

This is an Emergency

Just when the worst seemed over with the floods, the catastrophe descends more heavily on us than before. The onrushing hill waters gurgle dangerously with the incessant downpour leaving the terrain under thicker sheets of inundation. What Dhakaites experienced yesterday wading through mid-riff-deep waters in some of the hitherto unaffected areas may be only a glimpse of the pervasive onslaught undergone by the people around the major river basins of the country. Pray, such heavy rains do not beat down for a couple of days more or else we had really had it.

Our forecasting flair and vociferous surmises all revolved around drawing comparisons with the 1988 deluge as if that academic exercise will stand us in good stead minimising the woes of millions by a magic wand. Anyhow, their numbers have gone up in the last ten years so that a bench-mark in relief operations must prove to be an inadequate guide out of the woods. And if a 1988-size calamity does befall us then where do we stand?

The floods have been already a long-standing phenomenon, cascading down from the north, settling down to the mid-section of the land and remaining more or less stationary all over the flat delta. The menacing thought is if the swell has not been as bad as in a worst year it is certainly showing an ominous sign of undrained placidity. Just as inundation spawns its own set of problems so does recession and there is invariably a multiplier effect on the suffering of the people.

The sense of the phenomenon was never got right from its origin in the upper catchment areas. Parts of India and China have had very bad floods already. Admittedly, there has been a miscalculation of the magnitude the floods could break out in. The government responded to the situation on the basis of a two-some motivation: first, it would tackle the problem of succouring the people without recourse to external assistance; and (b) thereby earn the gratitude of the people by its competence which is why the television footage on ministers.

Obviously, they have missed out on the imperative necessity to have the entire nation galvanised, irrespective of political affiliations and professional moorings, behind the urgent task of reaching help to all affected people in the country.

If this is not an emergency situation then what is? Let's formally call it that and meet the challenge on an emergency footing.

Wrong Approach

Education Ministry has taken two important decisions at one go. It has cancelled the identical question paper system for the board examinations. From next year, the five education boards of the country will use different sets of question papers for both School Secondary and Higher Secondary Certificate examinations. And also students seeking admission to colleges for the eleventh class will have to sit for a qualifying exam. Seemingly Education Ministry's recent decision has been prompted by last year's embarrassing leakage episode which not only created a huge public outcry but threw the ministry in a great quandary. Obviously it has worked under the consideration that by having five different sets of question papers for one examination and using the lottery strategy it can minimise the damage that a possible leakage might cause; the palpable logic must be of saving the rest four-fifths of the cake if one fifth of it is spoiled. But why? Why the Ministry instead of taking strong measures to clear the leakage virus from the system is trying to run away from it? If the people involved in violating the sacred secrecy of examination system were severely dealt with after every exposure, the problem would have undoubtedly been scaled down by now.

Another point that needs to be reckoned perhaps with utmost seriousness is to think up a way to gradually reduce the scope of capability of the question papers. The impulse behind leakage is essentially copying. If a system can be evolved through which this very objective can be defeated, Board would not have to switch from one system to another like a cat on a hot tin roof. As far as the admission test is concerned even without entering a debate over the issue one can say government is devaluing SSC as a form of a standardised evaluation test. Even if the incidental problems linked with the decision are ignored what is the guarantee authorities will not deem this as unworkable if not tomorrow, next year? It is time we settled down; had a durable system in place.

Popularising Law —

Hilariously

Gazi Shamsur Rahman is dead. This is an absurd death. He was so full of verve all along and seemed to have conquered aging. Suddenly cancer strikes and the picture changes unseen by us all. And whenever we conjure up his visage in the mind's eye we get back in us that sense of well-being that he infected everyone around him with. One is not sure if a jurist of his standing ever became so popular a figure not only among his friends but in the society at large. His 144 books, almost all of these on law, were not addressed to the general reader. Outside the legal profession, few cared about these. His stupendous popularity was built mostly on his felicity and prowess as a conversationalist. Television caught some glimpses of it and spread it to millions who could not get close to him for first hand taste of the thing. Besides he was a diarist and raconteur of rare quality.

