

Miseries Lurking Again

Three million people of the city's eastern region are likely to be flooded this year if there is considerable rise in the water levels of the Balu and the Sitalakhyia rivers. The monsoon is just round the corner and we had the most devastating floods this century in July last year.

The Prime Minister announced on 20 September last that an embankment would be constructed in this area to save the inhabitants from the onslaught of future floods. But for the 30 lakh hapless people of these areas, they have nothing to cheer about as nothing has been done about it so far.

Since the historic flooding of 1998 the government and its agencies concerned have taken a long nap for eight months and during this period they have hardly taken any step to reduce or mitigate the annual suffering of the people of eastern Dhaka city. There were three committees in place; one headed by the PM herself called the National Steering Committee, second was the Project Implementation Committee under the Water Minister and the third was the Experts Committee headed by the Secretary of the Water Resources Ministry. But these committees have hardly been of any use. Meanwhile the project of the 114 square kilometre embankment, primarily estimated to cost more than three thousand five hundred crore taka lay in the doldrum. Later, the cost was reassessed at two thousand five hundred crore. WB and ADB were approached for funding this important project but they asked for further studies on the environment and rehabilitation of the area which will cost Taka twenty-five crore till 2001. No one knows when the actual work on the implementation of the project will start.

The residents of Khilgaon, Mothertek, Basabo, Nandipara, Ahammabag, Kadamtala etc. had suffered tremendously during the last floods for about seventy-five days virtually floating on water in insanitary and unhygienic conditions. In spite of assurances by highups in the administration and important public figures at that time nothing tangible, not even the proper rehabilitation of the battered roads has been done till-date.

We wish to send a strong reminder to the government and the Prime Minister of her promise to protect these people from flooding again and again and set the ball rolling before the floods strike again.

Toxic Poultry Feed

A huge quantity of poultry feed component, up to one hundred tonnes, imported from Belgium, the Netherlands and France might be contaminated with potentially carcinogenic dioxine, so fear the veterinarians, scientists and officials of the Poultry Industries' Association. If it is true, then the country is certainly faced with a health disaster of a grave magnitude. Belated though, the government reaction to the world-wide food scare following detection of high level of poly-chlorinated biphenyl (PCB) and dioxin in Belgian dairy and poultry products is nonetheless praiseworthy. It has already banned import of poultry feed (protein concentrate) from these European countries and also seized consignments already off-loaded at the Chittagong Port. Besides, the firms that have already opened letters of credit in this regard would need clearance from authorities before they get the imported consignments released.

Well under control it may appear, the situation remain quite alarming nonetheless; for, the country does not have the technical support required for detection of dioxin in poultry feeds or poultry and dairy products. The Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission have never run such tests before. At this point of time, it seems, we have no way of knowing whether the available poultry and dairy products in the market are contaminated or not. The fact that dioxine is "less degradable and bi-magnifiable"—which means if it somehow sneaks into the environment, it can magnify itself—renders the situation to be even worse.

Total withdrawal of Belgian, Dutch and French dairy and poultry products from the market appears the safest and most effective measure at this point of time. Until and unless we are equipped with efficient dioxine-detection mechanism, the ban imposed on import of dairy and poultry products from these countries should stay. "Unscrupulous traders" will definitely try to make most of our vulnerability. To make sure that their attempts are foiled, the government machinery should also be on constant vigil.

Destroy the Racket

The four about-to-be-trafficked children were simply fortunate to be "rescued" by the police on Wednesday last from the city's Kalabagan area. Subsequent capture of four alleged abductors is commendable. But the incident certainly sends a chilling signal among the parents that their children are not safe. Any time any number of infants might become victims of a group of child-lifters. Innocent children meeting horrifying fates are not new, but it appears that the enormity of the crime is yet to be understood.

A police official is quoted to have said: "the four accused are members of an organised gang, engaged in picking up newborns for trafficking." This, leads us to assume that the origin of child-lifters' racket is not at all unfamiliar to the people in khakis. It is only the lack of sincere drive that has kept them active.

When crimes go unpunished and the police remain silent and inactive, then criminals call the shots. This time, the law should not waver so far as it is taking action against those found engaged in a vile crime like child-lifting. Time has come for an all out effort to stop trafficking of children and women. For that to happen we propose a grand alliance of the civil society, government and the law enforcement bodies. Only such a concerted effort will stem this rot.

