

Recovery Strategy

It is stating the obvious that GDP growth is bound to slow down as a result of the floods. By what margin the target of six per cent somewhat ambitiously set for the 1998-99 fiscal would be missed depends critically on how quickly we can bounce back on the dynamic roll.

Given our time and resource constraints, the damages we must first repair to be able to pursue the development agenda ought to receive top-most priority followed by the rest that would obviously take time and big money to be overcome.

As we get on with the Vulnerable Group Feeding and Food-for-Work programmes to secure the human element to development, the agricultural and industrial rehabilitation schemes are expected to be undertaken for rapid implementation.

In an extra-ordinary policy shift, the government has decided to divert ADP allocations to rehabilitation work. Projects will perhaps bear new names and, their implementation will acquire more of a compelling importance than any time before.

Clinton Testimony

The first feeling was one of disgust. Transparency evidently was only an excuse. The real action was making public a man and woman's extremely private situations in a manner debasing those two, debasing the American people and their institutions and debasing all those who sat before a TV set on midday GMT Monday all over the world.

Up to the decision to publish or even broadcast on internet the Starr Report, it was a profoundly correct bipartisan action of the House of Representatives. Making public the Clinton-grand videotape and on television, ended that heroic bipartisanship, for the point of showing to all mankind the Clinton testimony in camera was so flimsy and unconvincing. The point was to enable each individual to judge for himself or herself whether Clinton had indeed perjured. They are not judges and their judgment cannot either be enforceable whereas there are people competent, qualified and appointed to do just that.

But first reports indicate that has hardly come to be. The minds made up against Bill under the influence of the Starr Report had no extra supporting material to distance themselves further from the self-confessed errant president. After prurient glimpses into that Report the testimony tape was insipid and anticlimactic. For those not quite gone contrary, the videotape came to make them see how unfair was the grilling. The whole exercise was very degrading. For all.

This videotape is only one of the huge each of Starr's supposed to be incriminating materials. What if a Republican dominated House decides to make a telly-serial of those? The world will forfeit its livability by a big measure if that happens. And civilization and culture take a heavy dent.

Death of a Champion

She came, she ran and she conquered. And now she is gone. Florence Griffith Joyner, the champion American athlete fondly called Flo Jo all over the world is dead at the premature age of 39. The agency report on the sad demise says this prima donna of the track who caught the imagination of people around the globe with her feats and beauty died of seizure.

An onlooker's delight, Flo Jo was one of a kind. Few black women since Wilma Rudolf made their presence felt in the world of track and field as did this super sprinter. Not only did she win three gold medals in the Seoul Olympiad but also set two world records in women's 100 and 200 metre. That she would take the world by storm was hinted even before she actually covered herself in a blaze of glory. Four years earlier in the LA Games, Flo Jo won the silver medal in heptathlon. By Barcelona Olympiad in 1992, this great athlete was over the hill but still good enough to claim the bronze medal in long jump.

Flo Jo was not exactly one's idea of a lithe graceful athlete. She was rather thickset and stuggy. Nevertheless, her good looks coupled with her flair for glamour manifest in her self-designed fancy dress and long fingernails made her a darling of all and sundry. Long list of universal admirers as she had, ranged from the most avid aficionados of athletics to those who have very little idea of sports and games. Her death is truly a darkness at noon. It once again reminds us of an oft-harped disturbing observation: Athletes don't live long.

Death may have robbed her of a fuller life but her place in the hall of fame is ensured. Flo Jo will always be remembered.

Flood Control: Opportunities in the Midst of the Crisis

only one-tenth of the total flood affected area of three mighty rivers and hundreds of their tributaries lie within Bangladesh. Therefore any permanent long-term flood control measure through construction of dam and storage reservoir primarily involves India.

THE Chinese firmly believe that in every crisis lies an opportunity. The optimism is so deeply ingrained that the character in the Chinese language for crisis and opportunity is the same.

In Bangladesh, we are at present in the midst of the worst natural calamity of this century. Never in the history of recorded floods, so much water engulfed so much land causing so much sufferings to so many for so long. Yet seeds of opportunities lie dormant in the rejuvenated soils of post-flood low lands of the nation. These are golden lands — what will not grow in the rich fertile delta of Bangladesh?

I think the biggest opportunity lies in the fact that high flood levels have created ideal preconditions for major flood control initiatives. We have to live with the floods but not high floods of such enormous proportion — receding to the Bay at the moment. The question is how such high floods can be contained?

