

# Flood and Its Aftermath Waiting for Total Rehabilitation

by Ashraf-ul-Alam Tutu

The government also needs to take the people into confidence and involve them in local aspects of rehabilitation at all stages, from planning to implementation and monitoring. For this purpose, the services of NGOs, may be availed of, as they are closest to the people at grassroots level, and are aware of the needs and capabilities of the people.

**A**LIPORE village situated on the Sathkira-Kaliganj road was submerged by the flood in the middle of October, and the villagers had to abandon their homesteads and shift to whatever safe place they could find. One such family was that of Nazrul Islam, 41, who was the sole earning member of the family of seven. Suddenly he fell ill, but there was nothing anybody could do, as the family, like thousands of others, was stranded by the flood. When his situation appeared to be serious, friends and neighbors somehow arranged to take him to hospital in a rickshaw van, plying through two-feet deep water. But all the effort was in vain, as he had a fatal attack on the Sathkira-Bhokra Checkpost road, and died on the way to hospital.

Man is mortal and death is inevitable. But that understanding does not relieve anybody from the worry of deciding where to bury the dead in a flood-submerged land. Incidentally, here have been few deaths related to the floods in Sathkira. But such deaths like that of Nazrul Islam have left a big question mark. Many embarrassing situations of various natures have had to be faced by the flood-affected people of Sathkira, and the problem faced by the family of Nazrul Islam was only one out of thousands such.

At present the government, NGOs and other civic organizations and individuals are providing emergency relief to the flood-hit people. The flood had been a surprise to all concerned. The areas affected had never experienced any flood for the last 62 years, and had been long considered a flood-free region. The areas submerged by this flood comprise the highest land in the Gangetic Delta of Bangladesh. Except on rare occasions when unusually heavy rainfall caused a temporary drainage congestion, there has never been any flood in this region during living memory.

**Causes of Damage**  
The immediate cause for such widespread damage are many but they all converge into one main reason: the region had never experienced any flood during the last 62 years, and had never expected any. There being no apprehension of flood, the people had built houses with materials that could be easily destroyed by flood, such as adobe and jute sticks. Adobe simply melts away in waterlogging, and the jute sticks are not capable of withstanding the on-rush of flood waters. And the majority of people living in the rural areas, being poor, also could not afford any better.

The rivers and other drainage channels in the region had remained neglected for long, because of the massive development of road communication during the post-1947 period and at a greater rate during the post-1971 period. There was no longer any interest in maintaining the navigability of the rivers and canals, as road communication improved and proved much efficient. Thus most of the rivers and canals had silted up and become half dead. Due to the absence of floods, bridges and culverts that were constructed along the roads did not have sufficient clearance for the discharge of water in such magnitude, and the raised roadbeds proved to be a barrier to the rushing flood waters.

Further south, in the southern portion of Jessore district and in Sathkira, the Coastal Embankment Project (CEP) of the 1960s had built high embankments and closed several rivers and canals in order to prevent saline tidal water from entering the former tidal flood plains of the south-western coastal region. As a result, most of the rivers and drainage channels of the region had silted up. In addition, many rivers and canals had been encroached upon, in the northern districts by farmers who owned lands on the banks of the rivers and canals, and in Sathkira by shrimp aquaculturists. The result of the encroachment by the shrimp

farmers had delayed the drainage of the flood water from Sathkira. Most of all, the people living in the region having had no experience of flood in their lives, simply did not know how to cope with it. In case of many, in fact thousands, they were awakened at the dead of night by the rush of flood water entering their homes. Finally, as the region was considered flood-free, it had remained out of the flood warning arrangement between the governments of India and Bangladesh. As a result, perhaps even the authorities were taken by surprise.

**The Extent of Damage**  
As the flood water has not totally receded from some areas, especially in Sathkira district, it is difficult to arrive at a final estimate of loss. Everyday some new information comes in and the estimates have to be revised. And again the situation was further complicated by the severe cyclonic storm that hit the south-western coastal districts, especially Sathkira and Khulna during the night following October 27.

