

Life in Dhaka Singing in the Rain

by A Husnain

The problem is not water, but too much of it, or too little. This is a rainy country, full of rivers. Rain is a part of daily life — and this welcome visitor is a part of the family. A tempest cannot temper the temper of a Bengalee.

RECENTLY one fine morning, with the sun chasing the floating clouds (after the flood waters had started receding) I walked to the nearby kac'ha bazaar (wet market) to buy some vegetables, as our regular vegetable hawker was missing for the last couple of days — perhaps he had gone home to anchor his floating homestead.

These door-to-door hawkers are a boon to the working families, competing fiercely with the shopkeepers, as the former have not to pay shop rent, chaanda (illegal toll), VAT and sales tax, but have to do a lot of legwork in the absence of a rickshaw 'van' (flatbed cargo carrier, open or enclosed). Any agency or cooperative would be doing a roaring business hiring these open rickshaws on micro-credits to the marginal vendors of the rickshaw-puller category) to enable them to earn a living with increased mobil-

ity. They climb up the flight of stairs in multi-storied flats. The basket a hawker carries on his head is quite heavy; sometimes I had to help them to bring it down. The hawker culture is an integrated part of life in Asia.

While shopping at the wayside, suddenly it started raining and within minutes it was a tropical monsoon downpour (one and a half inches of rain in half an hour). I hate carrying an umbrella, having lost several; I hop into the nearest cycle rickshaw for cover and further transportation. This time I hopped into one of the vacant shop-cubicles under construction by the DCC at the Mohamadpur Town hall bazaar on the outer side of the wall in the back lane. This lane is crowded by wayside vendors who sit on both sides of the road, impeding traffic.

The vendors had placed plastic sheets overhead for greeting the rains; and from the time

plodded from underneath to drain off the water. The bustle children thronged around for free showers, and enjoyed it hugely, laughing and singing in the rain.

The sheet at one shop gave way due to the weight of the collected rainwater. Two small boy assistants, aged 10-12, were engaged in roping in the cover. At one stage one boy asked me, merrily enough, to hold the rope (I'll be climbing up the structure, and pass it along to him. Twice the string broke, but the boys laughing all the time, enjoying the tussle with the rain.

I watched the passing show, and the accumulating water on the road, which had by now reached above the ankles. Most of the shoppers were without umbrellas (it was an unexpected cloud burst, which suddenly ceased). They walked calmly and with poise, in clinging wet clothes, ignoring the flippant

weather and the flitting rains. The women and girls, passing by, also maintained their serene composure, but the sculptured outline of some of the moving figures drew gazes which must have sent them into contemplation about the feminine mystique, and why God made some things so beautiful.

The social atmosphere was unlike that observed during a traffic jam — both the traffic and the exchanges are snarling. Here the temporary inconvenience caused by rainfall were tolerated in good humour, as a mother puts up with a truant child. A vendor switched on his battery radio, as if seducing the rain to stop.

The problem is not water, but too much of it, or too little. This is a rainy country, full of rivers. Rain is a part of daily life — and this welcome visitor is a part of the family. A tempest cannot temper the temper of a Bengalee.

Sharing the Air

by Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain

The rich nations are trying to frame the rules for trading in emission quotas. However, the methods being used to allocate these quotas are questionable. The rights and responsibilities of both rich and poor countries must be defined in the context of entitlements and also in a way that curb greenhouse gas emissions.

PREVENTING global warming means putting a cap or a limit on the world's greenhouse gas emissions which are threatening to overheat the Earth and which has the potential to wipe out humanity. But since the current process of economic growth is so intensely linked to the use of fossil fuels which is the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions, and the world economy is highly unevenly distributed, the key question is: How should this cap on greenhouse gas emissions be shared?

The challenge becomes further compounded when we recognise that controlling greenhouse gas emissions has certain economic costs. Therefore, how do nations deal with global warming in a way that is ecologically effective, that is, effective in controlling global warming and yet equitable and socially just?

The question of who has been or will be responsible for global warming has been repeatedly raised both by industrialised countries and by developing countries. If past and current emissions are taken into account, then industrialised countries are largely responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions. But with economies of developing countries growing rapidly, their future emissions will become very high.