Costs of Character Assassination

Those who are using words to snub others, are in fact doing harm to the cause of the people. The nation expects that MPs would properly use their time in the pursuit of socio-economic and political uplift of the people of their country.

watched their elected representatives on their feet to press home the grievances of their respective constituencies. Unfortunately, that programme also had to be stopped due to the alleged 'unhealthy' and 'unruly' conducts by some of the members and also due to other objectives confronting the programme. A good programme thus was laid to rest following unfortunate incidents in JS.

Why is there a Budget Session? It is simply because the revenue and expenditure of a fiscal year needs to be approved by the parliament. The Finance Minister of the country presents budget to the nation through the parliament. The parliament members in turn, are supposed, to scrutinize the whole scheme of thought of the government and make a critical assessment of the whole situation pertaining to budgetary allocation, government policies and the on-going socio-economic and political scenario. But unfortunately some of our learned members tend to take the floor for a place of mud-slinging. We do not mind members engaging in criticising each other even on non-economic issues but the euphoria goes so high that even dead souls are not spared from their verbal attacks. This is simply unbelievable and unfortunate. More unfortunate is the fact that some law makers in the JS let the leaders down by being of position or opposition. We

firmly believe that had that not happened and had our learned MPs tuned into the tone of the budget, the nation could reap home a much better harvest from the field of democratic parleys.

What is the cost of character assassination? While driving back home, I decided to calculate the opportunity costs of such character assassination. My estimate is based on reported expenditure of a JS session as appeared in daily news-

minute costs Tk 15,000 to keep JS session on, then a 5-hour session (300 minutes) would cost Tk 45 lakh per day.

In a situation where MPs delve deep into discussions pertaining to budget, socio-economic conditions of the people, the future of the nation—the whole amount of Tk 45 lakh could be considered to be used productively. Unfortunately, newspaper reports and our own feelings appear to say that for some MPs, this is hardly the

capita income of 1,87,500 persons come close to Tk. 45 lakh. With Tk 45 lakh at our disposal, we can provide credit to 1500 destitutes or landless at the rate of Tk 3000 per person. And assuming an average family size of 5.5 for those poor folks, the total beneficiaries from our Tk 45 lakh loan scheme comes out to be 8,250 persons.

We do not, however, claim any originality or innovation in our calculations. The assumptions are very simple and straightforward and assumes other things as constant. Neither would we like to suggest that by stopping such deliberations we save Tk 45 lakh and then buy some bullocks or boats for the poor.

On the other hand, we are aware of the fact that from each session, people's expected net benefit would run much higher than Tk. 45 lakh provided such discussions hover around people's cause but not to curse souls, dead or alive. Of course, there is hardly any yardstick to measure quantitatively the costs and benefits of a budget session. How to put JS sessions into productive use and make the best use of the Tk. 45 lakh which could otherwise be a dead-weight loss to the society? There are many ways, but let me cite a few.

First, through a discussion on law and order situation and a follow up by the government, a sense of relief and safety could draw upon to the people who

wrote MPs to the parliament. Second, MPs could suggest ways and means to curb corruption, bureaucracy and other hindrances to the society. Third, MPs could chalk out a list of unproductive pockets in government machinery and suggest a redirection of resources into relatively more productive channels. Fourth, MPs could spend more time on other issues, which are of capital importance to the society. If the deliberation in the JS just hang around the issues affecting common people, there is no reason why the benefits shouldn't much outweigh the costs of running the session.

So, to remind our learned MPs: Please note that the price of a word from your mouth in the session is Tk 94. It's very expensive given that the daily agricultural wage rate in your constituency is hardly Tk 80. So, please make the best use of your words by pointing at policies and prescriptions affecting common people's cause. Those who are doing it, are doing good to their constituency as well as to their country. Those who are using words to snub others, are in fact doing harm to the cause of the people. The nation expects that MPs would properly use their time in the pursuit of socio-economic and political uplift of the people of their country.

I think that the Hon'ble Speaker of the Sausad cannot just preside over the demise of a productive session caused by the abusive use of language and vulgar expressions. He should immediately come to the rescue and switch off the microphones of those MPs who tend to do so.



Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

papers. We are told that for each minute of JS operation, the cost is Tk 15,000 and for argument's sake let us take it to be so. Suppose further that a fluent orator can speak 160 words per minute (our politicians could hardly speak much more than that). Therefore, each word coming out of a member's mouth costs Tk 94. The most productive use of that money would suggest that the word should be about budget, either for or against. On the other hand, Tk 94 could be wasted if that word constitutes vulgarism, rebukes or other derogatory uses. However, if a

case. To put those members into right perspective and draw their attention to what they actually miss out, we have calculated the opportunity costs of their misuse of words. For the sake of simplicity, we assume that a total of 5 hours is spent on mud-slinging, character assassination and other non-budgetary phenomena in a budget session. In other words, we assume that Tk 45 lakh is not put to productive use.

