

JU's dubious development plans

Probe the graft allegations

We are outraged at the allegations of corruption that were raised against the Jahangirnagar University authorities in the ongoing development works of the university. Reportedly, ECNEC approved Tk 1,445 crore and 36 lakh development fund for the university last year. And this year, the university authorities undertook some projects for the university's "development" with the fund and made a new masterplan to implement the projects. For this they have already cut down over a thousand trees in order to build six student dormitories following the new masterplan, although the teachers, students and the university community had no knowledge of it. These new dormitories are being constructed under the first phase of the university's development work. However, there have been allegations of corruption in implementing the projects. On August 23, a national daily reported that the JU VC held a meeting with the university's BCL members and allegedly distributed Tk two crore among BCL leaders, although the university administration denied the allegations.

Needless to say, the university authorities have the right to undertake development projects which would serve the students, teachers as well as the university community. But what was wrong on part of the administration was that they did all the work, including making the master plan, secretly, without the knowledge of all the stakeholders. Moreover, the need to build new dormitories cannot be underestimated, as more students can enroll there with new residential facilities. We have to remember the fact that JU is a residential university and the number of students largely depend on the number of seats available at the dorms. But it is now clear that the places for the new dorms were not decided judiciously.

As the students and teachers of JU have been protesting for quite some time now against the "corruption of the authorities", and "unplanned" development works which would endanger the biodiversity of the campus, we think the JU authorities should consider the demands of the protesting students and take effective steps to ensure accountability. Most importantly, it is time to hold a proper probe into the allegations of corruption and irregularities. Since the allegations are against the university administration, the probe should be held by a higher authority, for example, by the UGC or the judiciary.

High level conference on blue economy

Should be followed by a feasibility study

A two-day summit commenced yesterday bringing together ministers and officials of 31 countries to discuss the potential of sustainable development of blue economy among nations bordering the Indian Ocean. It has been organised by Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which happens to be an inter-governmental organisation. We have been hearing about the blue economy and what great potential it has for the countries that are part of the region, and this is the third instalment of the conference. Whilst it is being attended by key ministers of all the countries, we will be seeing a number of experts give presentations on fishing, shipping and mining.

Needless to say, there will be projections on what is possible, provided the spirit of cooperation among member countries of IORA exists, to take it from the drawing table into implementation. If we are truly looking at the promotion of sustainable and inclusive growth that could open up employment opportunities, then it is time we let the experts take the lead. They need to formulate and undertake a feasibility study that will pinpoint precisely what economic opportunities exist for member nations. Then the respective governments can work on that study to launch various projects in the areas of sustainable fisheries and exploiting resources from the seabed, and enhancing maritime logistics that will open up opportunities in coastal shipping and connectivity. It is time we laid the foundations for future interventions to get the 22 member states and nine dialogue partners, moving on a trajectory of growth that will benefit all.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Where is our society going wrong?

We often forget how young boys too are susceptible to the malicious eyes of sexual predators, who will stop at nothing. An eight-year old boy was gang-raped and killed recently in Noakhali.

The boy was lured into a tin-shed by four men under the pretext of treats and was sexually assaulted. He was later taken to the hospital when he fell sick but instead of admitting him for treatment, the perpetrators took him back to the shed and killed him. It is appalling how human beings have stooped this low and how they are not even sparing children from their barbarity. There is something definitely wrong with their pattern of thinking. It is hard to understand their paedophilic tendencies because no research is being done as to why such behaviour is becoming so pervasive in our society.

I am afraid this problem has become way too widespread to be nipped in the bud but serious investigation should be done to delve into how their minds are functioning so we can understand where we are going wrong more concretely. Additionally, these offenders should receive the harshest of punishments so as to deter other individuals with similar mentality from ruining the life of another child—be it a girl or a boy.

Atika Rahman, by email

Housing the entire pyramid

Our vision for the future of Dhaka must be inclusive



TASNEEM TAYEB

growing country in the world, after Ethiopia, Rwanda, Bhutan, and India respectively. And this growth has been partially credited to the manufacturing industry, which has, over the years, ridden high on the benefits of low-cost labour.

The workers who form the backbone of the sector that contributes 33.71 percent to the country's GDP, inhabit the 3,400 slums spread across Dhaka. With the growing population pressure on Dhaka—it is after all a city of just 306.4 km square, accommodating around 18 million people, with population density of 23,234 people per square kilometre—providing housing to the constant inflow of people from all corners of the country has always been a challenge.

According to a UNDP report, slum dwellers account for more than 33 percent of the capital's population and the government can meet only 7 percent of the annual housing demand, and the rest are left to the private sector.

