

Flood Aid

With the enormity of the damages being wrought by the floods sinking in after a month of poverly sentimental hopes that things would get better, the government has formally posted its SOS call for international assistance to meet exigency.

Considering the huge economic bail-out packages most liberally given to some countries with not much of corresponding results obtained therefrom, Bangladesh's demand for disaster aid worth US \$700 million should look modest.

The initial response from some bilateral donors like the US, Japan, UK, Denmark, Germany and Canada and from a few humanitarian organisations has been encouraging. But obviously a greater flow hinges on a quick processing of Bangladesh's request at the donors' end.

Some doubts have been expressed in the international media about our capacity to distribute aid to the victims. What little is left of the communication links does present a logistical problem no doubt, yet, the concern, we venture to say, is somewhat exaggerated.

The human element of the distribution mechanism should comprise local representatives from all political parties. That would not merely help reach all the needy people there are but also keep corruption largely at bay because of the in-built check-and-balance.

Chittagong port has to work with maximum efficiency. If the diseased trade unionism feeding on the virus of politicisation cannot be ended by anything short of declaring the port services as 'essential' with all that it legally impels to be it. Yes, the customs clearance of relief goods at the ports must be much quicker — on an emergency footing, to be precise.

Tyranny at Ctg Port

This is trade unionism at its worst: holding the national interest hostage to narrow coterie end. We strongly condemn the disruptive programme given by the coalition of 22 trade union bodies at the Chittagong port to protest government's decision of allowing an American company to set up private container terminals in Dhaka and Chittagong.

We ask the agitating trade union bodies was it really necessary for them to indulge in such an utterly irresponsible and selfish campaign when the country is faced with such a colossal economic damage due to the devastating flood? Don't they have any idea how much of an impact every inactive hour at the harbour has on the economy?

We also do not understand why the mayor of Chittagong has to chime with the agitators in public. Being a member of the party in power he should have known better ways to get the message across to the government than siding with the trade unionists with an eye only on his own stakes in regional politics.

Live Long with Us

Nazrul is dead twenty-two years. Before that he was dead in his mind for over three decades. He had an active creative and intellectual life of roughly two decades. These few simple facts, weighed against the ponderous corpus of his output in literature and music and film-making, and in politics and journalism easily bring out the extraordinary in him.

Many of us try to be inspired by great minds and lives, but in a shirker's way. We must closely comprehend the art and teachings of both Tagore and Nazrul and be in constant debate over these. Only then shall we be able to dip our whole people into the creative and critical intellectual sea of nectar that they had bequeathed us.

Through his music we have access to the finest melodies of the subcontinent of the last three centuries. Always there are divine words set in divine airs in hundreds of his songs.

Of Communication and Transport

The airports at Bangkok and Singapore are stretched to their seams. Dhaka should be in a position to handle diverted international traffic. But that would require, better airport services and facilities, urgent conversion of Chittagong airport into an intentional one; and upgrading Sylhet airport to handle non-resident Bangladeshi traffic from the United Kingdom.

eastern and northern frontier states of India coupled with the conversion of the single-track railway along Sirajganj-Ishwardi-Rajshahi to a double line broad-gauge railway and the proposed meter gauge railway along Sirajganj-Bogra will further augment the importance of Rajshahi metropolitan area and the growth of other urban centres in the western districts, namely, Nawabganj, Bogra, Naogaon, Sirajganj, Joypurhat and Natore.

Another important consideration for decentralized urbanization is the growth of thousands of market-towns, the most important prerequisite being investment in transportation infrastructure. World Bank's Rural Infrastructure Study (1996) has identified 2100 of such growth centres.

Within this spatial scenario of urbanization, it is important to upgrade the road network linking divisional - district - thana and market town centers. Such improvement will greatly help the private sector to take over inter-city passenger traffic thus allowing the railway system to reorganize itself into a predominantly freight moving profile.

through Bangladesh. And that presupposes considerable expansion and upgrading of existing roads and highways. A proposed bridge over the Ganges at Paksey will open up the Mongla port for commercial/industrial freight from Nepal and Bhutan. A happy announcement by no less a leader than the Prime Minister of Bangladesh herself regarding a bridge over Padma will not only bring the eastern and southern parts of the country together, but also halve the distance between Dhaka and Khulna. Mongla port will be in real business then.

senger traffic in inter-city routes like Dhaka-Chittagong, Dhaka-Sylhet, and Dhaka-Rajshahi to the private sector. Why not handover the maintenance of inter-city trains to private operators? What is important for the future, however, is to restructure the profile of the railways for freight traffic, especially container transport.