The estimates of loss, as published in the "Pathoker Kagol" of Khulna on October 21, was as follows:  
Crop (in areal loss) = 76,500 acres  
Educational Institutions damaged = 302  
Places of worship damaged = 114  
Bridges damaged and culverts = 280  
Metalled roads damaged = 73 km  
Unmetalled rural roads damaged = 2,161 km

On the other hand, Khulna daily Jannabhooni on October 22 reported that six persons and 499 cattle had died due to flood related causes in Sathkira. According to the report, 94,126 houses, 280 bridges and culverts, 428 educational institutions, 2397.81 km of roads of all kinds have been damaged, and 554,835 people have found refuge in 435 emergency relief camps. Estimates of shrimp and fish ponds/enclosures (ghers) washed away have been shown as between 1000 and 1500 in various newspapers.

According to a report released on October 26, by the Agriculture Extension Department, about 28 per cent of the standing transplanted aman crop in Sathkira district has been lost, representing loss of production to the extent of about 66,000 tonnes of rice, valued at about 700 million takas. The same report also stated that 30 fish hatcheries in Kalaroa upazila and 191 fish nurseries in Kalaroa and Sathkira upazilas have been totally washed away. All of them would need total rehabilitation including supply of breeding stock of fish. The AED report also puts crop loss of vegetables at 3,000 hectares (7,500 acres) representing a loss of potential cash income to the extent of about Taka 60 million to the farmers.

No reliable estimates are as yet available in respect of loss of cattle, goats and poultry birds belonging to the flood-hit people. Whatever the final estimate may turn out to be, it would be colossal, and it is likely to take years to make good.

**Relief and Rehabilitation**  
The government's response to the sufferings of people displaced by the flood has been slow and very inadequate. According to the reports published in most of the daily newspapers since the flood began, more than 60 per cent of the flood affected people are getting relief from non-government sources, such as NGOs, professional associations, trade unions, various business associations and chambers, clubs and philanthropic individuals. Donor organizations and a few large International NGOs are providing relief through their local partner NGOs. Many local NGOs including those of Khulna and Bagerhat districts are also

providing relief from their own resources.

But in spite of all these initiatives, the relief falls far short of need. Many flood-affected families, displaced from their homes, are still in a floating condition. Though their numbers are few compared to the large numbers in the camps or shelters, still they are human beings, and human suffering is the same, whether sufferers number in the hundreds or in the thousands.

There have also been reports of corruption in the relief distribution process. Several instances of corruption have been flashed in the daily newspapers. There was report about a whole village refusing to accept relief from the government in protest against the alleged corruption of a Union Parishad Chairman. Daily newspapers of Khulna, Sathkira, Jessore and Dhaka reported numerous cases of corruption, as well as protest demonstrations almost on a daily basis. The newspaper reports of corruption generated anger and hate among the corrupt officials. Reporter and agent of the Daily Loksamaj of Jessore was beaten up with iron rods and had to be hospitalised. Reporters of Kalyan, daily Janabarta and Purbanchal of Khulna have been reportedly threatened and ordered to leave the area. The office of the daily Sathkira Chitra was ransacked by supporters of corrupt officials.

**Rehabilitation**  
However, the flood waters have been receding from almost all areas, and the people have been trekking back to their homes. It is now that the major work of rehabilitation has to commence in a well-coordinated manner. The rehabilitation initiatives have to address several sectors simultaneously and immediately.

For those families who have totally lost their homes, assistance will be required for reconstruction in the form of materials, money and labour. Until such time as their houses are rebuilt, they will have to be provided with temporary shelter materials.