One clue to his success in every field that interested him was that this vastly learned man wore his erudition very lightly indeed. Another lay in his ability to reduce the most abstruse of things to simple and very familiar, *aatpourey*, so to say, expressions of the *adda* vintage. This incomparable man made out of law — the dead thing that sits over the soul and stifles imagination and creativity and exacts abidance as no authoritarian ever did — very hilariously enjoyable TV talk show. His law columns in the print media also sparkled with its chatty yet precise expositions. No wonder, he had peaked at creative writing too.

It is very hard to take his death. Better remember him as lively as we knew him — the creator of *Dabir* and *Khabor*.

"Dialogue between a Daughter and a Father"

What Picasso, says is that art, like creative science, is not a photographic representation of surface reality that is seen by the eyes or understood only by sensory perceptions. It is an exploration beyond the apparent into ourselves, into the essential linkage of the souls of all creation with the essential, elusive and intangible universal soul.



thought, in not-too-distant past, reduced the reality of the world and existence to the behaviour of matter which is really inert. Galileo analysed the motions of bodies on the earth. Kepler studied the vast aggregate of matter like the planets. Newton integrated their conclusions to formulate a universal law that the brick of the universe is the particle of matter that is dead and incapable of motion unless being pushed or pulled by an external force. The ancient wisdom of the Greeks and in this land of ours too reduced the various representations of matter to the primordial particle. But this particle is ensouled. It has both material and spiritual dimensions.

Embattled as I was, I argued that the particle in quantum physics today has the power of internal dynamism and self movement. Or when Einstein discovered the theory of relativity, he said that it was not evidences and equation, but a flash of insight or should I say, imagination taking the wings.

My daughter she said: 'I agree Baba. The scientists need not always begin with a hypothesis and collect a huge

mass of evidences before making an educated guess. The creative scientist may look into her/himself rather than just factual evidence to explore the elusive truth. You recall the quote, an equation should be elegant. Einstein may have had a flash of insight or searched his soul for ensouled matter. But the rigour of his analysis defies an artist. Also, does an artist always look beyond the apparent reality into an extra sensory dimension? A poet may talk about imagination recollected in tranquillity or some such sentiment. A painter's brush may explore the reality beyond the superficies.

But what about a still life on canvass that portrays what is on the surface? What about a verse or a prose-piece based strictly on observation? Those

can be pretty or even elegant but devoid of what you call the spirit. True, a creative artist, or so also a scientist, looks into the self to perceive and explore the life force or the universal soul and recover the sense of the sacred, not just in the sense of a theistic belief, but in the sense of reverence for earth and all creation, of celebrating and co-creating the universe with all the power of our latent divinity. But can we generalise?

I could not agree with her, more. But, I wanted to probe a little more. So I reminded her of the wonderful saying of Picasso which she quoted to me herself. He says, 'Art is not true.' Her reply has been most lucid and I quote verbatim her words:

What Picasso, says is that art, like creative science, is not a photographic representation

of surface reality that is seen by the eyes or understood only by sensory perceptions. It is an exploration beyond the apparent into ourselves, into the essential linkage of the souls of all creation with the essential, elusive and intangible universal soul. The initial sensory images that come across the naked eyes may be deceptive. They allow us to see what is on the surface and, often, things are not as they seem. So one must not get enchanted with external forms, however beautiful those may be, without looking into the mind and soul.

The dialogue was coming to an end and it had been a learning experience for me. I understand today that a scientist, a poet, a painter or for that matter, each individual in human society perceives truth differently. Some may see it as tangible facts or evidences. Some may refer to sources like Newton or Einstein, Sartre or Picasso. Others may see it in plants and animals and stars, in themselves and in their children. The true reality as underscored by my daughter remains inside ourselves. We must explore our souls and find the life

force rather than looking for it anywhere else. As the ancient wisdom says: 'The face of wisdom is covered with a brilliant golden lid; that do thou remove, O Surya. For the law of the truth for sight.' — (Issa Upanishad 15) The incantations of Goethe also rings in my ears: To treat a man as he is is to debase him To treat a man as he ought to be is to enrage him.