In this regard discussions of the numerous matters that the Kyoto Protocol (KP), hurriedly put together in the wee hours of the last day, left undecided are going to be critical for finding an ecologically effective and yet just and equitable solution for combating global warming.

The KP is a step ahead in the world's resolve to arrest the problem of human-induced climate change but it falls short on two counts: One, the strategy outlined allows parties to meet their commitments without undertaking substantial greenhouse gas reductions at home and may, therefore, not result in the 'stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system' — the ultimate objective of the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC).

Two, even though the strategy outlined does not insist on participation by developing countries, except through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Emissions Trading (ET), it sets the world on a path that does not recognise the atmospheric rights of the current and future generations of developing countries even as it provides the current generations of industrialised countries' greenhouse gas entitlements — not based on equity but on the basis of current emissions — and furthermore, provides developing countries perverse incentives to pollute further.

The two key elements to be used to achieve this objective are firstly, the calculation of emissions of a clearly identified base year, and secondly, agreed emission reduction targets in terms of percentages of the emission in the base year.

Therefore, in the KP numbers game, anything that helps to increase the emissions in the base year, especially because of activities that have since ceased

or reduced, immediately gives the country a head start. For instance, Australia had high emission because of deforestation in 1990 and since this deforestation has already stopped, it can claim to have reduced its emissions since 1990.

And emissions trading (ET), joint implementation (JI) and clean development mechanism (CDM), further provide opportunities to borrow 'emissions reduction' from other countries where 'emissions reduction' is already taking place because of

tion commitments...

One can, therefore, ask: Why does the KP see no other role for developing countries in combating climate change other than just helping Annex I countries to meet their commitments under the protocol?

Developing countries will, thus, not get any long-term benefits from participation in a CDM process. The only existing rationale for JI, one that is being globally pushed at the moment, is the one that was outlined by the government of

their own. And by then the costs of cutting back on carbon dioxide emissions will be very high even for developing countries.

Secondly, there is the question of practicality. How will one differentiate when is a more energy-efficient technology being brought into a developing country to cut carbon dioxide emissions and when is it coming simply because foreign or domestic industrialists want to move towards better technology for competitive reasons. There is the danger that companies can use CDM to push all kinds of experimental technologies that may not be economically viable otherwise.

The worst aspect of the KP is that it has already given the heaviest emitters of greenhouse gases, namely, the industrialised countries full entitlements to their heavy current emissions minus the small amounts that they are expected to reduce as a percentage of their current emissions. The final level of emissions that industrialised countries are expected to reach in their first commitment period from 2008 to 2012 is described as their assigned amount.

But, in the KP, this assigned amount has gone well beyond being a mere target to be reached. It has been turned into an entitlement by giving developed nations full property rights over these assigned amounts. These include: the right of a nation to use the assigned amount; trade any part of the assigned amount it is not going to use; and to bank any part of the assigned amount it is not going to use in the first commitment period for use in future commitment periods.

How then can these difficulties be resolved? The answer lies in equal per capita entitlements which could be built on one or a combination of the following concepts:

The emissions absorbed annually by the global atmospheric sinks could be distributed equally amongst all the people of the world; a long-term per capita emissions convergence target could be identified and each person could be given that as an entitlement; future atmospheric concentration targets for different greenhouse gases could be agreed upon and the national entitlements can be steadily phased in towards a convergence point of equal per capita entitlements over successive commitment periods.

It is obvious that in the future the world will have to accept some common maximum per capita emission for each country in order to deal with global warming. We can't have a world in which some countries have to freeze their carbon dioxide emissions at one level and other countries at another level. This would mean freezing global inequality.

In sum, what developing countries should not, and nor should industrialised countries expect them to accept, is the principle of trading emissions or for that matter, international cooperation to prevent climate change which is built on the argument that developing countries provide a lucrative opportunity to reduce emissions cheaply than in industrialised countries.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

POST-FLOOD REHABILITATION The Task is Formidable

by Dilip Kumar Datta

It is now the responsibility of the government to see that relief goods that come to Bangladesh are not misappropriated by anybody and reach the hands of those who need them most. Any deviation from duty on the part of any responsible individual should be seriously dealt with.