Also, in the context of the Trans Asian Railway routes, Bangladesh is in a strategic lo-

ture to the cheapest and traditional water transport: With waterways of 25,000 Kilometer, it is naturally so. But due to heavy siltation coming down from the upper reaches, lack of dredging and river-training, the water ways are severely hindered and sometimes a deadly menace. But planned development with both private and public initiatives can make that a blessing, rather than a curse.

The greatest opportunity, however, lies in Chittagong port as the gateway for regional freight-traffic for destinations abroad. But what is the current state of the art in that dismal port? "Moving a container through Chittagong costs \$ 600 compared to norms of \$ 150 to \$300 at neighbouring ports.

Table with 2 columns: Year, TEU. 1999: 395,000 TEU; 2005: 554,000 TEU; 2010: 737,000 TEU; 2020: 780,000 TEU

An examination of existing capacities and future growth of container traffic suggests that the optimum solution might be to develop the existing container facilities using the private sector (Bangladesh 2020, UP, 1998).

Another possible option is a deep sea port at the mouth of Shbisa, south of Mongla.

Turning from land and water to the yonder blue of wide open sky, the golden eagle for Bangladesh is state-owned Biman. Lack of adequate fleet, factionalism and apathy have plagued the services in the past. A welcome initiative has been the induction of private operators in selected domestic routes.

Also today, the airports at Bangkok and Singapore are stretched to their seams. Dhaka should be in a position to handle diverted international traffic. But that would require, better airport services and facilities, urgent conversion of Chittagong airport into an intentional one; and upgrading Sylhet airport to handle non-resident Bangladeshi traffic from the United Kingdom.

In the end, I recall the verses that Amit Ray recited to Labanya in Shesher Kautika:

পাখি বেঁচে ছিল বহুদিন ধরি
কামরা দুখন সন্দি বহুদিন পধি।



Again as the document Bangladesh 2020 notes: "Some medium scale bridges such as one over Meghna at Bhairab Bazar, one over Ruppa at Khulna and one over Karnaphula at Chittagong could bring nearly all parts of the country under a single roads and highways network. Especially as a participant in improving the urban network - including some urban bypasses such as the one east of Dhaka city on a BOT basis for instance - the private sector can become a major player in Bangladesh's transport network."

Let me now make a transition from roads to railways. Exclusively state owned, the ledger-book of Bangladesh Railways has been heavily in the red. An encouraging initiative by the government is to progressively hand over pas-

senger traffic in inter-city routes like Dhaka-Chittagong, Dhaka-Sylhet, and Dhaka-Rajshahi to the private sector. Why not handover the maintenance of inter-city trains to private operators? What is important for the future, however, is to restructure the profile of the railways for freight traffic, especially container transport.

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Having said all that, let me

To the Editor...

House rent Code

Sir, I request the authorities to promulgate (or revise) the Code of Conduct for Tenants and the Landlords and the Landladies (what awful terms), as in plot-hungry Dhaka the house rents are leaping up uncontrollably, and too frequently. The tenants have no protection. There should be NGOs for tenants!

As a tenant (a private individual with family), I am the sufferer as my house rent has gone up from 6,000 to 10,000 in eight years; unilaterally. This one-way 'take it, or leave it' attitude by the house/flat owners leaves the tenants unprotected officially and legally. Our people's government... should do something about it; and then enforce what it decides.

The rules and regulations should come out of the statute books and walk in the streets and be hung up where necessary.

Harassed Tenant
Dhaka-1207

How could we do this?

Sir, We are ashamed and devastated. We couldn't believe that it happened in our friendly campus. We were totally outraged when we learnt about the incidents that three of our fellow students were allegedly raped by the students of 'this' university.

We always felt proud as students of one of the most open and free minded university of this country. But now, all that have been shattered, and a cloud of shame is hanging over our university.

How could we do such a thing?
Now who are to blame? Is it us, our teachers or the society we live in? We think its the process and the process server.

A Couple of Students
JU

"Thanks, Mr Prince"

Sir, I read Mr M Zahidul Haque's letter "Thanks, Mr Prince" (DS of 15-8-98), in which he has thanked Saudi Prince Abdul Aziz for extending generous financial help in establishing the first Islamic Centre/Mosque in North America and for his active involvement.

Sir, How unlucky we are. Every year, in small scale or large the flood water comes rushing in, drowning hundreds and thousands of huts and houses. Submerging acres upon acres of land along with the crops standing in those. Marooning lakhs of people. Some being rendered completely homeless, some still staying in their houses with knee deep water inside them and some climbing up on to the roofs of their houses which has completely gone under water. What an awful suffering of our people for weeks or months together every year. One can only understand and feel what they go through if one can put himself in their shoes. Not everybody can do so though, because these days we all are so concerned with our own selves that we haven't much time to spare for others problems.