True, we cannot live with the old myths and dogmas. It is also equally true that we cannot live without any spirituality. Rationality is important. But, just a rational existence without any foundation of the soul and the spirit that is all pervasive, life can be singularly arid and empty. Because, rationality is mute about the questions of mystery, of the miracle of mind and of manifestations of divine imagination.

Further, unless there is the continuous awareness that there is a unified oneness which binds the world together and becomes evident in the multiplicity of what we see, there is no possibility of the essential humanness of the human species. Body may be the chariot and sense — organs the powerful horses. But it is wisdom that is the driver and soul, the master of the Chariot.

To the Editor...

"Narrow Squeak ..."

Sir, Our attention has been drawn to an editorial headlined "Narrow Squeak for Biman" published in your esteemed daily on August 10, 1998 which needs to be clarified as under:

The views expressed in the editorial is based on a report carried by a Bengali daily a day before. That report itself is a story of "its own nature" having a lot of self-contradiction. In fact, there was no fire, so question of snuffing by the attending ground staff does not arise. Moreover, automatic fire detector and fire extinguisher are there in the cargo hold.

It is not possible for any airline let alone Biman to keep such incidents hidden. Our procedures call for such incidents to be reported to Civil Aviation Authority without any delay. This we did promptly. The area of the incident was inspected and the aircraft was released for flying.

It is, therefore, perhaps not correct to say that Biman has been living dangerously for quite some time. Rather, Biman's proven track record on safety is arguably in the high note.

Antwar Hossain Khan
Dy. General Manager PR
Biman Bangladesh Airlines

Rewarding students

Sir, The presenting ceremony which was recently organized by the London Examination Assessment Council and the British Council to award the successful students of the GCE "O" and "A" Level with their certificates was truly admirable. Yet I regret to state the above preparation have dismayed many. Such ideas seemed absolutely astonishing as in the past the Council have never stepped up to award the students in that way. This not only disappointed the past students but also their parents. Still now, a question of uncertainty prevails, as we are not sure whether it is a permanent scheme.

In fact it won't be wrong to say that innumerable meritorious students were deprived of this credit as in their times they hardly came across with such official appreciation. If this was not followed earlier, why now? On the other hand, a large number of students will be inspired if they are rewarded warmly like this. Perhaps it is hard to explain how joyous we would have been if the Council would have developed this procedure long before.

Rezwana Hussain Jabbar
2/16 Iqbal Road,
Mohammedpur, Dhaka-1207

Are we safe?

Sir, Dateline October 1996: Tuhin committed suicide (?) by using shoe-lace in police custody. His offence was to be a member of the opposition party.

Dateline February 1997: Seema Choudhury was raped by some police personnel and later died in "safe custody". Offence unknown.

Dateline June, 1997: Nuruz-zaman Sharif died in police custody. His offence was that he wanted to meet the PM to retain his lost job.

Dateline January, 1998: Arun Chakrobarty was arrested by the DB personnel, tortured and later died. The offence was to possess illegal arms.

Dateline 23rd July, 1998: Shamim Reza Rubel arrested by a DB team, tortured beyond human limits and later died. His offence was to possess "illegal arms", though police could produce no clear evidence for the allegation.

Above are a few events concerning police atrocities in recent times. According to one statistics, in the past six months 35 persons died in police or safe custody. This is enough to make us worried about what is happening around us.

These arise serious questions in minds of the citizens. It's the moral obligation of the government to guarantee safety to the citizens. But over the last

few months the situation has alarmingly worsened. Who can assure that there won't be any attack at your house without any provocation? Who can be sure that you will not be arrested under "Section 54" without doing anything wrong?

Are we safe? Will I be the next victim? Am I safe? Are You safe?

Farseem M. Mohammadi
BUET, Dhaka

"I want my lawyer"

Sir, Noted international affair specialist Farid Zakaria in a seminal article aptly coined the term "illiberal Democracy". He placed Bangladesh in around the middle in the spectrum of illiberal democratic countries. Perhaps had he been more familiar with our country, he would have ranked us even higher.

We know that whenever a person is arrested in western countries, he/she suspected of mass murder, serial killing or terrorism, the first thing he/she hears that, "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say or do now can be used against you."