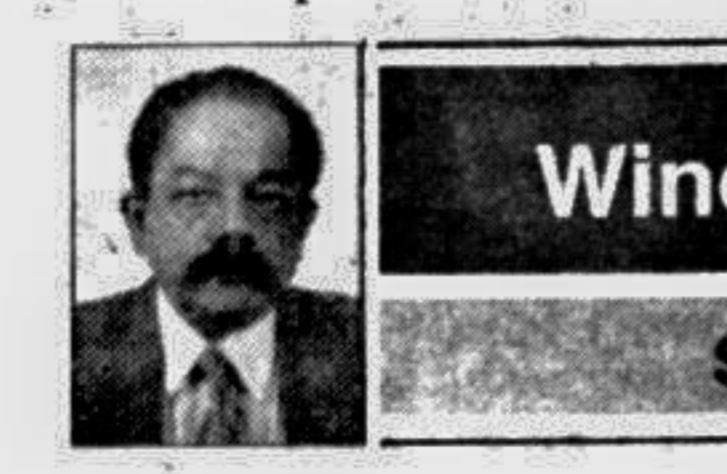
The abnormal floods have affected not only Bangladesh. Vast flood plains of North India covering the States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and the Bramputra river basin of Assam have also been badly mauled. In fact, only one-tenth of the total flood affected area of three mighty rivers and hundreds of their tributaries lie within Bangladesh.

Within our territories, suitable site for storing excess flood waters could be the Haor depression in north-east Bangladesh whose capacity can be augmented through further deepening and embankments all around. But it would constitute a small part of the total solution. Bangladesh is so densely populated that any other flood water storage site is inconceivable. Sites for such reservoirs have to be found primarily within India and to a lesser extent in Nepal.

Benefits from such dams and storage reservoirs are going to be enormous. Not only high floods will be contained, there will be augmentation of water during dry period, facilitating all over North India and Bangladesh. In addition, huge quantities of electricity can be generated — feeding power grids from the Punjab in the west and inclusive of Bangladesh, up to Assam in the north-east. The crisis of the floods give rise to opportunities for water and power development in future and now is the time to propose to India the basic framework for such a cooperation arrangement in the pattern of the Mekong River Development Committee involving five countries: China, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam.

India does not object to such inter-country cooperation but they wish to work on a common bilateral framework without involving United Nations agencies or any other country. Bangladesh should not have any objection to it. We have successfully concluded a water treaty through bilateral initiative. Since 90 per cent of flood waters reaching Bangladesh originate outside our territories and 90 per cent thereof are

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Window on Asia Shahed Latif

due to precipitation within India, such flood control measures ought to originate from what the two countries can jointly achieve without any outside interference. The financing of such huge water control projects would call for foreign assistance and the two countries can jointly approach donor countries and agencies for that. Instead of a donor dominated framework, as is the case with Mekong Committee, it would be prudent to retain control over such big initiatives by the two governments. The suffering farmers and fishermen of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Bangladesh and Assam know it best. Immediately, the two countries may jointly initiate a participatory study and investigation process based on local knowledge, information and experience.

But Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs seem to be unaware of the grand opportunities thrown open by the crisis. They seem to be more interested in competing with the Ministry of Finance in talking to donor countries and agencies for flood relief and rehabilitation assistance. Over the last two and a half decades, External Resources Division (ERD) has developed the expertise to deal with the problem of mobilization of external resources and there is no need to duplicate the work. Instead the Foreign Ministry should immediately set up

its own task force with the addition of water experts and take the vital diplomatic initiative with India.

However, India is a vast country and approach to Delhi alone would not be sufficient. The Indian Press and television should fully appreciate the enormous possibilities which could emerge out of the equally enormous sufferings of the people. Also, the relevant State Governments may be fully apprised of our proposal. Seminars and workshops may be organized in order to assist the process of developing ideas into blue-prints for action. It is not an easy task and no success is assured overnight. Therefore the work must begin now. It is strange but true that both the countries were facing exactly the same flood waters but they did not discuss about

how to contain the same flood waters in future. Perhaps it was not the time. Now with receding flood waters, there is no reason to lag behind. India, in spite of high floods there, donated 20,000 tons of rice and a large quantity of food grains are being imported daily by trucks from India to meet the shortfall of Bangladesh. It is quite obvious that there is no lack of goodwill. What is conspicuously lacking is good work. Apart from seeking cooperation with India, we must at the same time consider what we can do ourselves, on our own to contain the floods.