BANGLADESH is a land of rivers which have on the one hand become the part and parcel of our culture and tradition, on the other hand have caused untold sufferings to millions of people inhabiting the delta. There exist as many as 260 rivers and their tributaries of which 26 are coastal rivers, but 96 per cent of the total water finds outlet into the Bay of Bengal through the river Meghna. Not only floods but also tidal bore, cyclones and drought are the major natural calamities that hit Bangladesh almost every year.

Natural calamity is nothing new to Bangladesh. History has it that in last forty years there occurred five major disastrous floods — the last one hit Bangladesh in 1988, which inundated larger areas than the present flooding but the waters remained for a shorter time. The present flooding is distinguished from those of other years in the sense that it has persisted for about two months. What is more painful is that the aman cultivation is seriously at stake as the water stayed in the fields for a prolonged period.

Flood waters engulfed the northern and central parts of Bangladesh and the people of those areas are worst affected. Dhaka became a water-locked city. Water penetrated even in the posh areas making the rhythm of life stand still. Seventy wards out of 90 have been affected and 165 relief centres opened. The greater districts of Rajshahi and Rangpur were badly affected. The Pabna Embankment built in later forties was under threat under the onrush of swelling waters of the

mighty river.

Damage caused by this flood is colossal. On 26.8.98 State Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation Talukder Abdul Khaleque, while talking to BBC stated that 19,863,279 people were affected, crops of 56910 acres of land have been devastated, 34,481 houses have been damaged and 9867 kilometres of road destroyed. Our government was confident enough to grapple the flood problem by utilising its own resources but as the flood took a serious turn with new areas being engulfed and waters took a longer time to recede, it became necessary to call for international help.

The interesting aspect of the whole scenario is that the leaders of both the major political parties have agreed to cooperate with each other in the moments of national crisis. The Prime Minister has visited some flood-affected districts to see for herself the plight the people were in and distributed relief goods. Leader of the Opposition has also toured round the flood-hit zones. Government has called upon the affluent section of the society to contribute their mite to alleviate the sufferings of the affected people. Different NGOs have also engaged themselves to the task prompted by a noble sense of duty.

Our government took some time to gauge the extent of damage. On August 25, the Foreign Minister called upon the donor countries and organisations to give assistance worth 80 million dollars but on the next day Finance Minister wanted in a meeting with representatives of

donor countries and organisations international aid worth 680 million dollar and 1.38 million tons of food grains for relief and rehabilitation of the flood affected people. Again in a meeting held on August 31, total requirement was announced to be 839 million dollar to tide over the situation.

Promises of international assistance, as we so far know are to the tune of: a) United States of America: 70 million dollar cash and 4 lakh ton food grains, b) USAID: 2.5 lakh ton wheat and 3 crore and 20 lakh dollar in cash, c) Japan: 30 million yen, d) US Red Cross Society: 3.60 lakh dollar, e) UK: 7 lakh sterling pound, f) Canada: 1.6 million dollar, g) Norway: 3 lakh US dollar, h) the Netherlands: 2.5 million dollar, i) Germany: 50 thousand dollar and German Red Cross Society: 3.60 lakh dollar.

To crown it all, UNO Secretary General Kofi Annan asked the international donor agencies to help generously to the suffering humanity in Bangladesh. Different UN Agencies like UNDP, WFP, UNICEF and WHO have undertaken to contribute 1.6 million dollar assistance. European Union has promised 86 thousand tons of wheat.

But there has not been any consensus as to the food requirement to meet the crisis. Our government is of the view that there will be a shortage of 20 lakh tons of foodgrains but International Red Cross asserts that there will be shortage of 40 lakh tons of foodgrains. The Opposition Leader went further and opined that the country

would need 50 lakh tons of food grains to meet the emergency. The Herculean task ahead is the distribution of the relief materials to the flood affected people. When famine broke out in 1974, there were reports that there was mismanagement in providing succour to the affected people, and this issue has time and again been referred to by the opposition parties. It is now the responsibility of the government to see that relief goods that come to Bangladesh are not misappropriated by anybody and reach the hands of those who need them most. Any deviation from duty on the part of any responsible individual should be seriously dealt with. If the shipment of goods by sea is done, then the Chittagong port must be kept clear of the turmoil with which it was beset in recent days. The roads that went under water during flooding will have to be repaired quickly because the relief goods-carrying vehicles will ply along these roads.