The private sector in turn cater to the housing needs of the middle-income or at best the lower-middle income groups. This leaves the urban poor in the middle of nowhere, literally.

In search of shelter, they are forced to seek informal arrangements for their accommodation, which can be expensive and fatal. Every year, lives are lost in Dhaka city's slums in fire incidents, shanties are gutted and dreams of a better life extinguished. Often these fire incidents are made more dangerous due to the illegal and unacceptable utility connections provided by slumlords, as happened in the case of the Chalandika slum, where individuals connected to the ruling party controlled the slums and provided gas connections through plastic pipes, with entirely predictable results.

And then there are the eviction drives. In 2016, the High Court stayed the eviction drive of the government at the Kalyanpur slum, which houses 40,000 low-income dwellers, pointing out that there is an obligation to serve proper notice and provide rehabilitation options before conducting these drives.

Despite the high court order, the government keeps evicting slum dwellers

without offering rehabilitation solutions. Even a few months back, the National Housing Authority (NHA) conducted an eviction drive at the Bhasantek slum, rendering more than 10,000 people homeless, since they had not been provided with rehabilitation opportunity.

The NHA said that they had served notices to the slum dwellers prior to the drive, a claim denied by the slum dwellers, saying that only announcements had been made a week before the drive. Despite these contradictory claims, the question remains, why does the NHA not provide the slum dwellers with alternative accommodations before evicting them—the same people who drive the economy forward with their hard labour. Although the authorities are saying that the slum

Perhaps they will go scot free, as they have done all these years.

Rizwana Hasan elaborated how the lack of political will of the government to address the housing need of the urban poor has resulted in the mushrooming of slums. She also suggested that housing solution for the poor is perhaps not a priority for the government, as a result of which, even after all these years, it has not been able to offer the urban poor affordable housing solution.

According to Architect & Urban Planner Salma A Shafi, who is also the general secretary of Centre for Urban Studies, Dhaka, the government has policies and plans in place, like the NHA and the urban development policy, but it is the reluctance of successive governments in addressing

by Salma A Shafi, who suggested that creation of employment opportunities in zila and upazila levels would facilitate the decentralisation process, that would take the added load off Dhaka.

According to Rizwana Hasan, addressing the root causes that trigger migration can be another effective approach to solve the problem of migration from rural areas to cities. Containing river erosion, ensuring fair prices for farmers should be the focus points for the government.

There are multiple solutions to the problem of Dhaka's population burden. To implement these however, strong political will and pro-poor policies are crucial. Collaboration and coordination with experts, NGOs and other bodies working on this issue can help the government



A distraught woman sitting on the scattered shards and rubble of what was her home at Bhasantek slum. Homes and shops in the slum were bulldozed by the National Housing Authority on February 20, 2019.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

has been evicted for the construction of the "Griho Shuchona Flat" project, details about it remain somewhat sketchy.

According to environmental activist and chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), Syeda Rizwana Hasan, conducting eviction drives without rehabilitating slum dwellers is in violation of a 2016 High Court directive that expressly prohibited the government to do so.

And without rehabilitation where would the slum dwellers go? And why not bring to book the slumlords who have misused government lands for so long?

the housing need of the urban poor—she calls them marginalised of the society in housing—that has resulted in this situation today. She also added that urban planning of a country should be pro-poor, and focus on providing them with affordable housing solutions.

Rizwana Hasan suggested that a way out of this spiralling problem would be to relocate certain industries to the outskirts of Dhaka, with adequate housing facilities for the people working in those sectors, which would result in the spreading out of the urban poor population of Dhaka, to other areas. The thought was echoed

come up with an effective strategy to address this spiralling problem.

The simple fact of the matter is, slum dwellers are major contributors to our economic growth, a key enabler of our low-cost advantage. If the key to sustainable growth is inclusive growth, then it is stating the obvious to say that growth at any cost cannot be a mantra for success. Our vision for the future of Dhaka city must be broad-based—it must be a city that houses the entire pyramid, not just parts of it.

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The G7, 'Thucydides Trap' and the Rising Global Anarchy



GP ACHARYA

THE G7 summit has been wrapped up with a show of harmony among its member states where none of the participating states raised the concern about the danger of the "Thucydides Trap", between the US and China, a major cause of the anarchy in the international system, today. Yet, this summit came into light due to President Trump's willingness to bring back President Putin into G7, and host the next summit in his Florida based resort in the US. Putin was expelled from G7 and has been isolated from various global forums after the Russian seizure of Crimea in 2014. However, without any discord, the meeting condemned the Brazilian President Bolsonaro because of the wild fire in the Amazon rainforest, and pledged USD 22 million, which Brazil rejected at first, but accepted later under the condition that Brazil would decide how to use it.