The loss of property for the affected families and for the nation as a whole is also gigantic. Many families reel under this financial blow for years together before they can fully recover. Many industries, mills and factories go down under water with their machineries as

Neighbour indeed!

Sir, It is ironical and extremely hilarious that while our government is trying its utmost not to incur displeasure of India in any way, in fact walking on tiptoe, Indian government is bent upon to oust the so-called Bengali-led state.

It seems that they could not tolerate persons who speak Bengali so in the process the government of India is deporting its own people who speak Bengali to Bangladesh.

The Poor of Bangladesh
Dhaka

Gross inefficiency

Sir, Though I am a regular viewer of important programmes of BTV, I must admit that the overall quality of BTV programmes is deteriorating.

One of its gross mishandling of programmes was seen regarding the programme "Shopan" shown on BTV on 23.8.98 (Sunday) at 10 pm. At 11.45 pm on 22.8.98 it was announced that the programme "Shopan" will be telecast on 23.8.98 at 6.40 pm. To our utter surprise and

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong

A Venice in the East

well as with their raw and finished products. After one such flood we found soggy cornflakes inside new boxes. On complaint, we were told that flood water is to be blamed! To think that the company sold this spilt product to their valued customers without any qualms is really unbelievable and possible only in Bangladesh.

Getting back to the flood damages and sufferings caused by it to our millions of poor people mainly. Of course middle and upper class suffer too, but much less, compared to the sufferings of the poor. Who have no place to go to, who lose all their meager belongings to the hungry monster who devours all their earthly possessions. In their wake the floods also result in the spread of various diseases leading to serious epidemics most of the time. Causing deaths of so many, from diarrhoea, dysentery, typhoid etc., or from snake bites or starvation as their crops are all lost and they are left with no cash in their hands.

And yet in this very planet of ours, just a couple of thousand miles from here, people do live with water surrounding

disappointment the programme was shown at 5-10 pm on 23.8.98. The mystery of such a change is still unknown. Is it due to gross inefficiency or an outcome of a snap decision of the authority. Would the authority explain?

Needless to say that if such state of affairs continues the dwindling prestige of BTV will be down further.

ABMS Zahur
131 Mohammadi Housing
Society
Dhaka-1207

Illogical

Sir, The Indian government has been actively contemplating to forcibly push in lakhs of Bengali-speaking Indians to Bangladesh by alleging that they are "illegal immigrants".

It is a fact that ever since the partition and independence of the Indian subcontinent, there has been large-scale migration from and to all sides of the borders. Recently there have been reports of illegal immigration from India into Chittagong Hill Tracts. The government of India had, in the past, alleged that a number of Hindus had gone over to India. Now the people whom the government is trying to evict by brutal force are all Muslims. This is a blatant contradiction of the government's own position.

The government and the people of Bangladesh should resist such nefarious activities, which is clearly being motivated by base communal ideas and orientation. In fact, the civilized world should raise its voice against such Nazi-like unacceptable government conduct. However, there may be arrangements for the extradition and exchange of criminals and fugitives. For example, as reported in the press a Magistrate in Bangladesh, Devashish Roy posted in Joypurhat raped a young woman named Shah-nawaz (Daily Star, page 3, August 19). The criminal was prosecuted, but he absconded. Reportedly he fled to India. He was tried and sentenced by court of absentees after ten years' imprisonment. The victim, Shah-nawaz, on August 17 went to meet the Establishment secretary seeking redress, but fainted

Amir Adil Khan
30, Shantinagar Dhaka

She, you and I

Sir, Can anybody tell me why is our society going to dog so fast? I guess that nobody has an answer! As everybody is depending on somebody, therefore nobody is coming forward with simple answer: Yes! I came to the conclusion that we as a nation is suffering from this disease of SOMEBODY, NOBODY EVERYBODY and ANYBODY. Or else why are we lagging behind in implementing the basic civic law? Everybody is depending on somebody therefore nobody is coming forward with the solution. People are losing their faith in law, as there is no implementation of simple civic law in our society, therefore the law and order situation is deteriorating day by day. Isn't it high time to do something about it? Can we overlook this any more? I am sure the answer is a big No! Things are already going out of control very fast. But I am sure if we try now, we can come out of it before it is too late.