The massive flow of water along with mountains of silts is good so long crop production can be carried out. Even a 5 to 10 per cent damage level may be tolerated or if high floods are of short duration leaving sufficient time for transplantation of paddy. We have to contain and not control the flood waters. Dredging of rivers, canals and silted up water bodies carried out on an extensive scale round the year would enhance the drainage capacity of our river system.

The present dredging capacity of Water Development Board amounts to 3 million cubic metres per annum. However, even if the capacity is increased ten times and 30 million cubic metres of silt is dredged up every year, even then we may not achieve the desired level of drainage capacity in years of

high flood. On the other hand, the cost would be enormous, well beyond the capacity of our own as well as all the possible donors put together.

Dredging is the answer but financially it is an impossible solution. Therefore except at critical points, for example, opening up of river mouths or improved drainage of Dhaka Metropolitan area, dredging on the desired scale along the span of mighty rivers must be ruled out. We have to think of innovative solutions — never tried before.

A Wharton Business School graduate suggested — why not privatize dredging? The cost can be recovered by the private dredging company in several ways: 1. Sale of dredged up mud or silt to riverside villagers for raising the levels of villages or adjoining crop lands; 2. Monopoly fishing rights over the length of the river deepened; 3. Fee realized from the land owners benefiting from improved drainage as well as irrigation water supplied by the dredging company; 4. Dredging may create new crop lands along river sides which may be sold or leased out to recover the cost; and 5. Perhaps privatized dredging will be feasible if any mineral or precious metal or stones can be procured from the river bed.

Private dredging may not be feasible but the purpose of my writing is that we must consider one and all. Another quick fix solution was suggested to me by Mr. Abdul Hamid Chowdhury, presently the Planning Secretary. The idea is too bold to be suggested to the government but I thought that it should find a place in my column. The substantial part of the flood waters ultimately flow out to the sea through the Meghna estuary which is largely silted up and being funnel-shaped and narrow, high tides often prevent the outflow of huge volumes of flood waters. So why not design underground explosions on the river bed so that accumulated load of silt is considerably disturbed and put out of place and at low tides when the outflow is naturally at the maximum, the accumulated silt will be forced out to the sea and on to the swatch of no ground? Dredging but at much shorter time and considerably less cost. Obviously the whole thing has to be carefully planned and a great deal of investigation is called for. But no doubt we should try it out on limited scale. Let us see the results and find it out. After all, controlled explosions is now an established practice in urban development.

With their gift that God bestowed on them, they give gifts to us. Like poet Rabindranath Tagore and Nazrul Islam give us endless joy from their songs and music. So did Shakespeare by his dramas, Michaelangelo by his paintings and sculptures. Sir Isaac Newton, Thomas Edison and Alexander Fleming gave so much to humanity that we live in comfort today for their gifts.

The world should therefore cherish and encourage such gifted persons, so that they can give the world to the maximum of their abilities. We will be losers if we don't. We should recognise their talent and help it to flourish and not ignore them as Van Gogh was, during his life time. This includes young children who show any extraordinary talent.

Dr Sabrina Q Rashid Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka.

Is it necessary?

Sir, Recently, national dailies and periodicals were all in unison in reporting abuse of minors girls in the hands of miscreants. Incidents of sexual assault in police custody or/and any other authority show the extent of deterioration of law and order in the country. However the law enforcing authority, our leaders and sociologists hardly know the answers or the cause of such crimes but all would agree that it is more widespread than most of us suspected or believed to be. The criminals who commit crime against children and women in general are not normal people. They have been found without any remorse towards the victims or their families and behave in a way that indicates that they have no guilty consciences.

In the West, where mental, therapies are available for reducing these criminals' sexual urge the government to change laws for not allowing the prisoned criminals to get any parole, for keeping the cases under review even at the end of the prison term in order to keep the society safe from them. A minor punishment for rape/murder would only encourage others to commit such crimes. Recently one rape victim lamented, "he has got only 9 years in jail but he has sentenced me to life."

Again in reporting rape and murder cases the media do not necessarily act but react and use the tragedy for their name and advancement. To them a crying child or a woman is a powerful image to sell. Take a case of a rape recently reported. Was that vivid description necessary? M A Jalil Dhaka.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Kremlin Tete-a-Tete

WHAT happens when a great man of the West meets a great man of the East? "Ah, Mr. President. It is so nice to have you in the Kremlin. Can I offer you a glass of vodka?"