According to the Deputy Commissioner of Sathkira, the government has so far sanctioned an amount of Taka 12 million for the reconstruction of the damaged houses of the flood affected families, at the rate of Taka 1000 per family, though that amount is far from being adequate. The Deputy Commissioner told correspondents on October 30 that he had requested a team of International donors and requested them to come forward with housing assistance for the flood affected people, whether in cash or in the shape of materials.

Safe drinking water and food will be the most immediate needs. Existing tubewells, damaged by the flood, need to be rehabilitated, and/or new ones have to be sunk. A total of 20,334 tubewells have been reportedly affected in 394 villages under 30 Union Parishads in the five upazilas of Sathkira. The Directorate of Public Health Engineering has deputed 91 mechanics with a back-up of Sub Assistant Engineers, Assistant Engineers and an Executive Engineer to clean the flood affected tube wells in Sathkira district. But the manpower is not adequate for the purpose. Moreover, it has been reported that UNICEF has given 6.5 metric tonnes of Bleaching Powder for the seven districts which have been flooded in Khulna Division. This quantity is too little for the 216,319 tubewells affected in all the seven districts.

Emergency food supplies should include rice, pulses, salt, cooking oil, sugar, milk or baby food, also utensils, kerosene lamps and kerosene oil etc. Other short-term initiatives will include provision of clothing including winter clothing and blankets.

Rehabilitation of Education: More than 400 educational institutions have been damaged partially or wholly in the five flood-ravaged upazilas of the district. In addition, more or less 300 educational institutions have been used as emergency relief camps in the areas remaining free of flood. The flood refugees who

lived in the shelters have reportedly damaged a lot of wooden furniture of those institutions and used them as firewood. As such, educational rehabilitation will be required not only in the flood affected areas, but also in respect of the institutions used as flood shelters. Special dispensation may also be required to make up for the loss of time, more than a month, for which period education has been disrupted.

**Agricultural Rehabilitation:** The rehabilitation of farmers will have to include supply of vegetable seeds, rice and wheat seeds for the ensuing spring crop, and other agricultural inputs free of cost. The areas that still remain water-logged will need draining by pumping or any other suitable means.

**Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Job Creation**

The repair and rehabilitation of infrastructural facilities that have been destroyed or damaged by the flood will also create jobs for the landless and others who are dependent wholly or partially on wage labour. These initiatives will include:

- Repair and reconstruction of roads, bridges and culverts to restore communications;
- Repair and reconstruction of damaged educational institutions and places of worship;
- Re-excavation of rivers, canals and other drainage channels for easy drainage;
- Removal of impediments created on rivers and other drainage channels by illegal occupation;
- Removal of impediments on water-courses by means of re-designing water management structures that obstruct the easy drainage of water, such as river closures, cross-dams, etc.

**Strategic Initiatives**

This is likely to be a long-term process, as it will include coordinated action to be taken by the governments of India and Bangladesh on a mutual cooperative basis in the relevant regions of India and Bangladesh. There is need for coordination between the Governments of India and Bangladesh in matters of water management of rivers and basins that affect both the countries. Citizens and Civic organizations in both the countries have to conduct advocacy programmes to move their respective governments to act in manners beneficial to the citizens of both the countries.

A team of experts of the Bangladesh Water Development Board have visited the flood affected areas recently and inspected in detail the problems relating to water management. They have reportedly identified spots to be rectified, such as cutting of roads and building bridges on such spots, re-excavation of rivers and canals, and re-alignment of some roads. They are said to have instructed the local authorities to implement such works. They have recommended the formation of a Coordination Committee headed by the Deputy Commissioner and participated in by the district level officers of the BWDB, LGED, Roads and Highways, etc.

But observers feel that leaving everything in the hands of the local officials will not produce any satisfactory result. The region needs an integrated long-term plan that will address all the problems that have surfaced during the flood, for this the government will have to take the initiative and form whatever body that may be necessary for planning and implementing a long-term rehabilitation programme for the entire region.

