

We choose to be unsafe

CHINTITO SINCE 1995
NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

Profit-motivated businesspeople choose their present location despite the congestion for convenience, logistics, and neighbourly tolerance. Hundreds of lives should be enough to dissuade the foolhardy merchants and their corrupt government accomplices, one would think.

THE chain reaction, which culminated into the Chawkbazar devastation last Wednesday, was reportedly detonated by a car's gas cylinder that burst, leading to the explosion of plastic goods and chemicals stored in an area of mixed occupancies.

Bangladesh National Building Code 2006, now in force, does not allow Residential Buildings (Occupancy A) and Hazardous Buildings (Occupancy J) to be located in the same building or premises. Even in latter proposals, BNBC 2015 forbids residences (Fire Index 1) to be located in the same building with hazardous businesses (Fire Index 4) without code-specified separation and detachment. That did not happen in Chawkbazar. It is not happening either in other areas within this city or in the country. The enforcement of index-based zoning will be a huge positive change in making our cities safer, and liveable.

Engaged in threatening occupations, abetted by wheeling and dealing compliance enforcer, they end up violating such lifesaving legal requirements. Profit-motivated businesspeople choose their present location despite the congestion for convenience, logistics, and neighbourly tolerance. Hundreds of lives should be enough to dissuade the foolhardy merchants and their corrupt government accomplices, one would think.

The excessive Fire Load of the dwellings, thoughtlessly packed with highly flammable chemicals that have calorific value several times higher than wood, for example, require fire resistance of at least four hours. The lack of integrity of the building

elements, typical in a residential building, was not enough to protect the area and the residents even for a few minutes. Lack of any fire protection plan or equipment epitomises their apathy.

Ignited chemical vapour, especially paint thinners (perhaps Methyl Ethyl Ketone) will form explosive mixtures with air. The ensuing fire needed extinguishing with dry chemical powder, foam, and carbon dioxide. The Fire Service, despite the narrow streets as well as overcrowding, managed with difficulty to transport foam tender and relevant firefighting vehicles to the site to limit the fire. Water was effective in cooling the peripheral surfaces, but the stored chemicals had to burn out completely to avoid a catastrophe. Chemical and plastics business concerns are not prepared for such an eventuality with even mandatory buckets of sand and fire extinguishers.

On another front, considering the explosive nature of domestic gas cylinders, traders are not being careful with the containers. This writer has seen such cylinders precariously dangling from bicycles and bouncing on rickshaw vans on busy streets of the capital Dhaka, providing home delivery. The situation maybe as perilous in Chattogram, Khulna and other places, where residents are dependent on gas cylinder.

Jammed with vehicles and pedestrians, children too, one can only imagine a scene littered with charred bodies should the cylinder set off a series of explosions, vehicle to vehicle. Cylinder vendors must go through a rigorous check of technical capacity.

Businesspeople seeking Trade License to deal in hazardous chemicals should have adequate scientific knowledge, relevant training and requisite experience about safe practice. They must employ skilled personnel and have proper storage facilities in designated safe buildings and zones.



Such competent persons would not undertake endangered travels, vulnerable storage and risky operation.

Repeating what I said in 2010 following the Nimtoli chemical fire, which killed 124 people, I urge the people of Old Dhaka not to wait for any agency, but to go out there and compel hazardous chemicals and plastics goods dealers to stop immediately their functioning, including dangerous transporting. They can relocate to any area sanctioned by the government, but the status quo cannot persist.

We cannot continue to learn lessons like a poor student hatching his own

tragedies. Our pillars of fire failures are many. In the year 2000, a fire at Chowdhury Knitwear & Garments at Narsingdi BSIC left 54 workers dead and 200 injured. In 2006, a fire at KTS Textile Industries at Kalurghat BSIC in Chattogram claimed 91 lives and injured one hundred. In 2012, a fire swept through Tajreen Fashions at Ashulia, Dhaka, killing 124 and injuring three hundred workers (figures vary in different media). Remediation measures guided by Alliance, Accord and Solidarity with the proactive cooperation of BGMEA and BKMEA, and relevant government departments over the past five years have

transformed the garments and knitwear sectors into safe enterprises. That is the only lesson we need to learn now, that sincerity can vastly improve a calamitous circumstance.

We have to design our own success. It is the ripe time to go into severe action by immediately removing the few menacing chemical and plastics-related establishments from residential areas to benefit all, including the perpetrators of the continuing crime against society.

As for us, shall we check our car gas cylinders? Now?

Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed taught Architecture for over three decades and introduced fire studies at BUET Architecture Department in 1988.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Showdown in Munich

CARL BILDT

It was at the 2007 Munich Security Conference that Russian President Vladimir Putin first signalled a cooling of Russian-Western relations. Soon thereafter, Russia invaded Georgia; and in the years since, it has annexed Crimea, launched incursions into Eastern Ukraine, and carried out cyber-attacks against Western democracies. Today, Russian-Western relations are in a downward spiral.

This year's three-day conference, which had record-high attendance, will most likely be remembered for years to come. The speeches delivered by US Vice President Mike Pence and German Chancellor Angela Merkel

could not have been more different, in terms of both style and substance. At a gathering originally designed to facilitate German-American cooperation, Germany and America's foreign-policy positions have rarely been so far apart.

