

Keep Prices in Check

A deep sense of catastrophe has seemingly pushed many of our otherwise speculation-happily traders into burrows of morality, ethics and social responsibility.

The daily wage earners have been hit below their belts by the flood so that with their sharply lessened purchasing power there has been a drop in the active demand of goods.

With the production, procurement and supply lines coming under serious threats we are very much skating on thin ice as far as containing the prices within bearable limits goes.

It is time the government took a good look at the supply-demand-price triangle and dyked an imminent rupture in the basic fabric of day-to-day living under circumstances we have not known before.

Our specific suggestion is, the government should immediately open a series of dialogues with industry and trade leaders including representatives of the importers, suppliers, wholesalers and retailers to see what they and the government can together do to keep the prices of essential commodities within the purchasing power of the common man.

Speed is the Key

This year's prolonged and pervasive flood has brought country's communication system on the verge of collapse. The heavy rush of flood waters has rendered the arterial roads across the land virtually off limits to traffic.

So far the services men in tandem with the people and civil administration have done a highly commendable job in firming up the major city protection embankments in the country.

A lot remains to be done by way of disaster management. And the most urgent challenge is to speed up the relief operations. The pace of relief operations has been pathetically slow and ridiculously inadequate at most places.

Alarming

Quizzical it may sound but country's medical facilities are one of the biggest sources of threat to public health. A report published in The Daily Star yesterday informed us that Dhaka Medical College Hospital dumps all its medical wastes in the roadside bins.

When one takes into consideration natural calamities like the ongoing floods and the way some of the pathogens procreate, the threat of mass health hazard becomes very real.

FLOOD recurs in Bangladesh every year causing heavy devastation on life, property, infrastructure and economic activities.

This year the scale has been far wider bringing, according to official estimates, about 39 out of 64 districts under water which is at the same level as was experienced in 1988.

One may of course ask the question whether only two observations can give the phenomenon the characteristics of regularity to call it a cycle.

However, its periodicity may not be exact. That is, the interval between these recurrences may not be exactly ten or

The victims of the annual floods may have developed some capabilities to cope with these regular occurrences, of course with the assistance of Flood Information and Disaster Management departments, but not the more severe floods that recur at 10-15 year intervals.

Shorter Intervals

However, the above question of periodicity raises another interesting issue. If one looks at the events of the last fifty years or so, one finds that the intervals between these severe floods have been getting shorter and shorter.

To answer the first question, one has to look at the changing pattern of weather but one also has to look at why the rivers cannot flush out the onrush of waters due to heavy rainfall.

By and large, because of this, riverbeds are rising which not only carry the flood waters. Further, a lot of earlier flood control interventions like building embankments here and there have created barriers to water flows in some other regions.

However, the point here is that if sediment contents in flood waters increases over time, riverbeds rise gradually and the seabed gets heavy deposits of sediments every year.



INSIGHT by Kabir U Ahmad

Implications of Frequent Occurrences

It goes without saying that more frequent 1988-type floods will inflict heavier damages not only on the life of the victims directly but also on the economy and the society in general.

On top of this, if the global climate change brings heavy rainfall more frequently and also brings even a centimetre rise in the world sea level in 10-15 years, as the international experts claim, there is a major disaster-type situation to be reckoned with.

bridges and culverts, ferry ghats, buildings of local schools, colleges and other public and private institutions are damaged which will need urgent repairs costing large amounts of money.

From the point of view of the economy, agriculture, industry, commerce and foreign trade have been facing severe setbacks. But to answer the question raised above about the implications of increased frequency of 1988-type flood is a heavy blow to the stability and growth prospects of the economy.

Some Economic Effects of 1988 Flood

The value of agricultural output was Tk 17625 crore in 1986-87, which went down to Tk 17490 crore in 1987-88 and to 17304 crore in 1988-89 showing a decline of 0.8 per cent in 1987-88 and 1.1 per cent in 1988-89.

per cent in 1986-87 to 2.9 per cent in 1987-88 to 2.5 per cent in 1988-89.

It is easy to see that the effects of one year's major flood carry over to more than the subsequent year's level of activities. How long and what amount of resources will the economy need to recover from devastation of 1988 flood cannot be assessed right now.

Some Concluding Observations

The purpose of this short article was to indicate that quite apart from the regular annual floods, the country is also going through a longer cycle of much severe flood at 10-15 years intervals.

Technically, these two types of floods can be separated in terms of their scale and intensity or magnitude of devastation that they inflict on the people and the economy.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

To Tell You the Truth, Most People Lie

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

A lie cannot outrun the truth. Just ask Bill Clinton! It's not that every question has to be answered truthfully. There are questions that are inherently unfair.

In every society, a child is badgered with the instruction: "Tell the truth". Yet, as children grow up to be men and women, truth or the complete version of it, is the first casualty.

They frequently resort to cheating — with spoken words, or in actions. People prefer to go for the convenience of the short term relief, via a lie, rather than the long term cure, the truth.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who preached the virtue of absolute truth, would have turned in Anne Frank to the Nazis for the sake of not having to lie sooner or later, though, a person's propensity to prevaricate, gets him or her. A lie cannot outrun the truth.

ought to be met with contempt at worst or reticence at best. On January 26, 1998, on the advice of his public relations handlers, President Clinton set his jaw, shook his finger, clenched his teeth and literally lied through his teeth.