And the first thing the arrested says is: "I want my lawyer"

Does a common citizen of Bangladesh enjoys anything remotely similar?

Shifajiqur Rahman
BUET, Dhaka

Enemy of the people

Sir, I am a Bangladeshi living temporarily in the USA. While I was in Bangladesh before coming to the US, I found policemen of Bangladesh were very uncivilized. Their main aim is not to serve the people, but to earn black money by any means. They take bribe from the owners buses, trucks, every kind of vehicles; they arrest people and torture them without any reason to take bribe from the family of arrested person. They release criminals by accepting bribe. They rape women whenever they get chance. They collect tolls from shops, markets and criminals. They sponsor the criminal activities to get huge return of money.

They take huge amount of bribe by facilitating illegal border trade. They take bribe from hotel owners and in turn allow them to do prostitution business. Sometimes they are the partner in that business. They are the men behind all the evil acts in society. They are the number one threat to the country and enemy of the people.

Here in the US policemen are the friends of the people whereas in our country they are not. What a contrast!

My advise to the government is to reform the police. I hope this letter would hit those sincere and honest officials of both police and other public servants.

Ms. Joyndal Abedin
University of Montana,
Missoula, MT 59812, USA

Sir, I draw your attention to the recent remarks (The Daily Star, 13 July, '98 page 11) made by Dr. Arun Kumar Sharma, Professor of Botany, Calcutta University at a lecture organised at the LGED Bhavan, Agargaon, Dhaka, on 12 July last, as part of the Bangladesh-India Science and Technology Cooperation on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of India's independence.

Prof. Sharma is reported to have said that the hybridisation of plants, commercial production of human anti-bodies, nitrogen fixation, molecular documentation of crops and DNA finger printing system are highly prospective ways of bringing about revolutionary changes in diversified fields.

On this occasion Prof. Sharma denounced criticism that biotechnology is a threat to bio-diversity as in his opinion this technology is in harmony with the changes of nature. In the same event Prof. Ahmed Shamsul Islam, an eminent botanical scientist is reported to have sought Indian expertise

Who is this Akram?

Sir, We know through newspaper reports that AC Akram of DB is the main suspect in Rubel murder case. But who is this Akram? Where does he come from? What is his qualification, when did he join the police force? How old is he? How many promotion he got during his tenure of office? Why was he posted to DB?

We want to know everything including the family life of this alleged licenced killer, unfortunately we have not been able to know most of these details through *The Daily Star* though this paper has been reporting the murder since the first day.

Ahmed Ali Khan
Elephant Road

"She is Ours"

Sir, Mr Badruzzaman from Narsingdi drew a painful scenario in his letter "she is ours" printed in the DS dated 30 July '98. During the BNP had day "hartal" on 16 July he had "preferred to pass through Cantonment having an idea that no, malye prevails in that area ..."

And then a very unfair event took place when our writer was turned back due to the "assaults" of the guards, but a mere girl was allowed to pass through Mr Badruzzaman, you have no idea what the true meaning and purpose of a cantonment really is. You have to understand that the law of the country doesn't apply within this area. You were lucky that the MP's didn't invite you into their stations for some sweet interrogation. Under normal circumstances the general public are not allowed simply to "pass through a sensitive area as such. No one is allowed to enter a cantonment unless and until they have a pass, an official invitation or a genuine reason. People like you, Mr Badruzzaman, believe that simply because democracy prevails in our country you can enter anything and everything just because the heck of it. You are very wrong. The defence services are there to protect us. They reside, work and exercise in a secluded area. They never poke their noses into public life, then should we? And have you ever thought that the girl who was allowed to pass through might have been a civilian or a military personnel's family member who was residing in that area? Then don't you think she has more of a right and preference than a civilian from Narsingdi who simply wants to "pass through" on a hartal day?

Shahnewaz Siddique
Dhaka

the dark of night his wife and did not return, father who left his lispng kid with assurance of coming back with red shirts and failed to realise his promise, the names of two lakhs mothers, daughters, sisters and wives who had been subjected to rape, torture and harassment, are yet to be written in the history books. What ever has been written is fraught with errors or bias.

