

In the Peril of Deluge

PHOTO FEATURE ON FLOOD



Kalachandpur: A street turned into canal.

Star photo by Anisur Rahman



Basabo: In pursuit of livelihood — vending on boat.

Star photo by Enamul Haq



Manikganj: No land to stand.

Star photo by Anisur Rahman



Aricha: River has no banks — risky desperation.

Star photo by Anisur Rahman

Importance of Flood Management: Imperative Neglected

by Shaikhul Islam

Why are we begging to the donors time and again? Why don't we take steps properly and timely? Why did not the government review the ADP and include flood management programme in it?

phenomenal riddle, it can only impede the swelling nature of water. A flood leaves behind so many multidimensional problems like crop failure and subsequent food shortage, health hazards, damage of property and infrastructures and so many other things.

Here we see huge shortcomings in thoughts and perhaps total lack of vision. Our authorities concerned, it seems, don't like to think on a long-term basis. The typical approach they follow is wait and see policy: let the natural disasters come then we would act accordingly. As a result they rely on relief approach for transient solutions and unfortunately we are having this system work, rather to our peril, since long. The approach should be the long-term "management of flood" rather depending on short-term relief.

The consequences of late understanding of the necessity of flood management have incurred a huge loss to our struggling economy. Crop failures (Aus and Aman) and subsequent food shortage, damages to property and other assets, health hazards caused from water-carried diseases and devastation of communication and other infrastructures probably have surpassed the previous levels of loss caused by floods and have just shattered our hopes. How the poor people across the country will survive, survive and resume their livelihood perhaps would be mind boggling to think. How the government would compensate their losses and regenerate the overall economy is a question that needs rigorous analysis.

The 1998 flood has raised several questions on the credibility of the government itself. It is very unfortunate for us that we didn't have any visionary

government. All the political parties so far climbed to the pinnacle of power have played the same tune. They lacked radical thinking for policy formulation. We have not yet found any government poised with pragmatic policies and steps to combat this phenomenal natural disaster. All governments should have been cognizant about flood and therefore needed to follow appropriate policies to manage it. But what we see in reality? After 1988 the BNP government was lucky enough that it had not faced such type of flood. But this cannot be an excuse of merely ignoring the responsibility of adopting appropriate flood management policy. Creation of a Prime Minister's relief fund is not sufficient to handle a huge crisis of all basic necessities in a flood situation. Relief mentality cannot produce any good thing; it only creates dependency.

One just wonders why all the governments did not take into account the necessity of adopting exclusive policy regarding management of flood situation. Why they fail to incorporate such an important issue that is out and out related with our survival? Why ADP (Annual Development Plan) does not prioritize flood management programme? All the government declared the contribution of internal resources while announcing the budget for undertaking development programmes. Last time probably it was approximately 46 per cent of the ADP. But that does not constitute flood management rather envisaged only flood control and water resources. But what would be there for the situation that is in the offing? It is learnt from the newspaper reports that the planning ministry has already asked the line

ministries to cut expenditures and divert the fund from the less prioritized ADP projects to the flood rehabilitation fund until the donors give assurance to help. (May be in this situation government would be further cautious in future public expenditures!) This is an indirect acknowledgement that the government has undertaken less important projects for which funds have been allocated in the ADP. More importantly the government has not taken any pragmatic and consistent steps to manage pre or post flood situation. Flood management and flood control is not the same thing. Perhaps it is very difficult to control flood in a country like us considering various factors. But that does not mean we cannot manage post-flood situation. We can do it analyzing the trend of past 50 years. We can take precautionary measures regarding supply of food, health, medicare facilities, sanitation, safe drinking water, drainage, communication infrastructure and urban planning. But unfortunately we don't think in this way. We can also adopt plan to use local level infrastructures to manage post flood situation.

Was it too difficult to take a nation wide programme or at least a programme for the most flood prone areas on flood management? Such a programme could easily be incorporated in the ADP without seeking foreign funds meaning this programme could be easily run by our domestic contributions. The broad conceptual idea of such a programme should come from awareness building regarding availability of basic needs during pre and post flood situation. Constructing dam or embankment is simply the infrastructural support for flood management. It is

very much necessary but cannot solve everything of the problem and more so where these supports are not available.

The inherent worst consequence of this flood would be the huge aid dependency. Like many other developing countries we are out and out aid dependent. Aid is a powerful leverage for its owner. In the third world countries, sometimes aid is used for geo political purpose. In Bangladesh we have received plenty of aids since inception for different purposes. Do we find a break-even point between the expected and supposed to be actual output? Thousands of projects have been implementing under ADP that constitutes domestic and external contributions. Though we find that domestic contribution has been significantly increased over the years, but could it reflect the project implementation rate? Of course not. What would happen in launching another bunch of new projects if one flood damages everything? Before getting any result all the loopholes should be filled up. Moreover, the donors are not that much spontaneous, as they were few years back. Due to the changing global situation donors' attitude and approach are being changed. They might have different interests in other regions or they can impose unreasonable conditionalities putting behind our national interests.

