

Drought in rainy season

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NAZRUL ISLAM

THE Bangla months of Ashar and Sraban constitute the rainy season. About 75-85 per cent precipitation in Bangladesh occurs during the rainy season, also called the monsoon. The excessive rains within a short period during the monsoon usually overflow the riverbanks and water bodies, causing flooding almost every year.

But this year the monsoon did not receive normal rains. There was no flooding, even in the most flood-prone low-lying areas of the country. Rather, most of the rivers, haors, and water bodies have dried up. Cultivation of aman paddy and fish farming are being seriously hampered. Many transplanted aman fields also dried up, were fragmented into pieces due to want of water. In many areas of the country, the farmers could not immerse their jute stalks in water due to want of water in the water bodies.

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If we analyse the characteristics of rainfalls in the sub-continent during the last few years, we would

find that the climate has been unusual. Last year, the Indian cities of Mumbai experienced over 1,200 mm rainfall while Chennai 1,000 mm in only 24 hours (the average annual rainfall in Chennai is 1,000 mm). Some of the northern and southern Indian cities which normally receive scanty rainfall, are also experiencing excessive precipitation causing flooding this year. On the other hand, the late September deluge triggered by excessive rains wrought havoc in aman paddy production in northern Bangladesh in 2004.

This year Bangladesh has been suffering from a draught-like situation during the full-monsoon. What are the reasons of this unusual behaviour of the nature? Why is there no rain in the rainy season?

Why does it rain?

To understand why it rains two things should be kept in mind: water vapour condenses as air cools and air cools as it rises. Whenever air is rising, clouds, rain or snow might form. Cooling occurs because of changes in pressure at different altitudes: air cools as it rises, i.e. pressure decreases; air warms as it sinks, i.e. pressure increases. Air rises in convection currents where solar heating is high, such as over the equator. Air also rises when it encounters mountains. If the air is moist, condensation and rainfall are likely as the air is lifted. Regions with intense solar heating, frequent cooling air masses, or mountains tend to receive a great deal of

precipitation.

On the other hand, where air is sinking, it tends to warm because of increasing pressure. As it warms, available moisture evaporates. Rainfall occurs relatively rarely in areas of high pressure. High pressure and clear, dry conditions occur where convection currents are sinking. High pressure also occurs where air sinks after flowing over mountains. Another ingredient is usually necessary to initiate condensation of water vapor - condensation nuclei. Tiny particles of smoke, dust, sea salt, spores and volcanic ash all act as condensation nuclei. These particles form a surface on which water vapor can begin to coalesce.

Why does the monsoon occur?

A large part of the world, especially the tropics, receives seasonal winds and rainy seasons that are essential for sustaining ecosystem and human life. The most regular seasonal winds and rains are known as monsoon. In India and Bangladesh monsoon rains come when seasonal wind blows hot, and humid air flows from the Indian Ocean. Strong convection currents lift this air, causing heavy rain across the sub-continent. When the rising air reaches the Himalayas, it rises further, creating some of the heaviest rainfall in the world.

As the earth orbits the sun, different regions fall below the sun, and different regions receive seasonal rain and winds. The seasonal rains support seasonal tropical

forests, and they fill some of the world's greatest rivers, including the Ganges, the Jamuna, and the Amazon. As the year shifts from summer to winter, solar heating weakens and the rainy season ends, and little rain may fall for months.