Assuming that the per capita per annum income of the people of Bangladesh is USD 220 or about Tk 9,000. The daily per

Arbiters of Justice

Ardeshir Cowasjee writes from Karachi

The Attorney-General of Pakistan and his deputies are men appointed and employed by the government. They cannot be expected to wholeheartedly and honestly conduct a prosecution against their appointers and employers. The "aggrieved," therefore, urge that in conformity with current international judicial norms and practices, the Supreme Court appoint an independent special prosecutor able to prosecute the case in an unbiased manner

conduct a prosecution against their appointers and employers. The "aggrieved," therefore, urge that in conformity with current international judicial norms and practices, the Supreme Court appoint an independent special prosecutor able to prosecute the case in an unbiased manner (covered in my statement placed on the court record on May 6, 1999). Another good reason why the Attorney-General is incompetent to prosecute this case is covered by excerpts from my affidavit placed on the court record on April 22, 1998:

"That it is on record that the first law officer of the people, Attorney-General Chaudhry Farooq, has himself committed contempt in the face of the court. During the 1993-96 PPP government of Benazir Bhutto, Advocate Chaudhry Farooq, defending an Itefaq case in the Lahore High Court, swore at the presiding judge, Mr. Munir A. Shaikh, in open court, using the crudest of language. For this blatant contempt committed in the face of the court, the honourable presiding judge could have convicted and imprisoned him. That Advocate Chaudhry Farooq was not prosecuted does not deviate from or alter the fact that he abused an honourable High Court judge in open court, thus committing contempt in the face of the court. That with the advent of the PML government of Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister appointed as Attorney-General of Pakistan, as the people's lawyer, his own lawyer, Itefaq's lawyer, Advocate Chaudhry Farooq.

"That the judiciary and the people accented him, without protest, as the first law officer of the land rests heavily on the heads of the people and even more heavily on the heads of those in power and authority who could have opposed his nomination and subsequent appointment, and, additionally, this advocate can hardly be considered to be competent to aid the Supreme Court in the investigations it is now conducting to establish the identity of those members of the ruling party who had either organized the storming, or were leading the mob, or were with the mob

on November 28, 1997." Unless a special prosecutor is appointed, the exercise now in the mill will be an exercise in futility. The appeal will be admitted for hearing by CJ P. Ajmal Mian who will clear his conscience and retire two days later, leaving his successor CJ P. Siddiqui to carry on.

The Attorney-General is hardly likely to consider the involvement of the new CJP in the removal of CJP Sajjad Ali Shah in November/December 1997, or the contents of Sajjad Ali Shah's letter dated November 28, 1997, addressed to the President of Pakistan which has been placed on the Supreme Court record as an attachment to my affidavit dated May 9, 1998.

"I am very sorry to state that Mr. Justice Saiduzzaman Siddiqui, a judge of this court, who is presiding over a bench of three judges at Peshawar registry, has issued an administrative order constituting a full court consisting of 15 judges to commence sitting on 1/12/97 for hearing of the cases at Islamabad. He has heard and decided a petition under Article 184(3) of the Constitution, which cannot be registered and heard at the Peshawar registry and can be registered and heard only at the principal seat of the Supreme Court unless so authorized by the Chief Justice.

This petition was taken up for hearing without any authorization from me and such action was also taken by two judges, namely, Mr. Justice Irshad Hasan Khan and Mr. Justice Khalil-ur-Rehman Khan at Quetta without permission of the Chief Justice, and the order was passed holding in abeyance the notification of my appointment as Chief Justice, which order has been set aside by the bench of five judges by a majority of four to one sitting at the principal seat.

"Mr. Justice Saiduzzaman Siddiqui, as stated above, has passed an administrative order taking over the control of the whole administration which is the exclusive function of the Chief Justice. This divide against the judges of the Supreme Court is deliberately created by interested quarters. I

do not want to make any comments on the conduct and attitude motivating such actions, which smack of defiance and rebellion and amount to misconduct calling for action by the Supreme Judicial Council for which necessary steps are to be taken."