The government has sought another several hundred million of dollars to manage its post flood rehabilitation programme that includes covering up of food deficit to reconstruct communication and other infrastructures. Why are we begging to the donors time and again? Why don't we take steps properly and timely? Why did not the government review the ADP and include flood management programme in it? Why don't we give proper importance to it? Perhaps we will have to wait until our last breath to have an optimum solution for flood problems.

Capital City in Crisis

by Mohammad Shamsuzzoha

The city itself as well as its surroundings and water resources (both surface and ground) are at a stake due to negative impact, particularly on the city's water resources...

A seminar was organised by The Daily Star on 8th June, 1995 at BUET on "Save Dhaka". In that seminar, an expatriate dignitary commented: "One thing evident to all of us is that Dhaka is a city in crisis (terrible). A capital city that is in crisis means a country that is in crisis, a nation in crisis, because the capital is the heart of the nation."

The above statement was very true and timely. But really what has happened since that seminar and its subsequent recommendations. Practically nothing has happened — I mean no improvement in terms of environmental protection and mitigation of the city and its surroundings. The city itself including its surroundings and water resources (both surface and ground) are at a stake due to negative impact particularly on the city's water resources and certain negative impacts have reached to irreversible situation.

The present population of the city is 8 million within an area of 260 sq. km. out of which 135 sq. km. is protected by embankment (through hurriedly planned, designed and implemented) and the rest 125 Sq. km. is totally unprotected and as a result we have seen what havoc has been taken place on the life and property of the people living within this 125 sq. km. unprotected area. Further, the overall environmental condition has deteriorated very fast particularly after creation of Bangladesh due to population pressure and uncontrolled discharge of waste from all sources viz. domestic, industry, commercial and institutional.

The disposal of industrial wastes into the environment is regulated by the Factories Act of 1965. While Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act of

1995 has detailed provision for mitigating hazards caused by industries by obtaining environmental clearance through Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) from DoE. Unfortunately, the laws are there but they are not implemented — rather violated — and as a result the rivers and our sea have been facing threats because of over and improper use of agro-chemicals, disposal of untreated industrial, domestic and municipal waste, oil spills etc.

The Daily Star of August 29, 1998 states in its first page that "DMCH dumps all waste in roadside bins". It indicates that the biggest state-run hospital has no facility for incineration or safe disposal of the hazardous waste. This hazardous waste is carried by the DCC trucks those make crude dumping at a place approximately 6 Km. east of the down town and this uncontrolled tipping is pollution artesian aquifer of the city, the source of approximately 98 per cent of 200 million gallons of water supplied by DWASA for the dwellers of the capital city.

The deep tube-well of DWASA at Jatrabari which is approximately 3 Km. west of the crude dumping area of DCC has been found to contain appreciable quantity of biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and chemical oxygen demand (COD), and another well water of DWASA at Hazaribag area has been found to contain chromium and as well as BOD, COD.

According to the present population of 8 million within the city — approximately 600 tonnes of BOD are produced daily out of which only 120 tonnes are received through DWASA's legal/illegal connections for treatment, but unfortunately only 50 per cent of the quantity is reached to the

treatment plant of DWASA and the rest are lost through broken pipes while pumping causing another source of environmental degradation. Or in other words only 10 per cent of the generated daily domestic waste is treated and the rest 90 per cent of the domestic waste is ultimately discharged to our rivers through the khals and thereby polluting our surface water sources.

The uncontrolled discharge of industrial wastes, both point and non-point sources are even more dangerous because many of the effluents contain heavy metals and surface water containing heavy metals cannot be treated by conventional treatment methods rather needs sophisticated treatment method which we do not have at present nor available in the proposed treatment plant at Saidabad of DWASA.

The industrialists area making millions at the cost of our environment, property and life and this must be arrested forth with by implementation of the Environmental Conservation Law of DoE. The industries must have their own arrangement of pre-treatment prior to discharge of the effluent into the receiving body of water to an acceptable level as per DoE regulations.

Immediate steps are also necessary for taking care of domestic sewage for which DWASA needs assistance in order to implement its short-term and as well as long-term programmes through the year 1999 up to the year 2020 with the object of treating 90 per cent of the domestic and industrial waste by the year 2020 in phases.

The estimated cost is approximately 1.8 billion dollars including physical and financial contingencies spread over a period of 1999 through the year 2020.



By Hanna-Barbera