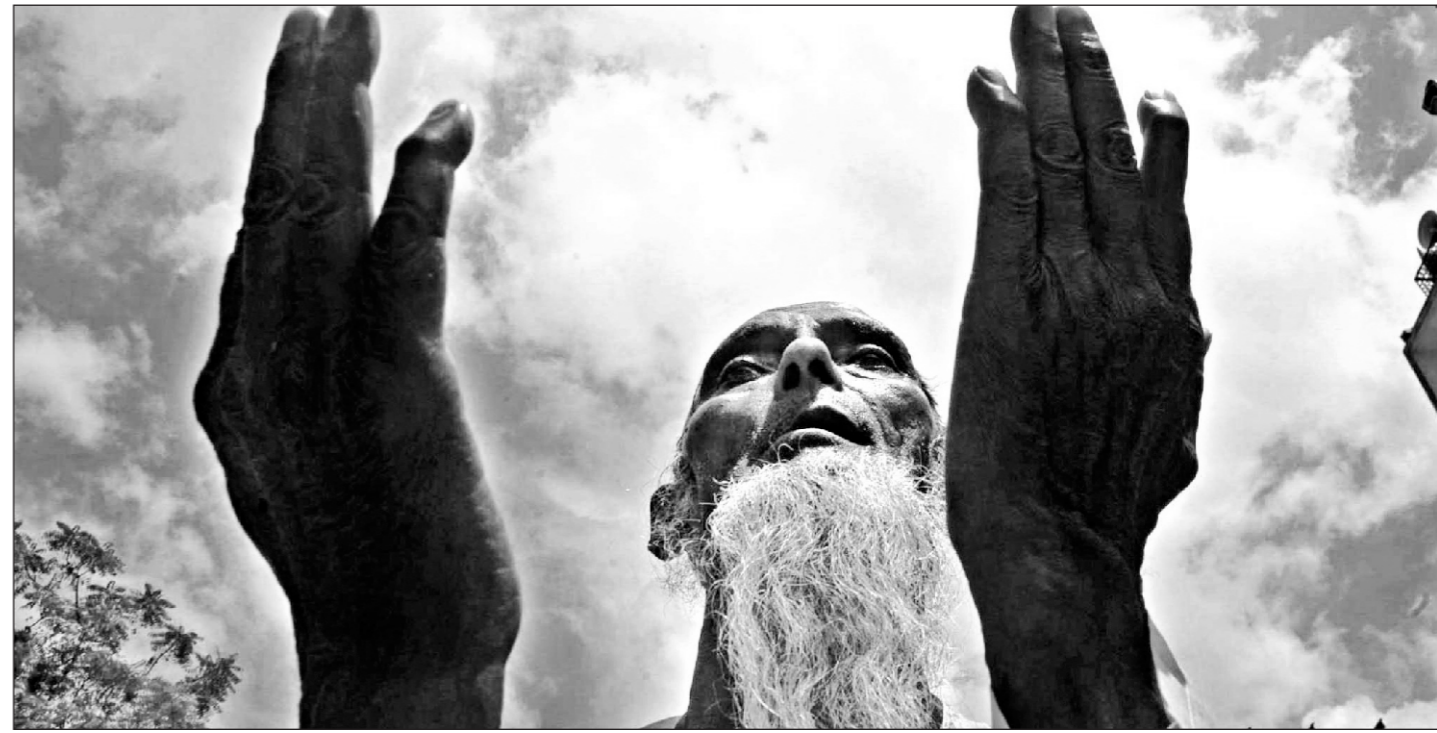
Is climate change responsible?

Climates have always changed, often in cycles and on many different time scales. A sudden cooling, 65 million years back, is thought to have ended the age of dinosaurs, along with 75 per cent of the species existing at that time. There may have been a dozen such mass extinctions. On a shorter time scale, several ice ages, each lasting hundreds of thousands of years, have come and gone in the past two million years. Even shorter climate shifts occur, such as the "little ice age," which began in the 1300s and caused crop failure throughout Europe.

There are two important shorter-term climate changes - El Nino and Anthropogenic global warming.

El Nino, La Nina and the Southern Oscillation (ENSO) are the terms referring to a major ocean-current connection that affects weather throughout the Pacific and possibly throughout the world. The core of this system is a huge pool of warm surface water in the Pacific Ocean that sloshes slowly back and forth between Indonesia and South America like water in a giant bathtub. Most years, this pool is held in the western Pacific by steady equatorial trade winds that push ocean surface currents westward. From South-East Asia to Australia, the concentration of warm, equatorial water provides latent heat that drives strong upward convection in the atmosphere. As a result heavy rains occur.