The AG will also not consider what Senator Iqbal Haider has recorded in his statement handed in to the Supreme Court on May 21, 1998: "The attacks on the Supreme Court started on August 21, 1997, when the strength of the Supreme Court judges was arbitrarily reduced. The spate of attacks by the ruling party on the Supreme Court continued thereafter with the intent to disrupt the course of justice and prevent the court from hearing most crucial cases incriminating the prime minister, his parliamentarians and

friends." In order to survive, the people desperately feel the need for an independent judiciary, particularly with the government we now have. Those who try to help the judges regain their dignity and status are generally regarded as fools and asked the simple question: "Well, you may want to do something for the judges, but do the judges want to be independent enough to rule against the government?" Take the FCA case. For some reason or other, stress was laid on the production of a list of those who withdrew or remitted foreign exchange between May 11 and 28, 1998. That does not matter one iota, for by law people were free to remit whatever they liked during this period. What was revealed to the Court and to the people of Pakistan were the names of the powerful people in government, the culprits, who

sent out money in between the time the embargo was declared on May 28 and the returns submitted to the State Bank the next morning. The Governor of the State Bank has a list of these people, but the court did not ask for it.

Another worrying aspect is the appointment of judges. Three eminent additional judges of the Lahore High Court, Justices Saqib Nisar, Asif Saieed Khosa and Mian Zafar Yasin, recently completed their statutory probationary period of one year, and were recommended by the CJ of the LHC and the CJP as being suitable for the appointment as permanent judges.

The law ministry processed their cases and the prime minister advised the president to confirm them. They had to be confirmed "in the absence of very strong reasons to be recorded by the President/Executive which may be justifiable". President Tarar refused to confirm them, stating that the first two are young (both are over 40 and constitutionally eligible) and that the third's rate of disposal of cases was poor. Would the CJ of the LHC and the CJP have recommended confirmation? "Strong reasons?"

26 June: New International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

by Akram H. Chowdhury

Torture is a powerful weapon against democracy. Torture is usually inflicted to demolish freedom of expression and freedom of political opinion. That is more the reason why we should take firm action against torture...

26th of June was officially proclaimed "United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture" by the UN General Assembly through adoption of Resolution No. 52/149 on 12 December '97. Today we are commemorating the victims of torture for the second time in Bangladesh.

This year, the Committee against Torture, the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for the Victims of Torture, the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on question relating to torture and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights—the principal actors of the United Nations engaged in the fight against torture—have launched an appeal, calling upon all governments, other United Nations bodies, programs, funds and agencies, as well as relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to commemorate this international day around the world.

"Reaffirming that torture is the vilest of acts perpetrated by human beings upon each other" the Secretary and the High Commissioner for Human Rights urged all the governments to defeat torture and torture everywhere and reminded that ending torture was a beginning of respect for the most basic of all human rights: the intrinsic dignity and value of each individual.

Bangladesh Rehabilitation Centre for Trauma Victims is observing this day through different activities. BRCT is the first and only institute that is providing medical and psychological treatment and economic rehabilitation assistance to the victims of torture since its inception 1992.

Every year, torture forces thousands and thousands of people to flee their home countries. According to US Committee for Refugees there are more than 14.5 million refugees and an additional 19 million have been internally displaced in their home countries. A large number of these people do not wish to disclose their torture history to either avoid embarrassment or in fear of being tortured in future. Of the refugee population world wide 1.62 to 5 million have been tortured.

Dr Inge Jeneffe, General Secretary of the IRICT in her

speech said that by celebrating this day we recognize their suffering and their experience of painful torture. The long lasting feelings of embarrassment would gradually wither away.

Effects of Torture
We need to establish a society that would continuously fight against torture. Because torture can destroy a person both physically and psychologically. Anxiety, hopelessness, depression, sleeplessness, suicidal tendency, loss of self-respect, mental weakness, distrust etc make a victim a burden to his own self. A survey report on the victims of torture treated by BRCT from 1994 to 1997 reveals that about 72 per cent of farmers, 61 per cent of daily laborers and 52 per cent of businessmen cannot carry out their job due to physical and psychological inability as the effects of torture meted out to them.

Torture and Conventions
Torture is internationally recognized as violation of human rights. A series of human rights declaration and conventions strictly prohibited torture under any circumstances. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art.-5), International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (Art.-4,6,7), European Convention (Art.-3), American Convention (Art.-2), African Charter of Human and People's Rights (Art.-5) and Four Geneva Conventions all forbid torture. Even if torture is carried out during the war-time, the torturer would be committing a war-crime and he would be punished in the court of his country or in the International Tribunal.