I therefore request the Home Minister to go through the newspapers and seriously think about the matters such as public nuisance of many kind, traffic violation, wrong parking, beating the speed limit, cinema ticket black marketing etc.

Do not wait for anybody thinking somebody will advise you, everybody is thinking but nobody is implementing it.

Amir Adil Khan
30, Shantinagar Dhaka

A Venice in the East

them all round the year. They are living so, for hundreds of years and happily even! They are rich and prosperous though living in water. These people are the Venetians living in the city of Venice.

The city of Venice is one of the most beautiful cities in the world and world famous too for its unique layout. It is a roving tourist centre too. All because the Venetians hundreds of years ago, had the wonderful idea and courage to dig innumerable canals criss-crossing their city.

So that the city itself is a work of art. The earth from the canals was used to raise the level of pieces of land in between them. The canal sides were all bricklaid so that the earth doesn't fall into them. Four or five stabled buildings were constructed just adjacent to the canals or rather on their brinks and amazingly till today they stand upright and strong. The water has not damaged them in hundreds of years! It is simply unbelievable, unless

BNP MPs' resignation

Sir, We are astounded and baffled to observe the good-for-nothing tug-of-war inside the BNP camp for collecting resignation letters from the party MPs.

We fail to understand the mystery behind it? Why resignation, mid-term election, by-election, change of government, new party in power, for whose gain or loss? How this would help solve manifold problems, sufferings and hardships of the people?

We do have the practical bitter experience that whoever is in power some party leaders get rich quickly, the poor become poorer, the rich richer and nobody cares to mitigate and alleviate the grievances and miseries of the masses.

We would therefore humbly request the Awami League, BNP, JP and JI not to accuse each other but to rectify and purify themselves first — for the service of the people, sacrifice their wealth and then hold a neat, clean and fair election for the greater national interest.

O. H Kabir
6, Hare Street
Ward, Dhaka-1203

CMSD tender

Sir, The authority has inserted discriminatory clause to tenders of CMSD for the local currency bidder.

"Payment will be made after successful installation, commission and satisfactory functional test at user's Hospital".

But above clause is not applicable for the foreign bidders. A year back, there was no such discriminatory clause inserted in the tender and no other purchase authority in our country put such conditions. It is interesting that the authority put such terms and conditions only for local bidder to bid in local currency but for the foreign currency bidder no such terms are applied in the tender.

On the other hand foreign bidder will get their payment under B/L before delivery of the goods to CMSD stores.

Abdullah Sarkar
146, Motijheel C/A,
Dhaka

Going through hell

While 99% of the students of the Indian Institute of Technologies (IIT) come abroad mainly to US for advanced education (MS & PhD), one or two students of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) are harassed by the US visa officers before they can get the F1 visa these days.

These Bangladeshis were being told they have insufficient fund, even though calculation showed some of them had much more than the minimum sufficient needed. Some of them were rejected based on their looks and without being asked any question. Some were rejected as soon as they told that their family will sponsor them without the visa officer even bothering to look at the bank statements. Many are randomly rejected based on the clause "you won't come back".

But looking at the universities in the US, it seems that Indians and maybe Chinese don't have as much problems getting the F1 visas. And how many Indians come back to India after finishing MS or PhD in US? The answer is: very very very very very few. Yet how come 99% of IITians and also from many other Indian Universities are given the F1 visa and so few from Bangladesh. The population of India is 6 times more than Bangladesh but there seems to be more than 1000 times Indian students in US. I have never really heard of any Indian getting rejected due

Going through hell

to 'you won't come back' clause or the 'insufficient fund' clause from Indian friends. When I was a graduate student, I have seen Indians come from all over left and right. Most of these Indians were not really rich and none of them went back to India after finishing MS and PhD. But I have been hearing nightmare stories from intending Bangladeshi students who face the US consulate.

A few months ago, I also heard an extremely sad news: a woman whose husband was critically ill in the US, tried to get a visitor visa in US consulate in Bangladesh. She was rejected again and again till her husband died in USA unseen by her.

Definitely, it seems that the US State Department which oversees the Consulate offices has hidden policy which specifically targets Bangladesh in this subcontinent. Bangladesh is not the country with the nuclear weapons, or is it that Bangladesh needs a nuclear weapon to make a point to US consulate?

Our people need education and both the government and the opposition should unite to make this point clear to the US consulate. I feel that Consulate officials are ruthlessly biased against Bangladeshis. Maybe if and when Clinton comes to Bangladesh, our president should raise this point. I don't see this as a moot point that should be ignored.

Romel Khan
A Citizen of Bangladesh

Dr. Sabrina Q. Rashid
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka