

IMPROVING CYCLONE WARNING RESPONSE AND MITIGATION

How to Make Bay of Bengal Safer for Citizens?

Need for Dialogue

Several pronouncements made by well-placed persons during the past week focused on the implementation of the country's economic policies, especially in the field of disinvestment, and indirectly touched on the problems encountered by the authorities.

While speaking positively on the stated policies of the democratically elected government of Begum Khaleda Zia, the US Ambassador to Bangladesh William B Milam stressed the need for maintaining a dialogue between the government and the business community. He, then, went on to suggest that the authorities could make "strong and positive" efforts to remove bureaucratic hold-ups which make it difficult for the private sector to function effectively.

A tropical disturbance forms in the south central Bay southwest of the Andaman Islands in the vicinity of latitude 10 deg N, progressively absorbs heat energy of the warm ocean over a period of several days, and intensifies into a severe cyclonic storm.

The need to act firmly and urgently is nowhere more important than in bringing discipline to the financial sector, the subject that was brought up a day earlier by Finance Minister Saifur Rahman. This too has been a stated policy of the government.

Indeed, in some areas, the situation may well be getting worse. A body set up by workers of three large public corporations has expressed its serious reservations about some aspects of the government's disinvestment policy.

Somewhere along the lines, the policies of the government suffer from both lack of clarification, even where officials themselves are concerned, and inadequate communication. Rhetorical pronouncements are poor substitutes for intensive face-to-face dialogue with interested quarters, whether they represent well-placed business executives or low-paid workers from public corporations.

Tapping the CIS Market

According to an agency story published in this and other papers last Wednesday, Bangladesh will soon enter into an agreement with Russia to revive trade links that existed previously with the recently-dismantled Soviet Union, followed by similar agreements with 10 other member-states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The socio-political situation of most of the CIS states is still quite volatile, but that should not pose a serious threat to the prospects of bilateral trade. On the contrary, the prevailing shortages of consumer items, including foodstuffs, in CIS cities and towns make imports an absolute necessity in the short-run.

In order to do our bit of marketing efficiently and comprehensively, the planned delegation needs to be staffed with as many professionals and as few bureaucrats as possible. The visit ought to be conducted in a strictly business-like manner, with selling of Bangladeshi products as its principal aim.

The problems with trade, however, are not few. Russia and other CIS states are suffering from an acute shortage of hard currency, and therefore may only wish to conduct business on a barter basis, as was the case with the USSR previously.

IMPROVING cyclone warning response and mitigation focuses on learning as much as we can about the application of sound disaster management theory and practice in respect of mitigating the impact of tropical cyclones in the Bay of Bengal.

It may be several days before the storm develops its own counterclockwise strong wind circulation around a discernible centre of rotation. Meteorologists at each cyclone warning centre around the Bay of Bengal, as well as at various global weather centres, closely monitor the storm's formation by a system of orbiting and geostationary weather satellites.

A long-term climatology of cyclone tracks in the Bay of Bengal tells us that the new cyclone may well impact (landfall) in any of the countries, namely from Sri Lanka in the west, the four coastal States of eastern India thus to Bangladesh in the north and Myanmar in the east.

Cyclones are generally "steered" by upper-level air currents in which they are embedded. In low latitudes the easterly steering winds are generally light (which helps to concentrate the atmospheric energy needed for the cyclone's development).