On the other side of the Pacific, the westward-moving surface



waters are replaced by cold water welling up along the South American coast. While the trade winds blow westward on the ocean's surface, returning winds high in the troposphere flow back from Indonesia to Chile and to Mexico and southern California. There the returning air sinks, creating dry, desert conditions.

Every three to five years the Indonesian low-pressure system collapses, and the mass of warm surface water surges back east across the Pacific. This phenomenon is called El Nino and the opposite is La Nino. Fishermen of Peru were the first to notice the irregular cycles of rising ocean temperatures. The reasons behind the system collapse are yet to be understood.

El Nino may cause drought in South Asia and Australia, causing crop failures.

Some scientists believe that ENSO events are becoming stronger or more irregular because of the global climate change. There are signs that warm ocean-surface temperatures are spreading, which could contribute to El Nino's strength or frequency.

Anthropogenic (human-caused) global warming has been increasingly becoming prominent in the news in recent years. Global mean-surface air temperatures have increased about 0.5oC over the past hundred years. The 20th century was the warmest since at least AD 1400, and 12 of the warmest years were recorded during the last 20 years. Much of this change is now understood to result from a number of human activities that release energy-absorbing "greenhouse" gases into the atmosphere.

Chief among these activities is burning oil, gas, and coal.

Steps required

Heavy rains during the monsoon may sometimes cause flooding in the country, but optimum flooding is essential for survival of our agriculture, rural livelihood and ecosystem. Many agriculturists believe that our land would have turned fallow if recurrent rains and flooding did not replenish our land every year. The floodwater leaches out and dissolves harmful soluble substances, which accumulate in the soil through excessive use of chemical fertilisers, insecticides and over-cropping.

The ongoing sustained draught ultimately may cause failure of aman paddy, the main source of our food grains, if steps are not taken immediately to irrigate the land artificially. Such crop failure may be a disaster for the country's economy. Although the transplan-

tation period was running out fast, the concerned departments of the government did not take any step to face the situation. Now, it is the duty of the government to protect the seedlings already planted in the fields by making arrangement of artificial irrigation. They should come forward to offset the impending disaster by ensuring adequate supply of fuel-oil and fertiliser with subsidised prices to help the farmers irrigate their lands artificially. Moreover, various agricultural departments should immediately launch special counseling programs to educate the farmers on how to conserve water and cultivate crops with minimum water.

Nazrul Islam is a journalist and environmentalist.

Hillary Clinton: Is America ready for a female president?

If Hilary decides to run for president, as everyone expects, then in all probability, she will declare her candidature sometime next spring. Once she declares her candidature, she automatically emerges as a front-runner. According to the latest TIME poll, Hilary (53%), leads over all other Democratic possible contenders, namely, Al Gore (49%), John Edwards (46%), and John Kerry (45%). Her negative rating is also much lower than these leading contenders. More importantly, if the Republican favourite John McCain gets the nomination, than he has only a 2-point lead over her, as compared to his 10-points lead over Kerry and 9 points over Gore.

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

NEVER in the history of mankind has a single country amassed so much military and economic power within such a short time, as the United States of America has done during the 230 years of its independence. It is the sole super-power today, has the largest economy and, above all, is the oldest functioning democracy in the world.

Nonetheless, despite all these achievements, the US lags behind nearly fifty countries of the world, from highly developed to the least developed, for never having a female head of state/government. The closest it has ever gotten was when Walter Mondale nominated Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate in the 1984 presidential race.

Things are changing two decades later. Women lawmakers are holding important posts in the Congress; Nancy Pelosi is the first female House minority leader. Albright and Rice have successfully held the post of Secretary of State, and female Senators and Governors have emerged as effective leaders. All these developments inevitably lead to a major question: Is America ready for a female president?

Well, if there is one single female candidate who has the best chance in the presidential election of 2008, it is Hillary Rodham Clinton. The former First Lady and the present junior senator from New York, hardly needs any introduction. Hillary has not expressed her desire to contest so far, and is currently focusing exclusively on her senatorial re-election bid from New York next November.

Hillary's re-election is a foregone conclusion as she has proved to be a highly capable senator and has successfully protected New York's interests. The Republicans are so sure of her re-election bid that they have not even put up a credible candidate against her. If this is a cakewalk for her, then why has Hillary set up such formidable logistic machinery for her re-election bid and why has she collected about \$33 million in campaign funds? Obviously, the senator and her team are testing her chances in the

2008 presidential race. The funds collected now could be used later for the initial presidential campaign.

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United States, however, is a deeply divided country today, between the Democratic dominated "Blue America" and the Republican dominated "Red America." If Blue America supports her passionately, Red America opposes her with equal intensity. There are few "undecided" voters (about 3%) who have not formulated their opinion about Hilary. So her room to persuade the "undecided" is very small and her main task would be to convert the people who oppose her. It is a hard sell.

During the last two presidential races, the US has demonstrated one thing for sure, that the voting pattern has changed little in these states. In plain terms, it means that Hilary has to win all the states that Kerry won in 2004 and in addition, she has to win one more state, either Ohio or Florida, to clinch the White House.

President Bill Clinton had successfully combined the support of liberals and democrats in his presidential races in 1992 and 1996. He knew how to balance the two sides and the "Clinton era" is still viewed by many as a period of economic prosperity and political stability. Bill Clinton is still a big draw to his ardent supporters and would surely lend full support to his wife Hilary. However, in politics one hardly ever "steps in the same waters."

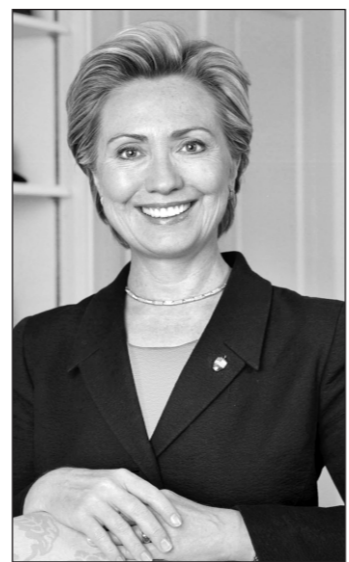
9/11 has significantly changed the American psyche and the country has surely moved to the

right. Hilary is aware of the sea change and, naturally, has made pragmatic adjustments accordingly. The liberals are unhappy with her for voting in favour of the Iraq war and not budging from that position subsequently. Basically, Americans supported the Iraq invasion but they believe that President Bush did not do it the right way. Hilary has, therefore, increased her criticism of the Bush administration and has been recently calling for the dismissal of Defense Secretary Rumsfeld. Americans would never trust a lady's finger on the nuclear button so Hilary has been trying to emerge as an "Iron Lady" as Margaret Thatcher had done in the UK during the Cold War era.

All said and done, Hilary's biggest asset is her husband, Bill Clinton, who knows how to make the right adjustment, at the right time, to get the right vote. No one doubts his political acumen or his brilliant campaign strategy. His job approval rating was 70%, nearly twice that of Bush. The problem, however, is that Bill is a charismatic figure who eclipses everybody else. The scenario has changed, though. Hilary is no longer the First Lady who has to play second fiddle. It is Hilary's race and she has to be at the centre stage. Can charismatic Bill play the role of second fiddle?

Once a person officially declares his/her candidature, the American people have a chance to dissect all aspects of a candidate. The media brings out all the skeletons from the closet. Surely Hilary's opponents would bring out issues like Monica Lewinsky to the Whitewater controversy, just as the Bush campaign successfully used the "swift boat" issue to damage John Kerry's bid.

Hillary knows very well that the Republicans have successfully campaigned to enlist the churchgoers' vote. According to recent Pew polls, Americans have turned more religious than before, and 60% of them pray at least once every day. So Hilary has been talking a lot about God and prayer in her recent speeches, although in the polarized political scene she has limited room to move to the right without antagonizing her traditional liberal vote bank.



