

## Disgusting

A deluge is a great leveller. But it can be a great revealing occasion too as this year's all conquering floods which look certain to get worse before getting any better after two days of heavy down-pour in the northern parts of the country would show. Knew as we did about their prejudice and myopia, the watery invasion this year has clearly shown how far our political leaders can go to build on their 'reputation'. With virtually the whole country floating on water and millions marooned and going through a most pathetic plight it is a cacophonous campaign at its duplicitous worst that the two major parties are locked in at the moment.

It is some sort of a world record of squabble that the flood politics of ruling Awami League and opposition BNP has given birth to. Having badly miscalculated the enormity of floods the AL government has finally woken up to the refractory reality. Party leader and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is spending time on highlighting the impact of the calamitous disaster and the necessity to tackle it unitedly but her call for 'united approach' is not matched by any action in that respect. Opposition call for forming an all-party relief committee has been dismissed summarily and the AL has been shaming the BNP with an amazing consistency for 'doing politics with people's plight'. As if not to be outdone by AL's flair for contradiction BNP are reacting with predictable ferocity. On one hand they are asking the ruling party to form an all-party flood relief committee and on the other they are carrying a relentless tirade against the AL government in a language that crosses the limit of civility and decency. How come BNP complain about ruling party's reluctance after indulging in an innuendo against it? You certainly don't expect cooperation from some one you call a thief. They seem to be more interested in discrediting AL than in the rehabilitation or relief work.

Both the parties sound utterly hollow and hypocritical with their utterances. They have reduced political speeches into cheapest form of rant that for all practical purposes can shrink the heart of the listeners and make their stomach heave. Left our parties are under any illusion let it be heard loud and clear: The nation is repelled at the comfort with which you have turned the sufferings of millions into an occasion for your political vendetta. We condemn your unscrupulous hypocritical shibboleths.

## Remembering a Committed Man

The centennial of Abul Mansur Ahmed began yesterday. We have in him a most remarkable man, specially representing the rise of the Muslim Bengali middle class. The Bengal of late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century produced men and women of extraordinary quality, both in action and intellect. And a great many of them were among the world's best — as writers and artists, scientists and preachers, social reformers and educators. Even in such stellar company Abul Mansur retains a niche clearly his own. One of his peers coming closest to him in many ways besides being a perfect contemporary operating in the same general sphere, could well influence and overwhelm him. But Abul Mansur was little swayed by Nazrul and went about becoming and being the incomparable Abul Mansur, creative writer, social and political thinker, lawyer, journalist and a practising activist politician.

What made Abul Mansur to move out to ever new pasture although he had been reaping golden harvest in the quarry he gave up last? Although another Muslim writer, Din Mohammad, had phenomenal success with his Househusque *Golak Chander Atmakatha*, a household item in the thirties, with *Aina* and its somewhat spaced sequel *Food Conference* Abul Mansur swept past him into a satirist of undying accomplishment. In the reason behind this can be found a key to his life's endeavours. He was a committed man. Committed as a writer and committed as a journalist, committed as a politician and, first of all, committed as a thinker.

Committed to what? Committed to carrying out a better deal for his people and for his culture. Which he thought were the Muslim peasantry of, first, Mymensingh and, then by that token, of all Eastern Bengal. There are many who wouldn't go with him in this and this far. But even they would ungrudgingly concede him his life of commitment to where he thought he belonged. He almost led an innerly uniform charmed life of astute intellect and unflinching mission.

Barring his stupendous intellect he never sought to use another instrument to realize his goal of common weal.

May we all abide by his remembrance.

## BCL Expulsions

In a positive reflection of image consciousness, the BCL central executive committee has expelled its five unit leaders at Jahangirnagar University for being 'charged with assaulting a respected teacher, Rehnuma Ahmed, on the campus.

Our off-repeated entreaties through this column for a self-corrective streamlining of the BCL behaviorism which has been lately bringing the ruling party to considerable disrepute seem to have been partially answered. We are glad for this, but would be happier still if more marching orders are issued to malcontents in the BCL fold wherever they are found on the campuses. Quite a few factious BCL units have had violent, even open armed conflicts which sometimes spilled over to the outer rim of educational institutions.

A good example has been set. Yet what we are looking forward to is an automatic replication of the same through an internal BCL mechanism, something distinguishable from acting under pressure of a negative expose as seems to have happened. Seminally, it is the ruling party that must redeem on its pledged dissociation with those BCL elements that have had an adverse reputation, dissuade local AL leaders from encouraging one faction against another and finally rein in violence or terror-prone elements within the student cadre.