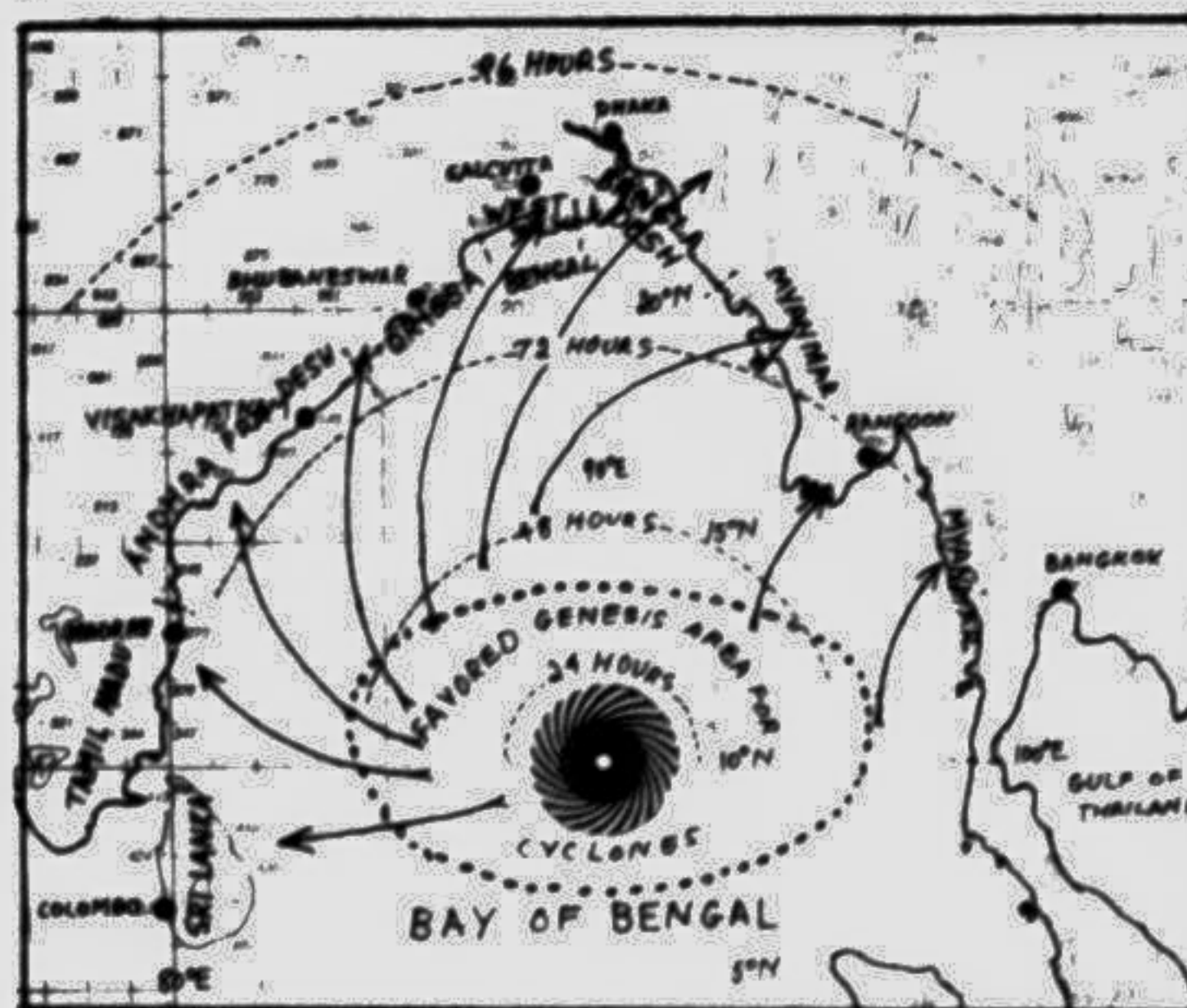
It is the responsibility of each national or delegated regional cyclone warning centre around the Bay of Bengal to issue information and warning advice about the cyclone to their own citizens and agencies and which sum up the perceived threat to their own country or region.

How it occurs?

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by RL Southern

Others will progressively curve more to the north under the influence of more southerly and stronger upper air steering currents and as they do so will generally increase in speed. So it is common for a cyclone to move initially towards the west and northwest and then to the north and northeast and occasionally to the east to strike the coast of Myanmar.



community to undertake preparedness measures to guarantee safety and protection of property to the extent feasible.

Response to Warnings

The means of improving response, is firstly to improve the effectiveness of warnings by providing more useful and meaningful information as the motivation for response activities, and secondly to improve the implementation of DPP contingency plans of action drawn up precisely for the purpose of protecting the community.