After the recession of flood waters, there breaks out diarrhoea in epidemic form. Medical teams should rush to the areas concerned with adequate medicines. Agricultural loans should be offered to the farmers who have lost their hearth and home so that they can address themselves to cultivation. Any attempt by any unscrupulous tradesman for racketeering should be curbed with penal action as per law. No one should be allowed to trade on human miseries.

The task ahead is formidable. Every one's cooperation is needed to tide over the crisis.

Religious Institutions as Infrastructural Support

by Syed Tariqul Islam

IT is widely known or a common belief that in most cases relief goods are not properly distributed and sometime, allegedly, are bagged by authorised persons in developing countries. We hope it will not happen this time in Bangladesh. In most cases we do not have infrastructure for proper distribution of relief goods, say, in the remote parts of the country. Government manpower is too inadequate to reach the lowest unit of people's representatives. Newspaper reports also blamed that Union Parishad representatives provided government relief to those who had voted in their favour and the rest was distributed among their kins and acquaintances (they were also

affected by the flood). Despite the government's all noble intentions to help the distressed a good number of innocent people did not receive any relief during the flood due to lack of infrastructure support.

NGOs could be considered as the catalyst to help the distribution process but at the same time they are also overloaded by the demand of their own beneficiaries to be met first. So can we find out an infrastructure which may readily be used to facilitate proper and effective distribution of relief and extending rehabilitation support and activities? Can we think of a very common and useful institution of our society? Yes, we can utilize our religious institutions (the mosque, temple, church).

We have a good number of mosques in Bangladesh and governing bodies of these mosques are generally comprised of elderly good citizens (murabbi of the locality) of the community. We can easily use this infrastructure for relief and rehabilitation activities in any disaster, like this flood or cyclone.

The Imam shaheb and other murabbi of each mosque may form a committee who would assess the damage of individual households of the locality. They will be given responsibility to distribute the relief goods with the help of youth volunteers of the community. This committee also may help the govern-

ment officials in their long term rehabilitation activities to be undertaken after the flood. As the Imam shaheb will lead the team and aged murabbi of the community will be involved in the process we can be confident that none will ever be able to raise any question about the sincerity of the purpose.

We should not always think that a mosque or religious institution is the holy place for prayer only. In any disaster it also can be an active centre to face the aftermath as it was proved by the Imam shaheb of renowned Tara Mosque in the old part of Dhaka city during this flood.

The writer is working with Action Aid Bangladesh.

The Trek That Inspires Spirituality

by Sunita Mainee

A dip in the nearby Lake Mansarovar, they believe, cleanses them of their sins. The arduous trek through beautiful, yet treacherous, terrain across Indian and Chinese territory pushes one's physical endurance to the limit, at the same time bringing one closer to one's spiritual self.

A trek to Mount Kailash in Tibet, deemed by Hindus as the abode of the god of destruction Shiva, is considered a 'once-in-a-lifetime' pilgrimage. A dip in the nearby Lake Mansarovar, they believe, cleanses them of their sins. The arduous trek through beautiful, yet treacherous, terrain across Indian and Chinese territory pushes one's physical endurance to the limit, at the same time bringing one closer to one's spiritual self.

Despite the tragedy involving a batch of trekkers to Kailash-Mansarovar — where a camp in Malpa was destroyed in a landslide and over 40 pilgrims were among some 300 people killed — many insist they are willing to go back, and not just for religious reasons. The 30-day trek is a delightful experience as one walks through forests and villages, across streams and rivers and along the majestic Himalayan range.

The annual trek begins in New Delhi, where pilgrims gather for medical examinations before the arduous journey and briefings by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs due to the transnational aspect of the trek. The pilgrimage, discontinued following the India-China war of 1962, was reopened in the early eighties.