The expulsion of BCL JU unit leaders should not in any way deflect the focus from punishing the alleged rapists on the camps or those who assaulted the teacher Rehnuma Ahmed.

# "Flood, Farmers and the Scientific Apartheid"

People uprooted from their hearth and home would like to know how long would their misery and anguish persist. Farmers would like to know when water would recede from their cropland for a second chance, if any, for the plantation of Aman, the major rice-crop.

Heavy monsoon rains in Nepal have caused severe flooding in most parts of the country.

What about Bangladesh? The preliminary estimate of F.A.O. indicates that 760,000 hectares of farmland have been affected with nearly 425,000 hectares of rice and other crops destroyed. The damage to farm produce is provisionally estimated at US\$150 million. (The Daily Star, September 1).

Given the fact that the Asian region accounts for 90 per cent of the global paddy output, the unnecessarily high price of rice already prevailing in the global market will go up still further. It is also important to remember that the world market for rice is rather thin. If China decides to import in a big way, there may be very little left for the rest of the countries in deficit.

It is reassuring that no less a person than the Prime Minister of the country has announced that the country has presently a stock of 800,000 to 1 million tons of food grains. Government has already taken measures to import another 600,000 tons. Besides, private sector has already imported in July and August 345,000 tons of rice. Hopefully, the private sector will be encouraged to import a further amount of 800 to 900 thousand tons of cereals. Food aid to the tune of 665,000 tons is expected from the concerned donor agencies and international organisations. The question that has to be confronted squarely and on a nation wide scale is the rapidity in collection and distribution of stocks as well as equitable distribution with affirmative rights for the poor and the free market economy. commodity crisis can only happen if the limitless avarice of the few and the powerful is allowed by default in good governance.

Yes, there are problems of vast magnitude. If flood water does not recede almost immediately, our major rice crop, namely Aman will be under serious threat. Nurseries for

transplanted Aman have already been damaged and transplanting on time, seriously hampered. To that, I shall come later. But the government has to be prepared for such an eventuality while encouraging the private sector to participate actively in the import-market. What is imperative in that context, is to ensure that there is no delay in the opening of letter of credit, or in releasing stocks from the port.

Now, I shall return to the agricultural rehabilitation programme which the farmers themselves and the Ministry of Agriculture as their partner have already taken up in right earnest.

Of our rice land of 11 million



hectares, 6.3 million (57 per cent) are under Aman. 2.4 million, under Aus, and 2.3 million under winter rice or Boro.

In some areas, Aus crop was already harvested before the flooding started. But in many places, ripe paddy is germinating in the stalk, as the farmers cannot harvest due to stagnant water. Also, the little they can harvest cannot be stored in the absence of any dry land or space. The obvious effect has been that the price of Aus per maund has come down to Tk. 100 to Tk.120 per maund. Officially anticipated put of Aus rice has been revised from 1.9 million downward to 1.6 million tons. I am afraid, the actuals will be even lower.

As for transplanted Aman, the timeframe for transplanting is optimally the middle of August which can be stretched to, maybe, a week more. That hope is no longer there. Farmers, in the high and medium land in the north and north-

west, whose seed beds and nurseries have not been affected are taking measures to transplant, may be within or a little after the first week of September. If quick transportation is made available, it may be possible to transport the seedlings to other areas, provided the flood waters recede fast. So, a more pragmatic approach may be to go in for late variety Aman, namely local varieties like Nigersail, Latsail, Rajasail, etc. Ministry of Agriculture has already taken an initiative in this regard. But the seeds and seedlings available are not enough, may be, 24 to 25 tons. The Ministry has also undertaken a major initiative in intensive Aman cultivation in the

more fortunate areas in the north-west region.

Rains have subsided there and the sun has come up. But there is a threat of drought due to El Nino, the twin brother of La Nina. The important task there is to ensure supplementary irrigation, as well as provision of balanced fertilizer and adequate production loan. Having been long involved with agriculture in the past, I am embarrassed to admit that our track-record in providing production credit to small farmers has been to say the least, most dismal. With all these concerted efforts, I am afraid, the loss to Aman output this year can go as high as 30 per cent. Even according to conservative estimate, our production deficit this year will be to the tune of 2 million tons.