"That would be nice." "That was a joke — we have no vodka. Ever since the ruble had a freefall, we can't find any in Moscow. What about a tea bag? These were only used once by the chancellor."

"It would be good if I had any lemon to offer with it. Mr. President, things are not going well here. Do you see those security men standing around to protect me? Well, they wouldn't make a move if someone threatened me."

"Why not?" "They haven't been paid in three months. All they do now is stand around and stare at me. I wouldn't count on the security people whom we assigned to protect you, either."

"I didn't know things were so bad in Russia." "It's not Russia, it's the ruble. All the foreign banks loaned money to us to make big profits. But instead of us using the money to finance the Russian economy, we produced Russian billionnaires."

"Well, Boris, I hate to say this, but it isn't America's problem." "It is in this respect. The banks that took the nosedive were American banks. They bet on our caviar, which wasn't the smartest thing for them to do. By the way, would you like to buy the czar's crown jewels?"

"I don't think so." "How about a dacha outside of St. Petersburg or a dozen nuclear missiles?" "I promised Congress I would not buy anything on my trip." "So why did you come to Russia?" "After what happened to me in the last few weeks, where would you go?"

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OPINION

Points to Ponder

A Desperately Concerned Citizen

The whole nation is gripped with disastrous calamity of the century — the dreadful flood. We are often struck by natural calamities like cyclone, flood, tidal wave and we face these ordeal with lot of courage and it seems God has given us enough strength to go through these calamities. Majority of our innocent and illiterate people take it as God's wish, but some of us do understand the geographical reasons for all these calamities.

This year's flood was terrifying because it went on and getting worse for last two months. But this time it has given me few serious points to ponder. It started from middle of July, but nobody seemed to have taken any notice of it. We expect that the experts who are in the government are supposed to know what turn it can take considering the atmospheric conditions of the neighbouring countries. Whereas whole of August when half of the country and the capital Dhaka were already under water, there was no pre-warning or awakening publicity about the danger of impending flood in our media.

An article in an English weekly on September 4 rightly mentioned that it was only because our Prime Minister had more important programme in hand.

When people are floating in the water and becoming shelterless everyday, we have to watch in our national TV that our Bangabandhu having lunch or breakfast with his wife, embracing his parents and other related pictures and listen to his voice.

How is it possible, how can same government think of doing such a thing? It is very insensitive. Why can't they understand this sort of propaganda can never increase our respect for our beloved father of the nation.

The government has given recognition to this acute flood so late that he shiver to think whether they would be able to tackle this colossal disaster. Since unfortunately we have such an inefficient government, we the public should try to do as much as possible. Mind you, there also we need motivation, guidance from the administration.

Even without inspiration from any quarter I see that many private organisations and NGOs have come forward with relief work. It is because now the difference between the rich and the poor in society is so glaring that it is unbearable.

Here is another point which bothers me. BRAC Centre in Mohakhali could easily have come forward and help clearing the waterlogging in front of their office — they could arrange a floating bridge which the Army use and make the road accessible to the public. It won't need a big or long bridge as the water patch is quite a small area. BRAC is loaded with donor money and they are doing so much of public welfare works, why didn't they think of the public in all welfare job for the public in this emergency? There was only one exit and entry for people living in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara and Badda that is Kamal Atartuk Road. No limit to people's suffering, because you had to wait in the traffic jam minimum for 45 minutes to one hour.

Traffic police personnel were doing their best and a fantastic job, but there were so much pressure of vehicles that sometimes it was not humanly possible for them to control the jam. If Mohakhali or Industrial Area Road via Aarong was open, taken care of?

To the Editor...

US diplomatic retreat?

Sir, The recent flare up in Clintonmania is likely to put a brake on US foreign policy offensive stands. The anti-American opponents have already initiated some moves to trap the maverick US into local conflicts of the bleeding-type, just to keep the American commitment engaged in boggy, intermittent local battles as she faced in Vietnam, Korea, Bosnia and Afghanistan. Monica missiles cannot be approved as a standard military weapon to use publicly and officially. The Monica affair has become part of high history, and American local history has penetrated the hallowed vaults which preserve the US constitution so painstakingly drafted and implemented by their forefathers. There are lessons to be unlearned.