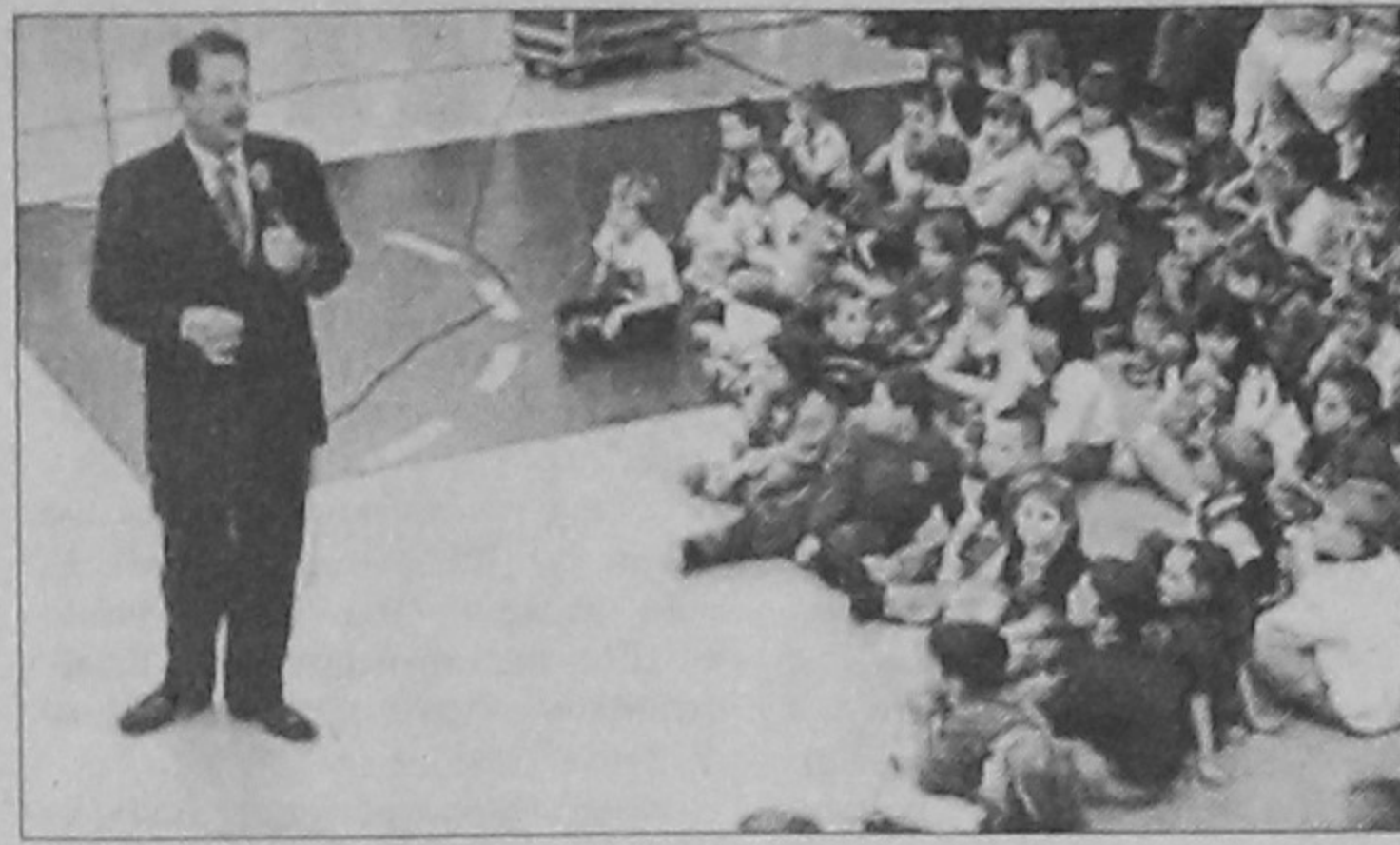
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