Our best bet, therefore, is putting most of our effort in winter crops, namely early winter wheat, maize, oil-seeds, potato and vegetables. It is pos-

sible to sow wheat as early as in November, if enough seed can be procured from now on. As soon as water recedes, maize can be planted by dibbling and no-tillage method. Perhaps the millers can be encouraged to crush wheat and maize for chatpatis to be prepared at 70-30 ratio respectively. Hybrid maize production suffered a setback this year due to marketing constraints. As for procurement of seeds for potato and vegetables, the time is now. Otherwise, it may be too late.

Another unfortunate, but cruel truth needs to be recognised. The small and marginal farmers, not to speak of the landless, have no work. Many are eating up their seed stock as food for sheer sub-human survival. They are selling off their almost non-existent assets, including small livestock. Opening up employment opportunities for them in post flood rehabilitation or Food for Works programme must deserve immediate consideration by a people's government. Let us recall the poignant story of Gabriel Gracia Marquaz. When hungry, the rich and the poor look so much alike. A human being cannot survive on gold and silver and paper-money, not to speak of power or privilege. S/he needs food to live. If the farmers are dying we will be dead and gone too.

Finally, I come to a controversial issue regarding which I have been upbraided by my more knowledgeable friends. That is about local knowledge and farmer's rights to preserve and exchange their own seeds. Science and technology are important, so also the need for increased agricultural production. We are also fortunate, in the cusp of a new biological revolution. As Ismail Serageldin, the Chairman of Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research (CGIAR) puts it, all sorts of possibilities are opening up as the scientists are getting into the manipulation of genes.

"The breakthroughs" and here I quote verbatim from his

interview in *Neuweek* on August 24, 1998, "that are coming are for the first time are driven by proprietary science.... There are some ethical questions.... Poor farmers who have bred the plants over generations get nothing out of the patent, while the company gets 100 per cent. Then there is a question as to the priorities of the research. Despite the fact that malaria is the world's largest disease today, there's hardly any investment in a malaria vaccine."

The enormous success of the CGIAR system and national agricultural research systems was based on an 'implicit contract' that the genetic material available in the gene banks was a public resource available for all of humanity and that the best of science was also available to be used for the problems of the poor.

If people want to produce square tomatoes, that's fine. They have the patents on the square tomatoes if I can use the same science and apply it to the problems of the foods that most of the poor people in the world will need. To come back to the malaria example, if I can use the same science they would use for a Viagra pill in order to produce a malaria pill, we would be able to have the old parallelism of an open access and exchange system.

I am not proposing a single answer as a magic bullet. I am proposing serious dialogue between the private and the public sectors in order to ensure that there is adequate attention to the poor, and that the issue of proprietary science does not become a real threat. Proprietary science also could exacerbate the gap between the haves and have nots, with the risk of creating a "scientific apartheid" in the next century.

With that, my esteemed readers, I rest my case. Our southern door is always open for frontier of science and technology. But the grave that we may dig for ourselves in ecotax and euphoria, does neither have a door, nor a window.

## To the Editor...

### Demised hope

Sir, Yasmin's peril and her treatment in the hand of government press made me loathe BNP government like the Pakistani rapists of 1971. I longed for their ouster and the rein of Awami League. But my mother always warned against it. She always says that 'You do not know about their regime. They will result in total lawlessness. I defied to believe her. I supported AL all through my student years with a belief that they have changed for the good and have learned from their faults.

But have they? AL period started with Seema and now have reached a countless number of rape victims. Did anything happen to the culprits in the case of Seema? Was the Sheikh Hasina case hushed up? How people dare mass rape at NGO. And now the rape of three students in JU in last three months. None have been arrested despite the culprits being known. Sheikh Hasina was last in her speeches in case of Seema but why is she playing dumb now?

I now feel disgraced that I supported Awami League throughout my conscious life. And I want to warn everyone that this system is creating Frankenstein's monster from which no one will be safe. So the time to act is now regardless of political view. We all should put our efforts to save our sisters, daughters and our pride by forcing the system to bring the culprits to justice. Or else we should prepare ourselves of the future where all the women will be a thing of pray to the perverted monsters we have supported to be created.

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### Resisting temptation

Sir, It was noted with disappointment that the Prime Minister's radio-TV address to the nation on the grim national calamity due to sustained over-flooding had to be tinged with propaganda, and criticism of past regimes. These thrusts could have been taken up later and separately, as the contents are not new, and the public have

heard these sermons hundreds of times for the last two years.