For his part, Pence delivered a hard-line "America first" message and celebrated the Trump administration's adamant refusal to accept longstanding rules and international agreements. Europeans, he declared, have no choice but to follow America's lead, even—if it means renouncing the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement that European diplomats did so much to

bring about. As with his previous appearance at the conference, Pence refused to take any questions after his speech. Many of his "applause lines" were met with stony silence.

Prior to Pence's appearance, Merkel had delivered a speech that might well go down as one of the best of her career. With energy and aplomb, she mounted a vigorous defence of multilateral efforts to confront climate change, Russian aggression, development in Africa, and a range of other challenges that lie ahead. The overall thrust of Merkel's remarks was obvious to everyone. She delivered a pointed rebuke of "America first" unilateralism.

Merkel's speech received a standing ovation, which is unusual for the Munich Security Conference. She also took questions, which she answered with confidence and a hint of humour, winning herself another standing ovation.

Like Putin's aggressive remarks in 2007, Pence and Merkel's speeches will be remembered for what they augur for the future. Taken together, they confirm that Donald Trump's presidency has ushered in a period of escalating transatlantic tensions that show no signs of abating. It was only a year ago that Europeans were told to ignore Trump's tweets and focus on the substance of US policies, which were being overseen by the "adults in the room." But with the departure of Secretary of Defence Jim Mattis and others, the adults are now gone, and there is ever-less daylight between the policies and the tweets.

Nowhere is the disconnect between US and European priorities more obvious than in the Middle East. When Pence browbeats European countries to abandon their efforts to save the 2015 Joint

Comprehensive Plan of Action—which imposes clear, verifiable restrictions on Iran's nuclear programme—one can only wonder about the Trump administration's

endgame. If and when Iran restarts its nuclear-weapons programme, US-Iranian tensions will almost certainly escalate to the point of crisis. The question is whether that is the outcome Trump and his advisers have sought all along.

The tensions on trade issues are no less acute. The Trump administration has already designated European steel and aluminium exports a threat to US national security, and now it may be preparing to add European cars to that list. If it does, the transatlantic trade conflict will enter dangerous territory.

Trump seems to have a particular aversion to German cars, which account for only 8 percent of US auto sales (though they do command a much greater share of the luxury/premium market). Moreover, as Merkel pointed out in her speech, the world's largest BMW plant is not in Germany, but in South Carolina, where a substantial share of production is exported to China. By pursuing dramatically higher auto tariffs, the Trump administration is threatening jobs not only in Europe, but also in the US; both would suffer from a disruption to global value chains.

A year from now, many of the same leaders and policymakers will gather in Munich once again. If the worst-case scenario suggested by this year's gathering comes to pass, we might be heading for open war in the Middle East and a devastating trade war across the Atlantic.

Or perhaps this year's conference will have set off the alarm bells needed to prevent the worst from happening. The transatlantic relationship is complicated enough as it is. No one should place it at risk of unravelling further.

Carl Bildt is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden.
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Angela Merkel welcomes Mike Pence to Munich.

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QUOTEABLE Quote



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR

(January 15, 1929 – April 4, 1968)
AMERICAN BAPTIST
MINISTER AND ACTIVIST

Our lives begin to end
the day we become
silent about things
that matter.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Rose part
 - 5 ERA and RBI
 - 10 Ballpark feat
 - 12 Juan of Argentina
 - 13 Like tumblers
 - 14 Superfluous
 - 15 Sailing hazard
 - 16 Scoundrel
 - 18 Pearshaped fruit
 - 19 Rutabaga's cousin
 - 21 Pool tools
 - 22 Eschews booze
 - 24 Pocket beeper
 - 25 Some diviners read them
 - 29 Shopping haven
 - 30 Puts up
 - 32 Put away
 - 33 Wagon puller
 - 34 Tipsy
 - 35 Yielded under pressure
 - 37 Grammar topic
 - 39 Improve, in a way
 - 40 Monopolize the mirror
 - 41 Breezes
 - 42 Some nest eggs
 - 43 Section
 - 44 Pocket beeper
 - 45 Some diviners read them
 - 46 Shopping haven
 - 47 Puts up
 - 48 Major's group
 - 49 Sailing hazards
 - 50 Yielded under pressure
 - 51 Orbital points
 - 52 Kathmandu's Kingdom
 - 53 Make a cameo
 - 54 Shreds
 - 55 Japanese mat
 - 56 News hour
 - 57 Bakery tyreat
 - 58 Mine
 - 59 Showy parrot
 - 60 Flight units
 - 61 Throws in
 - 62 Complete
 - 63 Asset
 - 64 Sarge
 - 65 Clara
 - 66 Speedster
 - 67 Satelles
 - 68 Rides
 - 69 Coy
 - 70 Asset
 - 71 Scow
 - 72 Gia
 - 73 One
 - 74 Whole
 - 75 Tepid
 - 76 Irene
 - 77 Care

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

R	A	C	E	D	A	T	B	A	T
A	D	L	E	R	S	A	R	G	E
W	H	I	L	E	C	L	A	R	A
B	E	N	S	P	E	D	E	R	
A	R	T	S	A	T	L	E	S	
R	E	E	D	R	I	D	E	S	
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B	L	T	G	I					
A	T	W	O	R					
W	H	O	L	E					
L	E	D	G	E					
S	A	D	A	T					

BEETLE BAILEY



BABY BLUES



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