The Constitution of Bangladesh has specifically prohibited torture under any circumstance. Art. 35 (5) says: No person shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment or treatment.

Yet the incidences of torture goes on unabated. A survey report, from January 1 to June 20, 1999, prepared by the BRCT revealed that 152 persons were tortured among which 15 have died due to torture meted out to them by the police. 4 died under police custody during the same period. The statistics show that 28 people were shot dead and 55 others were injured when police

opened fire at them at different times during the period. Member of the law enforcing and related agencies during the period raped 17 girls and women.

Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture
Men and women who have been tortured can be rehabilitated through integrated approach, which includes treatment, psychological, counselling, home visits, family therapy and economical rehabilitation. This integrated approach can improve the quality of life and can rebuild the confidence inhumanity.

BRCT has offered treatment to 119 victims in 1994, 263 victims in 1995, 107 victims in 1996 and 180 victims in 1997, 317 in 1998 and 276 victims upto 20 June in 1999. During this period, a sophisticated and highly acclaimed model of Integrated Treatment Approach (ITA) has been developed. Medical doctors, psychiatrists, nurses, physiotherapist and counsellors along with social workers and lawyers and human rights activists work together in planning and carrying out comprehensive and individually tailored treatment plans. But it is not enough.

Conclusion
Tremendous task lies ahead to eradicate torture from this world. Here we should follow the principle 'prevention is better than cure'. One way of preventing torture is creating awareness of the problem. Information and education on human rights can play an important role for creating awareness. Strong action is needed to introduce human rights instructions in the school curriculum as well as in the training curriculum of the law enforcing agencies and prison guards. The present government has already ratified the Convention against Torture. Now it is time for the government to fully implement the Convention and the parliament should take initiative to reform the laws concerned in order to uphold the spirit of the Convention.

The writer is General Secretary of the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Centre for Trauma Victims (BRCT) and President of the Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh (CCHRB), Dhaka.

To the Editor...

BCB, expedite requirements!

Sir, First and foremost my heartfelt congratulations to our cricketers for their outstanding performances in the World Cup '99 against both, the giant Pakistan and the minnows Scotland.

We do hope and pray that in this finest hour of the country's grand success, the top brass in the BCB will not remain complacent and expedite chartering out the priorities for putting the country's cricket regime in its proper perspective.

The Bangladesh Cricket Stadium has been deprived of future cricket and the pitches so painstakingly made for months together involving crores of Taka was mercilessly dugged out and destroyed beyond repairs.

The BCB authorities must be in possession of more incriminating evidences for which BCB can garner their entire resources to give a befitting reply. Only such firm acts can create a healthy and congenial atmosphere for promotion of cricket and regaining the Bangladesh Cricket Stadium for restoring to its original purpose — cricket.

Salahuddin Y. Jamal
CH Firozshah, Chittagong

Government service and politics

Sir, Under government rules and regulations, a government servant or an employee of a public sector corporation retires from public service on attainment of 57 years of age or completion of 25 years of service whichever is earlier. From time to time, our government also announces an offer of 'golden handshake' which enables many employees to go on voluntary retirement on receipt of payment of lump sum amount of compensation.

But how long does a politician in our country remain active in politics? True, government service and politics are two different subjects. But in many developed countries like USA, UK, France, Switzerland, Japan and Germany etc. government servants are accountable and transparent. Can't we frame some rules and regulations, discipline and conduct rules for our political leaders?

O. H. Kabir
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Shocking indeed!

Sir, I was enjoying the Star News immediately after

Bangladesh won the excellent victory over Pakistan on 1 June. As my mind was then filled with joy and jubilation, I felt like watching the news in a refreshed mood. But the very first sentence spoken by the news-caster was much shocking to me. The news-caster amazingly termed our historical victory as 'yesterday's shocking win over Pakistan'. The word that pinched me is the 'shocking' win. Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to say 'Pakistan's shocking defeat to Bangladesh'?

The Star News is referred by all for its neutral and positive presentation. But while all the cricket stars of the world admitted the great performance of Bangladesh cricket, the Star News found it shocking. Even the Pakistani skipper Wasim Akram himself lauded our excellent win. As a patriotic cricket fan, I'm really very shocked at such negative attitude of Star News towards our country. Ours is a new one in the cricket arena and we have to go a long way. So it needs inspiration and also appreciation. I request to Star News to learn to praise one's success which is the indication of generosity.

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