Each group of pilgrims to Kailash-Mansarovar comprises 30 to 60 people. The route provides breathtaking contrasts in the terrain. On the Indian side, the landscape is lush and beautiful, but harsh. On the Chinese side it is stark and barren, but still scintillating. The journey

begins from Delhi where the trekkers board a train to Kathgodam in the Nainital region of the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The actual trek begins from a place called Tawaghat.

The ascent, beginning on the third day of the pilgrimage, lasts nine days and covers several camps, including Malpa. The trekkers pass the picturesque Sosa valley and at one point make their way down to the river Kali which divides India and Nepal. Towards the last portion of the trip's first leg, the trekkers reach the confluence of the Kali and Kuti rivers.

In order to assess the trekkers' ability to undertake the gruelling journey into China, a final medical examination is conducted by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) at Gunji before the ascent to Lipu Leph pass, 17,500 feet above sea level. The pilgrims are accompanied to the pass by ITBP personnel.

After the crossing, the trekkers are handed over to the hospitality of the Chinese who accompany them to a base camp in a place called Taklakot through knee-high snow, rocky streams and barren desert land.

Most who apply to go to Kailash are deeply religious and treat it as the culmination of their pious inclinations. They believe once the trek is completed, they will be closer to achieving 'nirvana' (salvation) and, consequently, become closer to God. Some undertake it as a challenge — to test their stamina and physical endurance.

Lake Mansarovar is situated at an altitude of 15,000 feet, making it the highest lake in the world. Its clear blue water is soothing to the spirit and, apart from the ritual bathing, it is a pleasure to simply sit on its banks. Although the water is very cold in the morning, by noon it is sufficiently warm for a leisurely dip. One whole day is set aside for bathing in the lake and conducting prayers on its banks.

The tip of Mount Kailash reaches just over 22,000 feet, but the trekkers only have to climb up to 19,000 feet. The top of the mountain remains covered with snow all year round and even during summer trekkers are often faced with blizzards. The distance covered in the parkrama around Mount Kailash is about 52 km.

Hindus believe that one circumambulation absolves the sins of a lifetime. Whether one goes on the trek for religious reasons or otherwise, one gets to see some of the most beautiful landscapes in India and neighbouring China. The Kumaon region in Uttar Pradesh is renowned for its beauty. As

one treks along, one crosses charming streams, travels through lush green forests, wanders past little villages and gazes at the splendour of the Himalayan foothills. Vast and barren Tibet poses a tremendous contrast to the scenery on the Indian side. There is nothing to see for miles and miles except a stony desert, although the majestic mountains in the background draw the trekkers. The barrenness of it, however, often broken by the sight of clear blue lakes with gently lapping waves.

The purity of the landscape is astounding. The skies appear bluer, the trees greener, the rivers sparkling clear, the air cleaner and the sun brighter than anywhere else. After the first day's climb, which is very tiring, trekking becomes easier because the limbs get used to being exercised in a manner and extent to which they perhaps never have been before. The trekkers also visit a temple at Khotanath, near Taklakot. Although constructed on the lines of a Tibetan monastery, it is a Hindu temple and large idols of several deities are installed.

There is no Hindu priest in the temple and a Tibetan monk performs the rites. For the entire 30 days of the pilgrimage, one's thoughts are never far from the spiritual aspects of life and the existence of some supernatural force. Those who take the trip do so with such zeal that all thought of pain and discomfort is dispelled by the urge to reach the destination.

— India Abroad News Service

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HE'S NOT THE WORLD'S GREATEST OPENING ACT...

BUT HE'S THE BEST I COULD GET ON SHORT NOTICE

... BUT I GOTTA TELL YA...

THIS LADY WAS SOOOO FAT...

James Bond

AFTER DISPOSING OF MYSTER RUBY — BOND DROPPES OUT OF THE ROUNDRY!

WHILE INSIDE THE WAREHOUSE...

TILL MR RUBY COMES BACK THROUGH THAT DOOR THE ROUNDRY

SORRY, SCHAAAL! HE'S NOT COMING BACK.

WON'T TAKE A MINUTE, CHAPS — I JUST GOT TO GET TO A FAST FLANKING MOVEMENT!

by Jim Davis