Consideration of the tracks of cyclone over the last 100 years shows that these follow a generally westward track in the low latitudes where some will cross the coast of Sri

timely warnings of the approach to land of many cyclones, such as the last one in Bangladesh.

It is generally recognized around the world that deliberate warning "strategies" need to be instituted by national weather warning services in collaboration with DPP and other technical support services in order to maximise the usefulness of the available meteorological "intelligence" in serving the community and users with warning information.

Other strategies need to be called into question at the workshop. At what level of authority should recommendations or instructions for major preparedness decisions, such as evacuation, be made. The higher the level, the greater the warning lead time that needs to be given to convene high level committees and then disseminate the advice to the public.

Check on Casualties

Just to keep a check on growth in casualties and damage we need to institute better ways of coping with cyclones. Are there well-proven procedures which have been used elsewhere and which could be adapted for the Bay? For example in several cyclone basins the intensity or strength of cyclones is graded into a scale 1 to 5, each number being equivalent to a stated increasing range of high winds or storm surge, which in turn may be expected to cause a stated degree of destruction in respect of local housing and vegetation.

Rebellious Georgia is Setting a Poor Example

by Daya Kishan Thussu

The violent overthrow of president Zviad Gamsakhurdia of Georgia does not augur well for the fledgling democracies of the former Soviet Union. Gamsakhurdia was democratically elected last year with an 87 per cent vote and refused to join the Commonwealth of Independent States. Events in Tbilisi show that democracy may be the first casualty of the transition from communist rule.

Last May, Gamsakhurdia won 87 per cent of the vote to defeat five other candidates in the country's first-ever presidential election.

Gamsakhurdia is a fierce nationalist, intensely proud of Georgia's cultural heritage. Sometimes his attitude bordered on cultural chauvinism. He represented that section of Georgian intelligentsia which looked down on Moscow communists as crude and without much culture.

Georgia, an independent democratic state between 1918 and 1921, was one of the last republics to be forcibly incorporated in the USSR by the Red Army.

Kremlin rule over Georgia, a small nation of 5.5 million, was never easy. Its leaders were too proud and independent to be governed from faraway Moscow.

Gamsakhurdia's critics charge that the president exploited his popular mandate and took personal control of courts, foreign ministry, police and the National Guard. He was accused of suppressing the press and his political opposition. They also alleged that the president showed intolerance towards minorities, such as the South Ossetians and Abkhazians.



ZVIAD GAMSAKHURDIA Fiercely nationalist

Many believe Gamsakhurdia's biggest mistake was his inability to judge the August botched coup in Moscow. During it, the president seemed to play for time and was cautious in criticising the plotters.

This attitude dismayed many supporters and precipitated divisions in his government. Crucially, it led to the defection of a section of the National Guard under Tengiz Kitovani. The lawlessness of some Kitovani's rebel guards

led to martial law and more acts of repression.

As nationalism increased many enterprising Georgians started to bypass the centralised economy and set up their own private businesses. The so-called Georgian Mafia grew as a powerful underground group.

During his seven-month rule Gamsakhurdia tried to strengthen rather than weaken state control over Georgia's economy, a move that angered the champions of the free market. Furthermore, his refusal to join 11 former Soviet republics in the Commonwealth of Independent States was resented by Moscow.

For his part, the president called his opponents agents of Moscow, criminals and bandits who had no regard for democracy. He also alleged that the Soviet army and the mafia were helping his opponents.

When asked if the president's opponents were being armed by the mafia, Dzhaba Ioseliani, a member of the Georgian provisional government and leader of the "Knights of Georgia" paramilitary force, was reported to have said: "Where do you think we are going to get them from? The Georgian

Conservatory of Music?"

A defiant Gamsakhurdia has refused to resign and his charismatic appeal could yet mobilise the masses, especially in rural Georgia.

That the president had popular support even after he fled was evident when thousands of supporters came out in his favour on the streets of Tbilisi, defying a military ban on demonstrations. That they were fired on was indication of the dangerous intentions of the new Georgian leadership.