Resisting temptation (to criticise) is one of the basic foundations of leadership; the other, base being tolerance — the other qualities of the head and the heart flower if cultured properly. The country is passing through crisis after crisis, but one of the most persisting crisis is the lack of outstanding leadership.

The gamble of a truncated Pakistan did not last more than one generation. Thereafter, we have lost another generation generating garbage at the national level. Now the political vilification campaign continues within ourselves; although divide and rule is neither the aim nor the objective of any of us and the leaders of the society (the political leadership) will collapse unless supported by non-political leaders.

In the final analysis, we the Janata cannot blame the leadership, as we are the stretcher bearers. The word 'stretcher' cannot be substituted with 'palki'. It is neither a joy ride nor sick procession to nowhere. Where are we?

We seem to have lost our cosmic bearing. We have feelings, but are we becoming dehumanised? We have a sense of direction, but we are confronted with whirlpools and eddy currents after proceeding for a while. Why are we fond of quoting the sarcasm that three Bengalees cannot run a company? We cannot address our own failings and weaknesses. Foreign assistance cannot pop up our sense of nationalism or whatever it is called (at this level also there is fierce debate). What else to say — haven't we talked enough?

Twilight Citizen  
Dhaka.

### Death Anniversary of Mother Teresa

Sir, When a person is born, he/she is bound to face with death. On 5th September we observe the first death anniversary of Mother Teresa. Her heart was filled with Love of Jesus Christ. And she shared her Love to the poorest and distressed people.

Nationally and internation-

ally she was awarded. She believed service to humanity is service to god. To believe in service, god must serve the people, at present there is a nation flooded so heavily. So many villages/houses drowned. People left their homes and got shelter in some schools or college compound which is called relief camp. The rich and wealthy people can show their love and humanity by serving them.

During her old age with ill-health she took care of the sick, comforted suffering people. She was like an angel to distressed/sick persons, true apostle of Christ.

Though one year is passed away, still she is in our heart. O God, grant her eternal peace and bless us all so that we can share Love with each other, can serve almighty God.

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### SOFA

Sir, I have gone through the letter of Mr Mohammed Shoib which appeared in the DS on 12th August '98.

Not only do I fully endorse his views, I think we should go all out for a comprehensive military treaty with America if we can persuade the latter to agree to accept such a proposal.

It is amazing that our government didn't sign SOFA just because Atal Bihari Vajpayee did not like it. How certain can a nation be? We can surely understand Sheikh Hasina's personal gratitude to India. But she must understand that personal gratitude is one thing and a nation's prestige is another — particularly when it is a nation of 120 million people. She went all the way to Delhi to allegedly discuss with the Indian government for signing of SOFA which was rudely turned down, trampling our national dignity.

She and her foreign ministry — the advisers and of course the sycophants — all must understand that enough is enough. Just because they have won the election by a popular vote (albeit by a marginal majority) they cannot act against the people's will. They must stand up with their heads high and act as representative of a

sovereign nation.

If we have a military pact with America (again, if the present government can manage to get the Americans agree to it) Bangladesh will only gain — she will gain in stature, earn international respect and enormously benefit economically. America is the world's topmost nation today and we must go all out to acquire their friendship at all costs.

M Mahmood  
Dhanmoudi  
Dhaka

### And now... HANA

Sir, No sooner has the SOFA issue been consigned to doldrums, a new programme called HANA (Humanitarian Assistance Needs Assessment) has been brought out of the bag of Pentagon. The people of Bangladesh are suddenly informed, and no doubt taken aback, by the disclosure by a ten-member visiting US military mission (and not by our own government) that the government of Bangladesh has already signed a five-year MoU with the US government regarding a programme called HANA on July 29, 1998.

The said military team is now already in the country busy preparing an assessment report as to how best US can serve the Bangladesh if and when disasters strike.

What a novel manner of disclosure indeed! Where were our foreign ministry officials? Why could not this disclosure be made by them to the countrymen? Why do we have to hear about the signing of such an important treaty with a foreign country from foreign military personnel? In so doing, not only the Parliament has been belittled, but also the people have been duped and fooled and made to appear like sacrificial animals. The honour and dignity of the country has also been compromised.