Then, as the Howard Dean campaign has shown last time, the Democrats supported him initially, and, in fact, he was leading over all other candidates. But when the time came for votes at the primaries, they suddenly felt that Dean may be brilliant but he was "unelectable." The brilliant Dean campaign suddenly lost its steam and he withdrew in a matter of weeks. So the "electability" factor has to be kept in the purview all through the campaign.

On the national scale, Hilary is considered an intelligent, pragmatic and popular candidate. But, as noted earlier, Blue and Red America is sharply divided on her qualities. Partisan divisions also affect the perception of Hilary's political orientation. Democrats consider her a moderate, strong leader, with strong moral values, while the Republicans view her as a liberal, and rate her leadership qualities and moral values with skepticism. Hilary will surely consider all these pros and cons; it is possible that she might decide to forego the presidential race and focus on her career as a senator.

Having closely observed four presidential elections in the United States (1972, 1984, 2000, and 2004), I believe that, in the final analysis, the candidate who can persevere wins the race. The US presidential election campaign is a long haul and not a short sprint. One has to adjust and readjust according to the needs of the campaign. The logistics, funding and election strategy are of vital importance. Hilary Clinton has already demonstrated her leadership qualities and her capacity to steer a successful election campaign. Then again, the race is just beginning and she has miles to go in this long, uncertain, political marathon.

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Can Hizbollah deliver Muslims from ignorance?

Hizbollah must question this methodology if they sincerely want to lead the Muslims out of their miserable status. It would seem though that Hizbollah's roots in militancy may become its single biggest impediment to pursue a different course and thereby make them an unlikely party to deliver the Muslims from the Age of Ignorance. Perhaps a new group will arise from amongst the Muslims who will adopt the correct methodology and usher in the era of Enlightenment.

ARIF IQBAL KHAN

HIZBOLLAH'S fighters shocked the world as they bravely defended their posts against a mighty army backed by a super-power. The Hizbollah fighters have broken the myth of Israeli invincibility and Hassan Nassrallah's prestige in the Arab world has sky-rocketed, eclipsing the fame of Gemal Abdel Nasser and the Pan Arab dogma of the sixties.

Clausewitz's definition of war as an extension of policy by other means seems to have fallen flat on the face of the Israelis, considering their humiliation in the battle field as well as in the international diplomatic circle due to weaknesses in their strategy and the moral lowness of the force.

Hizbollah and its charismatic leader are revered by Arabs as the brave defenders of faith and are perhaps the undeclared last hope for the Arabs to regain their honour. But there is another side to this sentimental feeling which deals with the larger crisis in the Middle East and the Muslim world, and maybe Hizbollah's current methodology will keep them from becoming the Arab saviour.

The Lebanon conflict has raised a lot of questions about the role of Hizbollah in the Middle East and in the greater Muslim populated lands. Hizbollah's militant wing may have won the battle in Lebanon but can their methodology defeat the bigger enemy that lives within the Muslim ranks?

In order to first understand the dynamics that prevailed in the conflict we need to analyze the Lebanon conflict within the greater Middle East context from historical and political viewpoints. Firstly, the existence of Israel was imposed upon the Palestinians in 1948. Prior to the creation of Israel the British held the mandate to rule Palestine as their prize following the defeat of the Ottoman power at the end of WW1. It is interesting to note that Palestine had a long history of violence and conflict except for the 1,300 years of Muslim rule where the inhabitants of that land enjoyed peace, freedom of religion, expression, and thought. The only exception to that

tranquility was the time of the Crusades in the 11th century until Saladin defeated the crusaders. Lastly, the Ottomans ruled the area for nearly 500 years and interestingly there was only one outpost, a police station in Jerusalem, and the people of the entire area lived in peace.

