanding | 7 Winter wrap | |

Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to dsopinion@gmail.com.



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

RATES NATAL
APART ALAMO
JOKER MIKES
AGE ICE ELI
HES POD SIN
SETTER STAG
HARDISH
STEP INTENT
LOS BAH SEE
ART ALA TEN
TEARS LOADS
ERNIE EAGLE
DODOS STEED

BEETLE BAILEY



BABY BLUES



BY MORT WALKER



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