The leader of the military mission, Captain Gardner, was also reported to have claimed in his press briefing at the American Club in Dhaka on August 5, 1998 that this sort of humanitarian assistance was not unique to Bangladesh only. He cited examples of Laos, Cambodia, Mongolia and Thailand where such programmes are

### FAP: What was it for?

(FAP 3.1) and the Bhuapur-Gopalpur feasibility study (FAP 3.2), while the south-east study spawned a study of the Meghna estuary (FAP 5B). The supporting studies were meant to provide vital inputs to the components, primarily through evaluation of the past water projects (FAP 12, agricultural review; FAP 13-operation and maintenance study; and FAP 15-land acquisition and resettlement study). FAP 16 looked at the environmental issues and FAP 17 at fisheries. Three of the supporting studies were of an experimental nature which involved construction work.

The experimental studies focused on compartmentalisation (FAP 20), river protection (FAP 21) and flood proofing studies (FAP 23) which dealt with people's coping strategies, while FAP 18, 19, 24, 25 and 26 were concerned with information generation, flood-modelling and institutional development (Yakub, 1994). The FAP was co-ordi-

nated by The World Bank and supported by 11 countries and 4 multilateral agencies costing about \$ 146 million in the initial (1990-95) phase (Zahid, 1994).

It was expected that after loads of multidimensional studies and practical experiments, the FAP would lead to effective strategies to deal with the floods. But since we are again inundated with floods something must have gone wrong with the responses of all the studies and experiments. Either these have suggested responses that were impractical and therefore useless to protect us from severity of floods or the responses recommended were too expensive for a poor country to start implementing them.

This could not be an excuse for coming up with such response in the first place since the 'FAP implementers' must have known about Bangladesh's capacity to practically implement their recommendations.

The other assumption is that the successive governments did not pay heed to the recommendations of FAP or may have ignored possible solutions which is not excusable on any pretext. It is not impossible for our 'people's representatives' not being in the 'driving seat' of FAP as even the comments of the then Prime Minister on people's participation on the FAP was alleged to have been omitted (?) from the proceedings of the second FAP Conference (Huq et al, 1994). But surprisingly, all the hue and cry (or was it what is popularly known 'hujuj') raised by some non-governmental organisations died down after a while. Such reduction in interest on the FAP is surprising as the effects of FAP still continue to haunt the people whose lives were transformed (mostly for the worst) by it.

But these NGOs may have found, for some mysterious reason(s) of their own, it to be convenient to let go a movement even before it gets any effective response either from the

secondary diversions and feeder roads in selected portions of the national network would be included in the future planning exercises; so that the administration is not caught napping during emergencies (the flood interruptions display anti-bridge behaviour pattern). The private sector may be encouraged to participate with investment.

Our highway system should not become clogged as our unmodded and inadequate telephone system, due to lack of foresight in policy planning, and financing.

AZ  
Dhaka

### Thanks, Mr Prince and our SOS!

Sir, The letter, representative of "The Poor Of Bangladesh" published in the DS (Aug. 29/98) which has been written with reference to my earlier letter (dt. 15/8/98) vide which I extended thanks and appreciations to Saudi Prince Abdul Aziz for offering generous financial help in establishing the first Islamic Centre Mosque in the North America (NA).

The Poor of Bangladesh has appreciated the gesture of the Saudi Prince but with reservation that the NA is one of the richest regions and the poor people/Muslims living in the poor countries of the world including Bangladesh actually deserve such financial help.

Well, I agree with the above view but the point is: even the richest countries of the non-Muslim world wouldn't spend this money for building Mosque or Islamic Centre.

Of course, poor people in Bangladesh also deserve such financial help from the rich Kingdom of Saudi Arabia especially at the current critical moment when Bangladesh is experiencing a devastating flood and people are in serious need of food, clothing, shelter, medicine, drinking water etc.

May I fervently appeal to Prince Abdul Aziz of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to kindly take his usual personal initiative to help the flood-stricken people of Bangladesh.

M Zahidul Haque,  
A Citizen of Bangladesh.

government or the donors! Till date the FAP is still a mystery and we will not be solving it unless we can evaluate it in a neutral way in the context of the present floods. It is not my intention to seek only to unravel the mysteries of the past surrounding FAP but to request the government to exercise objective discretion in accepting foreign aid in future in dealing with natural calamities which may not necessarily address the problem we as a nation are facing and we ourselves are best placed to come up with a practical and sustainable response to it.

For a change, let us not limit our patriotism in useless (and empty) rhetoric and let it expand and enrich in to competent negotiating processes in utilising foreign aid in the most effective manner possible in addressing a problem that haunts generation after generation of people living in this delicate region.

A. Zayed  
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