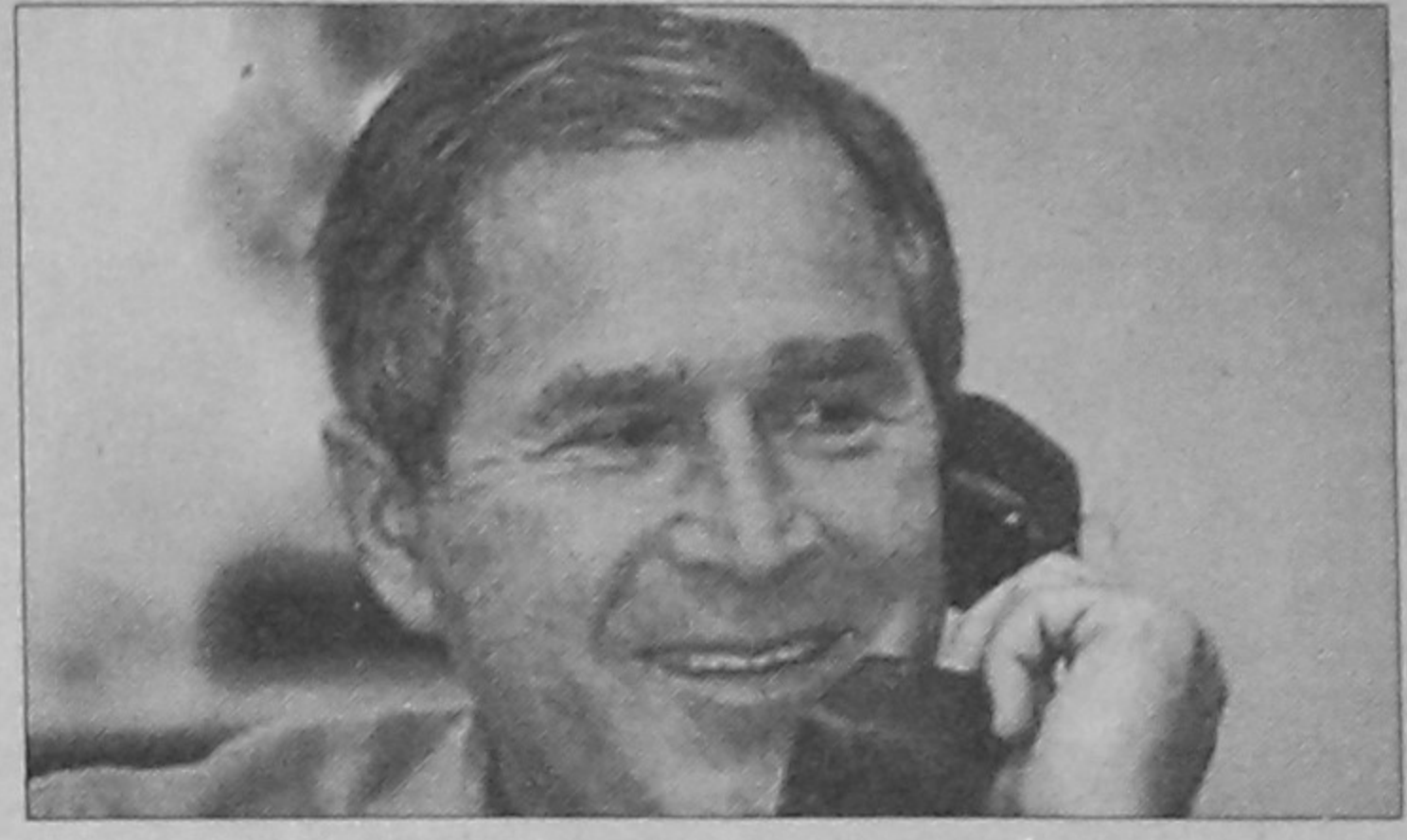
# Scrap This System