Meanwhile, unsurprisingly Trump skipped the session on environment and climate change. Perhaps, Trump is unaware of the economic cost of climate change which alone is more than USD 2.4 trillion per year globally, whereas the human cost and that of several transnational issues combined is beyond imagination.

Modern day rivalry

The world is again witnessing the modern day bi-polarity between the US and China. However, the US-China rivalry today differs from that of US-Soviet in the past and is largely focused on the virtual world, space, sea, technology and trade. Another distinct feature of modern day bi-polarity is that China has been engaged in soft power diplomacy, international cooperation, development, economy and innovative technology; while the US still relies on coercive diplomacy ("Carrots and Sticks"), military might and nuclear threats.

The way US is creating a trade war by increasing tariffs and blacklisting tech giants like Huawei will gradually push the US behind and ultimately create greater opportunity for China to build its larger sphere in tech and trade infrastructure. Meanwhile, President Xi has urged, "We all need to work together to avoid the 'Thucydides Trap'—destructive

tensions between an emerging power and established powers ... Our aim is to foster a new model of major country relations."

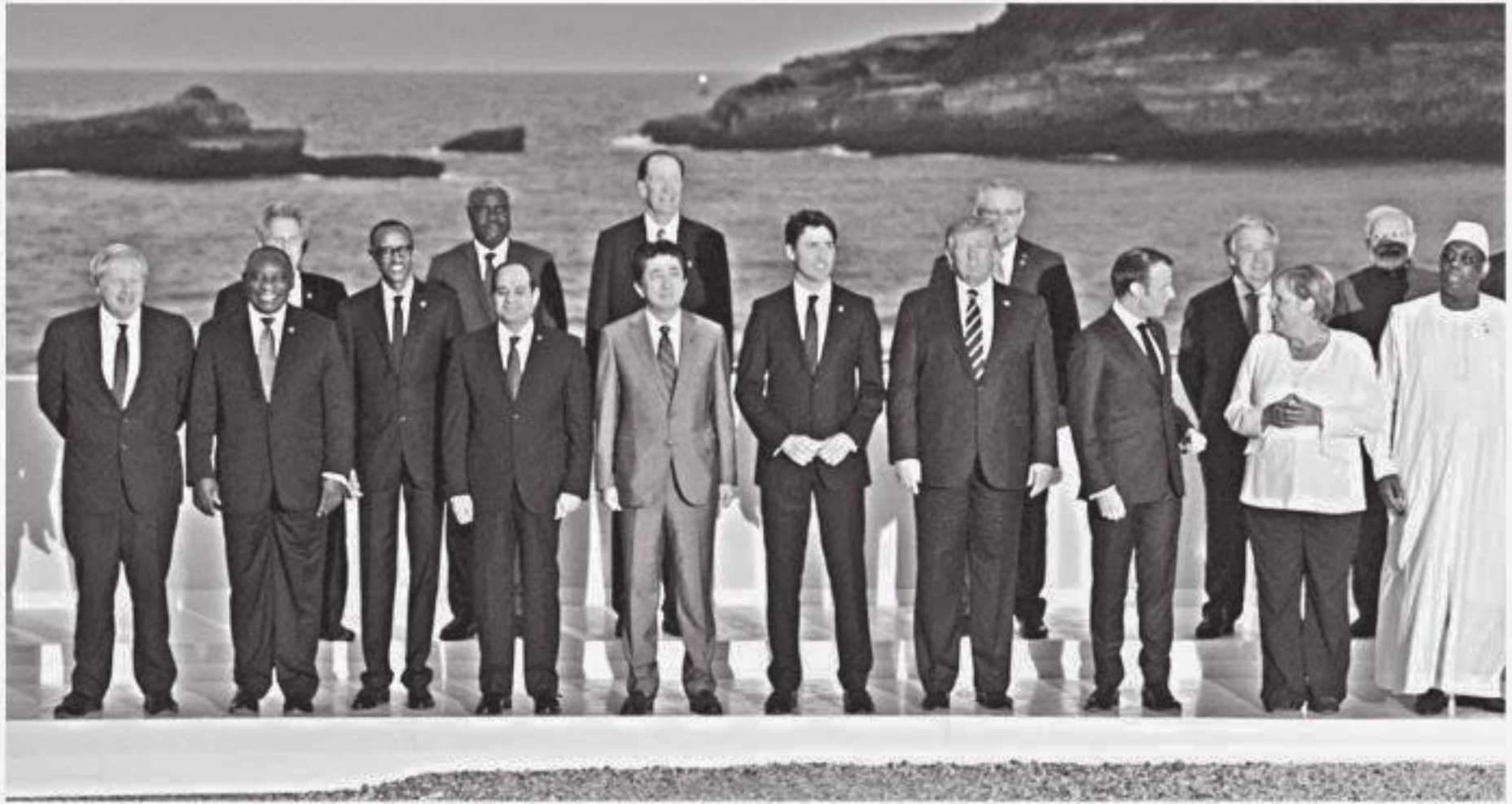
The regional rivalry between India and Pakistan (in South Asia), between Iran and Saudi Arabia (in the Middle East), between China and Japan (in East Asia), between North and South Korea (in the Korean Peninsula) and between South Korea and Japan (in East Asia) are making regional systems anarchic today.