I was one of the 'warsons' children whose father was killed by the Pak bahini and was an orphan who had to spend days unfed and nights in pain of hunger. I am a witness of what happened in my village. Nobody can give better account than me. I hope, like myself, a son/daughter will be available in every village to come forward to write the history of his/her village. In this computer age, few CD-disks will contain all the relevant data. What is required is a lead, patronisation, inspiration and guidance so that the controversy could be put behind forever and our nation can engage in the struggle of achieving that for which it shed blood.

Md Shah Jahan
Dhaka

'Blame it on Women'

Sir, Bravos for printing the article 'Blame it on women' by Sonia Kristy. Finally the Daily Star has printed a fiery article by a passionate writer on just one of many social and economic deprivations hounding us now. The Star readers deserve more of these types of commentaries.

Shahnewaz Siddique
Dhaka

Postponement of SAFTA

Sir, Over the last few years, Dr. Kabir U Ahmed, through his aptly named column "Insight", has done much to raise the general level of economic policy discourse in Bangladesh. His reaction towards SAFTA, however, as exemplified the August 2nd column, seems to be visceral rather than intellectual. He accepts uncritically the bit of populist lore that a trade deficit is a "loss". In fact a trade deficit, as a first approximation, is a gift, something for nothing. More precisely, it is a net inflow of capital whose precise effects will depend on how it is actually financed. To refer to this, repeatedly and without qualifications, as a "loss" simply panders to populist prejudices.

The studies of the possible effects of SAFTA that I have seen suggest that (a) all SAARC countries will benefit, (b) as a proportion of current GDP the gain will be greater for the smaller nations, but (c) aggregate gains will be modest for all partners — much less, for example, than the gains from global integration as envisaged by WTO rules. From the purely

economic point of view, therefore, we can do without SAFTA, or even SAFTA. I would, however, still be in favour of SAFTA on two non-economic grounds: (a) as a rehearsal for global integration, and (b) as a way to increase regional solidarity and reduce mutual hostility and distrust. I am aware that the second can backfire. But at least disagreements on economic matters can usually be resolved on the basis of rational discourse rather than rhetoric. Certainly Dr. Ahmed is quite right about the absurdity of the 40 per cent value added restriction, about the choice of items for liberalisation, and much else. I hope he will continue to bring his considerable analytical resources to bear on the analysis and advocacy of a workable policy framework for SAFTA instead of starting off from a rigid anti-SAFTA position

Abu Abdullah
Director General, BIDS

For out-door patients

Sir, A justice is to reform laws: a doctor is to reduce and produce new ideas of treatment; a social worker/lawmaker is to promote/penalise the society's curses. And all these together are to present a healthy atmosphere for the country's recent health policy. I want to express an option which may in some way be beneficial both for the poor and the rich.

I propose: Outdoor-patients of all the hospitals will pay Tk 100 as consultation fee out of which —
a. 60% will be paid to attending doctors.
b. 10% will be paid for pathology investigations.
c. 10% will be paid to supply prescribed medicine by the hospital authority.
d. 10% will be paid for hospital admission.
e. 10% will be spent for welfare of poor patients, hospital development and other purposes.

It requires a mention that paid patients will be able to draw the attention of the attending doctor as well as the hospital authority. At present, it is estimated that at least/nearly 50 per cent of the people go to private chambers and clinics. In this situation, the government has no way to earn from the health sector or to provide dedicated service to people.

Dr MA Khaleque
Senior Medical Officer
Atomic Energy Research Establishment
Savar, Dhaka

Uniformed ghosts

Sir, I can visualise the vengeance of an imaginary ghost when I think of the death of Rubel in custody. Going through the reports in the dailies, now I'm sure that Rubel's fateful demise has been dramatised in an avenging mood and was unjust.

Zia Farazi
East Nasirabad
Chittagong

Alien Gene Invasion ?

to develop five recently established tissue culture-based companies in Bangladesh.

What is interesting is to note that Mr. P.K. Ghosh, Adviser to the Department of Bio-technology (DBT) Government of India has quite recently expressed the view (Down To Earth, 28 February, '98 page 37) that the environment has also a profound role to play to impart control on the levels of expression of the introduced genes (through bio-technology).