What are the prospects now? Tengiz Sigua, the former and now provisional prime minister who resigned last August in protest against Gamsakhurdia's rule, has called for national "repentance and reconciliation."

The successors of Gamsakhurdia reflect many different hues in the political spectrum. The opposition grouping contains 30 parties, ranging from liberals, monarchists, and what is most worrying, admirers of the late Spanish dictator General Franco.

Monarchists are calling for a constitutional monarchy to solve the problems of a multi-ethnic country. The heir to the Georgian throne is a Spanish citizen, Prince Jorge

Bagration.

One faction wants former soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze, the most famous Georgian after Stalin, to take power. He has dismissed suggestions that the new governing council was wrong in using force to oust a democratically elected president.

He is reported to have told his critics: "It was not so much a violent takeover as a conflict between an authoritarian regime and democratic forces which were supported by armed formations."

It is, however, doubtful that many Georgians will accept someone so closely identified with Moscow. As chief of the Georgian communist party from 1972 to 1985, Shevardnadze arrested the nationalist and human rights activist Gamsakhurdia for dissent.

The power struggle in Tbilisi could have disturbing resonances elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. In the transition from communist rule to political pluralism, democracy may be the first casualty, especially when arms are so freely available because of the collapse of central authority.

For ordinary Georgians, reeling under a financial catastrophe, the spectacle of various nationalist factions clamouring for power through crude military force is unlikely to strengthen their faith in the democratic process.

- GEMINI NEWS

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To the Editor...

Local water heaters

Sir, Sometimes ago I bought one locally manufactured water heater. But only after about three months of use the bottom of the water heater started leaking. I contacted the supplier who told me that some modification will be necessary and I have to pay the cost. As winter season is on and I needed warm water I had no other alternative but to agree to suppliers' terms. The job was done in two weeks and on payment of total cost of about Tk 1000.

We do not mind using local products but they must give us reasonably good service. It appears there is no control on quality of products manufac-

tured in our country and on the price. Consumers are often compelled to pay high price for poor quality products. No effort is made by manufacturers to give 'after sales service' to consumers. Complaints are often ignored.

There is one institution called Bangladesh Standard Testing Institution (BSTI) which is supposed to check the quality of products manufactured locally. It appears manufacturers just ignore this organisation as generally no seal of BSTI is seen on products being sold in the market.

Will the Ministry of Industries, BSTI, Chamber of Commerce and Consumers' Association Bangladesh look

into this matter and see that the poor consumers of local products get proper value for the money spent by them? This is vital to increase confidence of people for local products.

Mrs S Haq Eskaton, Dhaka.

New Market mosque

Sir, One of my teachers, Prof Dalilur Rahman was recently telling me about a problem with the mosque inside Dhaka New Market. As the staircase has no roof, the musallis face problem on the rainy days. The musallis are to

put off their shoes on the basement.

Would the relevant authority please arrange to construct a roof of the staircase compatible with the architectural design of the mosque.

M. Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka.

'Change and expense'

Sir, My attention has been drawn to the letter written by Mr M Zahidul Haque published under this column of your esteemed daily of the 19th

January 1992 under the above caption. In his letter Mr Haque has expressed his opinion about changing the name of Biman's business class - the Rajonigandha class. He said that it was not necessary to change the name. But does he really know why it was changed? Here is the reason.

The flower Rajonigandha (tuberose), is used in South-East Asia in a special occasion as funerals. It is an emblem of grief in Japan and in neighbouring countries. So, when the smiling air hostesses used to greet the passenger welcoming them in side the aircraft in Rajonigandha class with a bunch of this flower the passengers quite naturally be-

came surprised and frightened.

In fact, it was absolutely Biman's failure to find out well in advance what effect this flower would have on the passengers. First of all, they did not bother to make a survey before implementing the name. However, it is a matter of prestige that finally the concerned authority has seen into the matter and changed the name accordingly.

Delwar Hossain Moddho Bashabo, Dhaka.