"Politico-diplomatic strategies"

The heavy presence of US-alliance forces in the Gulf region, Afghanistan, South Korea, Iraq is a reason for continuous worry. The US recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital is a clear sign of aggression against small states. Conflict between

Boris Johnson as a deserving British Prime Minister even before the election. Yet, he wants (or does not want) regime change in Iran, Syria, Turkey, Venezuela, Cuba and Hong Kong. He has been receiving beautiful letters from his amazing new friend Kim Jong Un (who was turned into a "terrific friend" after being tagged as a "terrible enemy"). The US had expressed severe discord when Tibet was integrated with China meanwhile the US and most of its allies remain silent when India annexed Sikkim, and Kashmir.

The UK and France were worried about the unification of Germany in spite of the UK, France and Germany being close allies. The US had fought with China and the Soviet Union against Germany and Japan in WW-I and II, but it allied with



World leaders pose for a family photo during the G7 summit in Biarritz, France, on August 25, 2019.

PHOTO: ANDREW PARSONS/POOL VIA REUTERS

Israel and Palestine is still a potential threat to peace and stability in the Middle East. The Indo-Pak dispute over Kashmir is another blistering issue in South Asia. Conflict in Syria and the respective backing by nuclear powers is creating huge havoc around the world. Nuke and drone threats one over another by the US and Iran, Mother of All Bombs (MOAB) and Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) tests by North Korea, and the topical US-Iran or UK-Iran power crunch are making this world less safe and more anarchic.

Meanwhile, President Trump acknowledged the opposition leader as the president of Venezuela, and dozens of the US allies welcomed this decision. Trump openly advocated for his favourite

West Germany and Japan against China and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. All these "politico-diplomatic strategies" reflect the states' containment within alliances and contentment on global anarchy.

Accordingly, terrorist organisations are helping to make the international system anarchic. The Boko Haram, a Nigeria-based Islamic extremist group known as the world's deadliest terrorist organisation, has killed more than 20,000; kidnapped hundreds of thousands; and displaced more than 2.3 million people. Likewise, the IS, Mujaheedin, Lashkar-i-Taiba and others are adding to the insecurity of people all around the world.

Right after the 9/11 attack, the US declared a global "war on terror", where

Washington called on other states to join in the fight against terrorism asserting that "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists". Samuel P Huntington, in *The Clash of Civilizations*, remarked that "Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilisations will be the battle lines of the future", which remains relevant after 9/11 for Islam-Christian conflict.

The Indo-Pak conflict is mostly revolving around territorial disputes followed by Hindu-Muslim issues. Meanwhile, India has published the final list of NRC in Assam, which has made 1.9 million people (mostly minority Muslims) stateless and there is genuine concern that they might be deported to Bangladesh, which is already hosting nearly one million Rohingya refugees displaced from Myanmar. This unprecedented mass movement of people would cause not only humanitarian crisis, but also could fuel religious and cultural disharmony.

Collaborative action

The world is witnessing the domination of religion over religion, culture over culture, human over human and nation over nation. It is still experiencing the legacy of the cold war such as military occupation, aggression, interference in the internal affairs of states, unfair tariffs or sanctions inconsistent with international law. Consequently, global anarchy is more anarchic today with the concealed interest under the 'Thucydides Trap'.

In addition, numerous transnational issues such as terrorism, war, crimes, financial issues, climate change, economic stability, energy and food security, intellectual property rights, cyber security, nuclear and AI threats, maritime security, poverty and pandemics among others are wreaking havoc in the world. Nonetheless, nation-states require collaborative and cooperative action among governments, international organisations, corporations, universities, NGOs, think tanks and creative individuals to avoid the "Thucydides Trap" and address the rising global anarchy.

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