He further added by saying that the results of assessment of transgenic plants in one environment may not be valid, therefore, in other environments. Which is why countries sitting on rich plant bio-diversity need to be cautious.

The views expressed by Prof. Sharma and others in Dhaka is quite contradictory to the view expressed by Mr. Ghosh in the sense that the differences between the different environ-

ments is not mentioned while propagating for bio-technological advances (apparently) as a great scientific breakthrough (or revolution?) sans considerable side-effects.

The reason for my concern is that Bangladesh like many other developing countries having rich (but fragile) plant diversity (already under serious threat from existing causes) has very weak consumer protection laws and the scientific capability of assessing the adverse effects of bio-technological products (to the best of my knowledge) is almost non-existent in this country.

Under these circumstances the active pursuit in the introduction of a wide array of bio-technological products and processes (in the absence of an effective regulatory regime) is dangerous to the people and environment of this country. Therefore I would like to appeal to the government to ensure ef-

fective surveillance on the introduction of the products and processes mentioned above.

At the same time I would also like to appeal to all concerned citizens to keep vigil over the introduction of this technology so that we are not caught unaware through attempts which have the sole motive of profit maximisation at the expense of the public interest.

Although it is quite unfeasible to attempt the outright prevention of import of these products and processes in a liberalised international trade environment even if they did have detrimental effects, one of the best ways to deal with the emerging situation in my opinion would be through developing capacities in screening such processes/products through an accountable system.

Let us at least do this on time rather than 'waiting for catastrophes' to force our hands and wake us up from our fragile but seemingly (?) blissful repose.

A. Zayed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

One Akram instigated some others and Rubel was dead. If this is the situation of our judicial system, the how can we feel secure in our motherland?

Arun Kumar Btsuwas
Dept of English, DU

The Terminators?

Sir, We are appalled at the inhuman treatment meted out to Rubel by the DB police due to which he succumbed to his fatal injuries. How could these personnel beat up Rubel so mercilessly in full view of his relatives is a matter of grave concern.

The people in the neighbourhood had to watch this incident helplessly. This shows the deep rooted fear of the police by the people. The young man repeatedly said that he did not possess any fire arms, but that plea fell on deaf ears.

Rubel's father hinted that the police wanted ransom for his son's release. If it is true then God keep us safe from these monsters who pretend to be our "protectors". We the peace loving people of this country demand a thorough probe into this incident.

A Concerned Mother
Dhaka

JBBMBJB

Sir, It is fervently hoped that the authorities would not apply SPA on innocent citizens who refer to the above bridge by a plain and simple nickname, namely, Jamuna Bridge, during informal and unofficial discussions in the drawing rooms or outdoors in private conversations.

People do have nick names, including high-profile politicians and leaders, and many tag the nickname after their formal and official name. A loving child is called by many affectionate nick names (Baboo, Moni, Sona, Pakhi, Tuntuni and so forth).

Use of abbreviations in daily life has no malevolent intention most of the time.

A Z
Dhaka

SOFA

Sir, This in reply to the letter published in the DS on 22nd July '98, one Mr Muzaffar Siddique of Bijnayagar, Dhaka, who supported SOFA and requested the government to sign SOFA.

Do you know Mr Siddique that the Japanese and Korean girls and boys having sharp nose their height have increased and colours has changed. Do you want your future generation to have brighter colour?

How do you agree a foreigner enter in this country without passport, visa and his baggages will not be checked while he comes and goes out and moves freely?

Really, you are a patriot like our leaders!

Zia Farazi
East Nasirabad
Chittagong

Is it a fair way to protest?

Sir, A group of students of Mirpur Government Bangla College were locked in clashes with transport workers and damaged over 50 vehicles in the city recently. They brought out processions and put up barricades on the road when they came to know that the college principal was injured when a speedy truck hit his car.

Now I ask them: was it a fair way to protest in a democratic country?

It would have been the very right thing to do if they initiated regarding that accident constructively. In a democratic country every problem should be solved peacefully through dialogue and negotiation.

Mostafa Sohel
Dhaka