by E. J. Dionne Jr.

What is to be done? This electoral college system must be scrapped. The truth is that electors are not a deliberative group like representatives or senators. They are the product of a system created in less democratic times by Founders who wanted to temper the popular will. The same spirit meant that until the second decade of the 20th century, senators were elected by state legislatures, not the people. We amended the Constitution in 1913 because we decided the people should rule in the Senate. We ought to follow that logic in presidential elections.



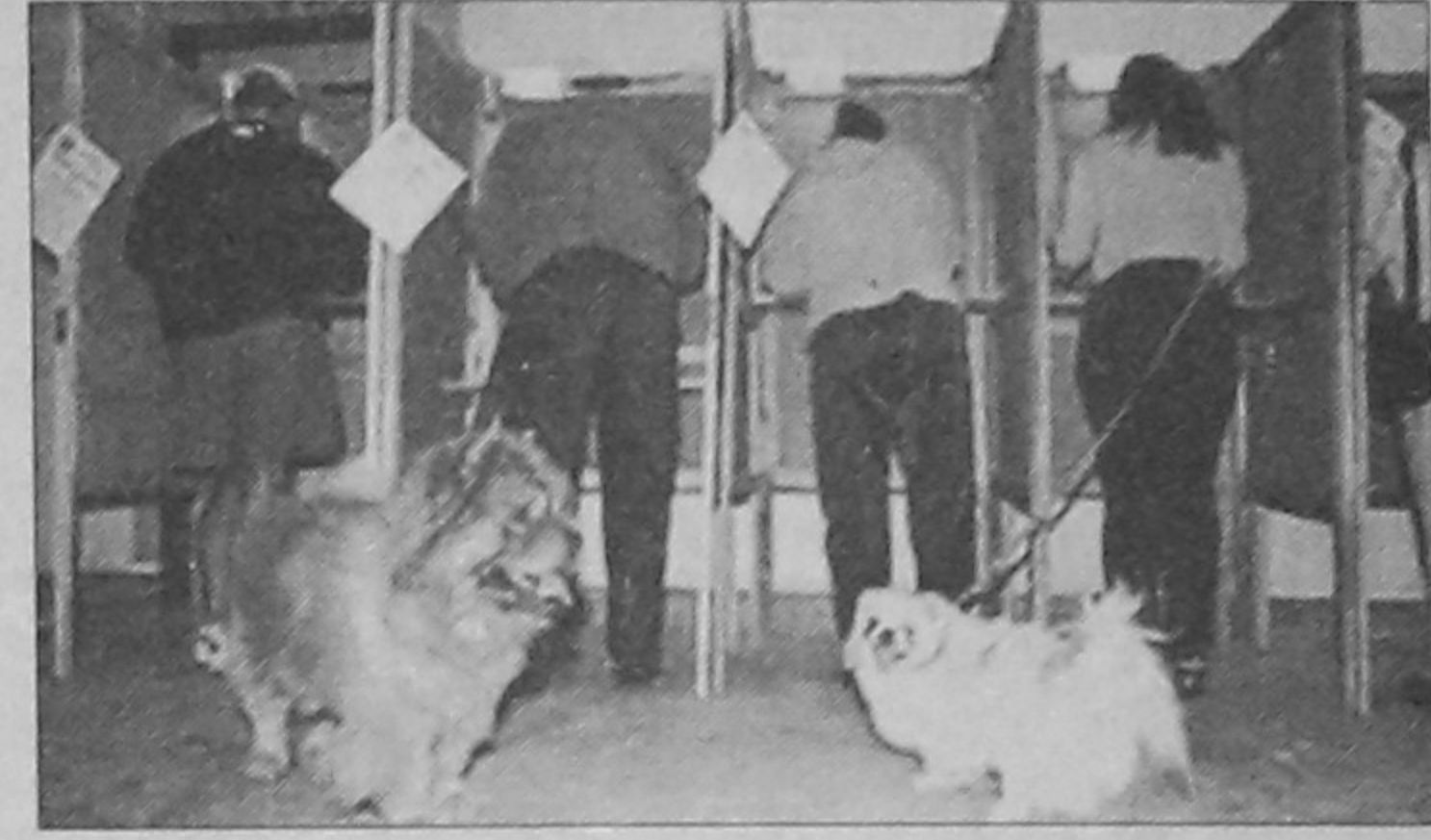
Al Gore voted at a school in Elmwood, Tennessee, near his home town