In their Martha's Vineyard "vacation", Hillary was demonstrating more Rodham than Clinton. According to the New York Times, in politics there is what is known as "rules of required hypocrisy", and here's how it works. "A politician pro-

responsibility but place blame elsewhere, excuse yourself within any admission. So people who abide by the more conventional rules of required hypocrisy when they deal with him almost always get burned."

The President is owed deference by his supporters, says Letitia Baldrige, Jacqueline Kennedy's chief of staff. "People expect you to be loyal. When you are in a place of trust, even if those above you abrogate that trust, you should remain loyal."

Having been branded a "liar" by his critics, now free of doubts, all his actions — such as

bombing Afghanistan and Sudan — are now suspect, and will remain so for the duration of his term, however long or short that may be.

A law Professor before he entered politics, legally "Slick Willie" was not incorrect in his denial. The prosecution in the Paula Jones deposition, had explicitly defined what constitutes "sexual relations."

Hillary remains opposed to another speech. TIME magazine continues: "All lies are not made equal. St. Augustine enumerated nine categories of lying, several of which would go into the category we call white lies.

Not by Jayalalitha's Pressure Alone

A N Dar writes from New Delhi

It is his colleagues whom Atal Behari Vajpayee should have made to work better. That has not happened. The blame should also fall on his party and his party allies.

HOW long will Vajpayee go on like this? He struck a brave and forthright role in his address to the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort. He did not sound false.

Vajpayee surprised many of his listeners when he read out his speech at the Red Fort. The best public speaker in the country reading out from a prepared text? Perhaps Vajpayee must have thought that it was better to lose out on the flourish of his extempore speech than give a false impression and say something in the heat of the moment that would not be right.

individual politician he would not do anything wrong. But then why is his government considered weak and about to fall almost every weekend?

Vajpayee knew that his listeners across the country were aware that the Prime Minister was not in a strong position. The coalition government's major ally, AIADMK, has not made him rule in peace.

People like George Fernandes who got the trade going against China had no qualms about sheepishly saying that yes, this was the personal view that he was arising. This too after Vajpayee himself had said that what he was saying was not

the government policy but George Fernandes' personal view. (Yes, Vajpayee's letter writer made it worse after the May 11 nuclear blast by saying in a communication to President Clinton that India felt threatened by China's nuclear policy.)

It is also the people in his own government who have made things difficult for Vajpayee. A poor budget (thank yashwant Sinha) setting off high prices, which the Prime Minister had to acknowledge in his Red Fort speech and falling exports (thank Ramakrishna Hegde) are bad spots in a government which came into being

in the countryside expectation that the nation had seen various other parties in power and now it was the time to give a chance to the BJP to prove that it could do better. It was now the moment for the BJP to turn a new leaf and fortunately for it had a leader who was, for the first time to satisfy the BJP cadres, wholly non-Congress.

Do the health authorities and the public not realise that, without good nursing by adequate numbers of qualified nurses, even the most skillful doctors in the world cannot ensure the best outcome for their patients?

Robin MacCormick Mymensingh

not have been known to the BJP that this will happen if the Maharashtra Government took such a step?

Take the case of the individuals in the Sangh parivar, the more ambitious and aggressive among them have tried with whatever help they could find to grab lucrative jobs for themselves.

On the question of allies the debate will continue on whether the BJP should have been so hungry for power as to put together a coalition that would be at the mercy of individuals and small parties. The coalition has been under great pressure from its allies.

In all this political turmoil the blame usually comes on Atal Behari Vajpayee. He is given the description of being a weak man. Is he weak or is he keen to carry forward with a politically weak back? As these lines are being written there is no knowing how long the Vajpayee government will last.

To the Editor...

Postal service

Sir, As a former Postmaster-General (a quarter of a century ago), I most sorrowfully admit that now-a-days I entirely depend on the courier service for all correspondence.

To the new generation of public servants, I ask whether they are going to do anything about it or not.

Pro Bono Publico

HANA: a fishy treaty

Sir, I wonder why the government signed the HANA treaty so promptly without even bothering to notify the parliament or the citizens.

ected government is up to regarding the welfare of our country. We have been facing natural calamities every single year. Suddenly we now see a wave of treaties claiming to help us during situations as such. Something strikes as very unusual here.

Right after the May explosions in India and Pakistan we see the birth of SOFA. Due to a massive outcry SOFA was killed immediately. Then HANA was born, which was signed without any clarification or notification. Fishy indeed!

SOFA or HANA — they sound as if it is one wolf under different skins.

I would urge the authorities concerned to discuss these mat-

ters first, draw up the pros and cons, and let us be the judge.

Not enough nurses in Bangladesh

Sir, I am a visitor from Scotland spending two months as a tourist while my wife works as a consultant, teaching nursing management in Rajshahi, Barisal and Mymensingh.