The end of the Ottoman rule witnessed the unfolding of a new political phenomenon in the Muslim lands. A new political thought swept through Hejaz, Nejd, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Ash Sham, North Africa, and India. It wanted to replace the 1,300 year old political institution of the Muslims with an alien institution that would eventually disintegrate the universality of the single nation concept of Muslims. Racial bias would become deep rooted through this new idea and make Muslims disoriented not only their governments but also question their own original sources. This new political ideology was so powerful that it became sacrilege to even speak against it, let alone oppose it. This new phenomenon was Nationalism. The nationalistic ideology rewrote the map of the Muslim heartland by establishing new nation states with boundaries carved out of once unified lands under one political institution. The independent states were to be ruled by authoritative dictators with the support of a superpower and the citizens' political rights were erased along with their freedom of political thought.

With the fall of the Caliphate and the rise of nationalistic sentiments, the Arab autocratic rulers became busy lobbying for super-power support for their own existence while the Jewish lobby was able to carve out a state of their own in the land of Palestine by 1948. In the subsequent Arab-Israeli wars, it is quite clear that most Arab rulers only gave lip service and sheepishly offered military support as a face-saving circus for their citizens, not for the Palestinian or Muslim cause. The result of the Arab-Israeli wars was that Israel was able to expand and conquer a much larger territory than their own expectation. A point to note here is that while the Arab rulers were bent over backwards to please the

super-powers in order to secure their boundaries, Israel ensured that the state of Israel had no international boundary!

The lack of Muslim unity and the loss of the concept of the Muslim Ummah thus became central to all the current crises in the Middle East. This could only happen due to the intellectual bankruptcy of the Muslims caused by blind faith and a simultaneous restriction on reason as a means to belief. As a result, Muslims have gone back to the "Age of Ignorance" (Jahiliya) similar to the time before the coming of Islam. The problem in Palestine and Lebanon and other places are symptoms of this fundamental issue but not the issue itself, like loss of hair in leukemia.

As the Muslims in Lebanon were being butchered by Ariel Sharon in 1982, no Arab or Muslim ruler dared to interfere, and there Hizbollah was born as a reactionary force to defend the property of Muslims that should have been the responsibility of the Muslim political institution. They have since grown into a powerful force in Lebanon and with the support of Iran and Syria they have stockpiled missiles and bullets which should have been the responsibility of a Muslim army under a legal political authority. They had to look towards France for a diplomatic win over America and that too should have been the responsibility of the Muslim state.

Unity will elude the Muslim until the ideology is comprehensively understood by the mind, and this cannot happen until there is a thought process to drive it. Therefore the greater challenge for Muslims is to build a new thought process in which the theater of war is in the mind and not in the battlefield. To tackle this issue of thought with militancy is like the Pakistan army's attempt for a military solution to a political problem in the then East Pakistan -- it cannot work. The usurpers will automatically meet their logical ends once the ideology is firmly understood and incorporated in the citizens' minds.

But it is dangerous to think that the only way to resist oppression, as in Palestine, is through violent uprising before the actual problem



has been properly diagnosed and medicated appropriately. On the other hand, temporary resistance victory, as in Lebanon, may inspire the Muslim youth to join overzealous militants in their utter madness to enforce their sadistic views on the innocent people and thus cause further decay of the Muslim intellect that will have ripple effect on the entire Muslim world. This will not be accepted and will cause internal destruction and worse still the Muslims will move further away from their principles in the original sources.

The methodology is just as important as the result itself and hence it must conform to the kind of challenge at hand. A political problem must be challenged politically. In the face of naked aggression, Hizbollah had no choice but to defend militarily and a splendid job they did at that. But their stated aim to "wipe out Israel" with the support of Baathist Syria and a racial Iran seems like a contradiction in their ideology. Racial divide and the politics of hate and militancy will be rejected by the people.

Hizbollah must question this methodology if they sincerely want to lead the Muslims out of their miserable status. It would seem though that Hizbollah's roots in militancy may become its single biggest impediment to pursue a different course and thereby make them an unlikely party to deliver the Muslims from the Age of Ignorance. Perhaps a new group will arise from amongst the Muslims who will adopt the correct methodology and usher in the era of Enlightenment.

Arif Iqbal Khan is a financial consultant and associated with the group, Muslim Professionals.