Tireless campaigning



The Clintons were among the early voters in New York



Voters in Venice California

- Internet photos

**O**UR political system blew up on Tuesday. No matter who takes office as president next January, the legitimacy of his election will be in doubt. A nation that is split into almost perfectly symmetrical political halves will spend four years preparing for the struggle of 2004 in which each will seek to avenge the wrong done it by a flawed system.

What's wrong here is not simply that the ever-so-narrow winner of the popular vote, Al Gore, might be denied election by a George W. Bush who would capture the electoral college on the basis of a handful of votes in Florida.

It now also appears that Democrats will be able to ascribe Bush's margin of victory in Florida-if there turns out to be a margin of victory-to the flawed configuration of a punch-card ballot in Palm Beach County. The ballot was so badly set up, Democrats argue with plausibility, that perhaps 3,000 voters who thought they were casting a ballot for Gore actually voted for Pat Buchanan.

As Rep. Robert Wexler, a Florida Democrat, pointed out, his party's complaints about the ballot flowed in long before the polls closed, and Buchanan's vote in the liberal Democratic county was far out of line with the thin support he won in surrounding areas.

The fate of the nation should not hang on an arcane local electoral dispute. Both parties can at least agree that this is no way to pick a president. Take the problem first from the Republicans' perspective. When it was thought in the week before the election that Al Gore might win the electoral vote but lose the popular vote, Democrats were quick to say that both Gore and Bush played by the same rules and should abide by them.

Knowing those rules, Bush and Gore chased each other in and out of the same battleground states. They sought whatever narrow advantage might secure them all the electoral votes under a winner-take-all system that applies in every state except Maine and Nebraska.

If the system had been built on popular votes rather than the electoral college, each would have pursued a different strategy. Each would have spent more time churning up enthusiasm within his political base. Gore would have spent more time campaigning in New York and California. Bush in Texas and the deep South.

So if Bush ekes out the narrowest of margins in Florida and thus

the electoral college, Republicans will have every reason to be infuriated by any Democratic claim that his election lacks legitimacy. Information retrieval systems will make it easy for Republicans to find Democrats who, just days before, spoke of the glorious traditions embodied in our system of indirect presidential elections.

But especially in light of the questions now being raised by that weird Palm Beach ballot, how can any self-respecting Democratic partisan just sit by and let Bush take the White House and with it leadership of an all-Republican government in Washington? Republican control of the White House and both houses of Congress can't possibly be seen as reflecting the will of an electorate that spoke in moderate tones on issues.

The exit polls made abundantly clear that a large and critical portion of Bush's support came from voters who are closer to Gore on the issues but had personal doubts about the vice president and also President Clinton. If Bush takes office, you can count on his being seen by Democrats as an Accidental President leading an Accidental Congressional Majority.

What is to be done? This electoral college system must be scrapped. The truth is that electors are not a deliberative group like representatives or senators. They are the product of a system created in less democratic times by Founders who wanted to temper the popular will. The same spirit meant that until the second decade of the 20th century, senators were elected by state legislatures, not the people. We amended the Constitution in 1913 because we decided the people should rule in the Senate. We ought to follow that logic in presidential elections.