Now the United States cannot afford such rendezvous due to Clinton antics and the global money market gone berserk, with limping Japan, shattered Moscow, embattled Indonesia, turbulent Afghanistan, and revolts in Kosovo spreading out into Albania, (add flooded Bangladesh with 30 million individual problems).

The US has to set its house in order first (and it is a white house for that matter) before beginning to wonder at the baits offered by Iran (200,000 in field manoeuvres) and Iraq (unleashing the same old attitude of defiance). The Shia-Sunni aspect of the conflict in Afghanistan is too subtle for Uncle Sam, pre-poisoned with the Islamic terrorist syndrome.

Now comes another depressing news for the developing countries: the IMF has not enough reserve fund in its kitty to spend on the Asian scene (including flood rehabilitation projects in Bangladesh costing about \$3 billion during the coming three years, although the IMF contribution would be a part of it); said to be due to the US congress dilly-dallying, which is usual when it comes to the prompt payment of US dues, and overdues, to the UN and its fatigued agencies. The Third World should be bracing itself for a new sickness called Donor Fatigue (DN).

Japan and Europe (or EU, however United) are not in a position to take over the world leadership mantle from the US even temporarily, or act on her behalf (assuming the severe erosion of the UN symbol). So global diplomacy is likely to drift for a while, before the US comes back after making up her wavering mind over elusive matters.

The Americans won't shake up a mountain to remove a molehill, or vice versa. Some local changes have more lasting global effect. On the eve of the new century, events have gathered together in lots and knots, to ensure that the inevitable changes to take place, to ensure the next phasing of human civilisation.

A Husnain Dhaka

The Circus in Washington

Sir, This refers to President Clinton's videotaped testimony on Monica affair. I must congratulate the US House Judiciary Committee for staging the best CIRCUS show on earth on TV on Monday, the 21st September, 1998. It is obvious that Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr and those who supported the release of the Starr report and Clinton's video testimony to public made themselves the real clowns of the 'Circus'.

Fifty million dollars taxpayers' money spent just to humiliate a man for political gains? Perhaps America would like to redefine democracy.

If ever there was a day when America was made to look so small in the eyes of the rest of the world in their two hundred and twenty two (222) years' history, this was the day! God bless America.

Ashfaq Choudhury House No 8, Road No 5 Banani, Dhaka

Tale of a president

Sir, King Edward VIII gave up his throne in 1936 for Mrs Wallis Simpson, the woman he loved. People remember it with awe and wonder, and for this act he has become a legend in the history.

Justification

Sir, Simply living abroad doesn't give one the right to justify the good and evil doings of the homeland. Many a times because of situation and circumstances the government needs to make plans which not only is beneficial for the country but might prove helpful in the long run too. Mr Alam's letter 'Justification' (DS 9.8.98) mentioned three questions which according to him needed justification. Well Mr Alam, today is your day, because I shall give you all the answers.

The Prime Minister's SAARC summit attendance was very justifiable. And so was, according to you, her presence with the flood victims. Being in the summit she had proved that Bangladesh too deserve to be very much a part of South Asia as well. The agreements reached after the summit was more fruitful compared to her predecessors. Yet at the same time she managed to be with the flood victims after her return. Tell me Mr Alam isn't that the sign of an effective Prime Minister? How justifiable was it that stacks and stacks of relief material were piled high in front of Madam Zia's house, rottings while people were dying throughout the country?

Celebrating the natni's 'akika' is a family affair which doesn't include government funds. Tell me Mr Alam, how justifiable is it when White House throws gorgeous banquets where the blacks in New York are living under the poverty line?

Inviting thousands of people at the inauguration of the BJMB is very justifiable. Having constructed the 11th longest bridge in the world deserves commendation. If you were present in the country then you too might have joined the celebration.

Shagor Dhaka

Gifted ones

Sir, James Cameron's 'Titanic' is again a fantastic creation. He is quite a genius and a gifted director, with the talent of giving the world something extraordinary. His other super hits were 'Alien', 'Terminator I and II' etc. All of them gave immense pleasure to the audience.

Geniuses are God's gift to humanity, they come few and far in-between. These few people can give so much to the world and to the ordinary human beings, that too in their short life span. But what they give lasts for ever and ever, also for generations after generations, serving them in so many ways.

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Nur Jehan

Fast Nasrabad Chittagong