But that is for later. The imperative now is that both Gore and Bush understand that they hold in their hands the legitimacy of the government itself. Before the lawyers and partisans raise charges and countercharges, Gore and Bush need to sit down together and agree on how they'll work out this dispute, much as the country created an electoral commission to resolve the even more hotly disputed 1876 election.

The fact is that the prize both men seek is now tainted-through no fault of their own. Each must now be seen as understanding why his opponents are so angry and dispirited. They must reunite the country, because no one else can.

Courtesy: The Washington Post

# Community Clinic Approach to People's Health

by Dr. M. Zakir Husain

The assumption that setting up a large number of community clinics will achieve the objective of making essential health care universally available needs to be re-examined in the light of accumulated evidence and current trends around the world.

**H**EALTH indicators of Bangladesh population are such that extending essential care to the entire population must be a major health policy objective. Successive governments in the country have stated their commitment to the provision of health care to all. But that did not mean that government health budget, rather low, can or should be committed to provide all needed medical care to all. It would neither be the best use of limited resources nor would available resources be sufficient. What the government can and should do is to create conditions under which people do have reasonable assurance of and access to essential care at affordable prices.

Rather than spending on medical care and that too mainly in hospitals in cities and towns, the government should be spending public funds on performing essential public health functions that protect and promote health of the population as a whole, and in particular that of the susceptible and vulnerable sections. These functions include for example, immunisation, safe drinking water and sanitation, environmental health, food safety and hygiene, health information and education, occupational health, and maternal and child health. Also included are effective disease surveillance, prompt control of epidemic outbreaks, and administration of international sanitary regulations and other obligations of international cooperation in public health.

These are functions that the private health sector with market and profit orientation, or the individuals themselves have neither the willingness nor the ability to perform these effectively. Performance of essential public health functions not only give higher aggregate health returns than personal medical care but also enhance the quality of life and productivity of the people.

The assumption that setting up a large number of community clinics will achieve the objective of making essential health care universally available needs to be re-examined in the light of accu-

mulated evidence and current trends around the world. Firstly, it is assumed that geographical distribution of health facilities to the farthest points is the better option, that it will improve access and use by those who need the services. But that remains to be proved. Thirdly, time has also proved that the public policy of centrally planned health care on the basis of population unit or geographical area is unsuccessful and unsustainable. Like centrally planned economic development, the notion that health care is best centrally planned and locally delivered on population per facility formula proved unsatisfactory. Most centrally planned health planning models have outlived their relevance and utility, with the exception of a few where it continues to provide some health care security to the poor and needy. The model did not respond to people's behaviour and variable needs in health care. People's health needs are not readily quantified and pre-determined, planned and delivered equitably, and sustained financially and operationally in the long term.

Starting with the first five-year plan, Bangladesh established a countrywide network of Thana Health Complexes (THCs) with a view to extending health care to the entire population. It is, however, an observed fact that majority (with few exceptions) of the nearly 400 THCs are positions of (with 9 sanctioned) under-performing and under-utilised. The staff lack motivation, the facilities lack support services, the patients are dissatisfied. Huge investments are not giving even reasonable returns. The staff are reportedly spending more time in private practice. It is an observed fact that optimum performance and utilisation of health facilities are the functions mainly of the quality and consistency of care provided and of client convenience and satisfaction. Neither nearness of the facility nor the perceived cost of care is not most determining factor. Unlike many commonly used consumer goods, medical care is not sensitive to merely price; the demand/need is not predictable and is poorly controlled by the person in need. Good quality and conveniently offered care will be even when there is an element of cost involved, while bad and indifferent care will not be used even if given free. Even the poor will be ready to pay low affordable cost for good quality of care when and where available.

Secondly, a policy of free medical care to all at their doorsteps is politically attractive but is a financial nightmare. It is wrongly assumed that people do appreciate and want free medical care when in reality it is neither free nor of acceptable quality even for the poor. Ironically, most of the "free" government health facilities cater more to the needs of those who can afford to pay rather than those who cannot.

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