

Flood worries remain

Stepped up relief operations needed

WE are already going through a flood. The question is: "are we in for a big one? If we read between the lines of the Bangladesh Water Development Board's latest situation assessment, the possibility can not be ruled out. We have it on good authority that none should brush aside the likelihood of a large flood from mid-August, which is barely a week away, to mid-September, which is not too far either. It's only when the risk period is over that we can feel relieved. But we must be prepared for any eventuality based on our experiences in the past.

What are the vulnerable points we need to take care of, so that the flood's impact can be minimised. After the 1988 deluge we had planned flood protection embankments on the eastern and western sides of Dhaka. On the western flank, the protection structure was constructed, but the two planned for the eastern side never got erected. When the eastern parts were inundated in the 1998 floods the question of constructing them arose afresh. Four and a half years have elapsed since and yet the eastern side remains unprotected against floods. As if to make it more vulnerable the DND bund seriously damaged by the 1998 flood continues to bear some old scars. Also, the 35 kilometer-long Dhaka protection embankment has had faultlines through which waters are seeping. Every year some 30 lakh people in the low-lying areas are water-logged.

In the immediate term, it is only by a large scale flushing of the waters from the low-lying areas to the relatively higher grounds or into the flowing channels that the situation can be mitigated. So, we need to install an adequate number of pumps there.

On Monday alone, reports from 14 districts put the diarrhoea figure at 800 and for Dhaka itself at 200. Since the floods began a month ago, the total number of diarrhoea afflicted people has risen to 9,553 in Dhaka and 25,784 for the rest of the country.

The authorities who have despatched 771 medical teams to the affected areas are saying that the situation is under control. But obviously there is so much more to be done. Oral saline and water purifying tablets are crucial. Dengue and to some extent jaundice have added to the over-all challenge.

It is time the government's disaster relief strategy gets into full play. Simultaneously, volunteer groups must be organised at the community level to lend a hand to relief operations.

Cricket at a crossroads

It's time for introspection

WHATEVER illusions we had had about our worth as a cricketing nation came in for a harsh reality check at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground in Colombo last Monday. Our cricketers crashed to the most humiliating defeat in the country's 52-match one-day cricket history and took down with them the popular perception that Bangladesh is better in the abridged version of the game. The cricket pundits, and also the Bangladesh Cricket Board officials, would surely be hard pressed to come up with a plausible explanation for our dismal performance on the tour of Sri Lanka. When Khaled Mashud and the boys surrendered meekly to a second-string Sri Lankan side inside four days of the second Test for our 12th defeat in 13 matches, they argued that our players were too much one-day cricket-oriented. There had to be attitudinal and temperamental transformation, if our cricketers were to do well in Test cricket, they would argue. So much for our limited-overs mindset!

Let us for once face the fact: we are miserable as a cricketing team. The tour of Sri Lanka, which concludes today with an inconsequential final match of the one-day series, has proved that once again. We have done little justice to our status as a Test-playing nation with a series of shameful defeats in the hands of India, Zimbabwe, New Zealand, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. There is not any reason for us to even hope that we may fare better against other members of the game's ivy league. That cricket is a glorious game of uncertainties has even lost its axiomatic significance in the face of our consistent downslide. It is not a question of technical flaws or temperamental inadequacy, our cricket, as it is being played now, falls way short of international standard. We are in a cricketing outback, the officials, the pundits and the players admit it or not.

Therefore, we need to think beyond such cosmetic changes as hopping from one coach to another. The problem lies deeper. The cricketing infrastructure must undergo a metamorphosis. We don't have that many quality players in our fold. So, instead of shuffling the deck, we better concentrate on producing quality cricketers. For that, we need to take our talent hunting and honing programmes to the grassroots. Our hopes rest there.

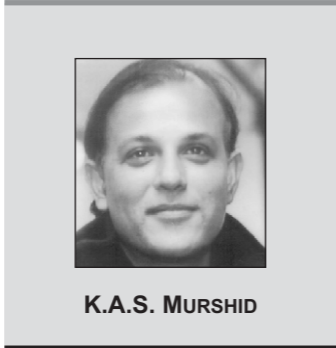
OMAR KHASRU

Haji Selim, old Dhaka Awami League former MP termed Aedis mosquitoes, carriers of Dengue fever, 'Hanif mosquitoes,' named after the former Mayor, who did precious little to control the outbreak of the dreaded disease except talk imperially and fancifully. He only offered clumsy, shoddy and token measures against Aedis reproduction. The activities of the present government and the current Mayor have been even less, verging on total inaction. In a civilised country and matured democracy, people responsible for this negligence, callous disregard and irresponsible behaviour would have been given the heave ho. But this is Bangladesh where anything

goes in seedy and unsavoury reckless attitude and action, or, in this case lack of it.

The Prime Minister, in her regal aloofness and 'let them eat cake' insouciance tries to stay above the fray with a smiling face. The Mayor speaks soothingly, reassuringly and gives the impression that things will be accomplished without plan or preparation with a magic wand, but does nothing tangible, substantive or meaningful. It is all smoke and mirror without any effective measures. He once said there would be no road digging during the rainy season. Soon thereafter full fledged and zealous digging started on Indira Road and Manik Mia Avenue, among other important and busy thoroughfares. He talks the talk but so far has displayed no inclination to

Mobility



K.A.S. MURSHID

THE word mobility has numerous meanings. I will, however, confine my discussion to just one dimension of the term, namely physical mobility, as opposed to say, social mobility. I suspect most Dhakaites will have noticed the somewhat uncomfortable rides that we are forced to take, irrespective of the mode of transport used. Indeed Dhaka roads everywhere, from Lalbagh to Badda and from Dholaikhal to Gulshan look more like the surface of the moon than that of a road. It therefore must be a blessing for the city fathers that some at least are no longer visible as more and more roads become inundated. And of course the floods are just what the doctor ordered as now we can blame everything on them -- the miserable roads, the piled up garbage, the traffic congestion, and so on. For road users, at least some will presumably have a less bumpy ride to contend with now

that they will have to use boats instead of rickshaws!

I don't know if anyone has tried to figure out the time and money wasted as a result of poor road conditions? OK let's assume most of us have little value for our time -- after all as Bengalis we are entitled to turn up late or even not at all, turn up without warning or even conveniently forget that we had an appointment altogether (with a subordinate of course). That still

time) will be higher than investment costs. More often than not most feasibility studies on roads, not surprisingly, find most projects feasible. There is a small catch somewhere. If I am not grossly mistaken, the life of a project is assumed to be 20 years for purposes of benefit-cost computations. Actual road-life in Bangladesh/ Dhaka city however, seems more like a year or two, at most. We can safely assume that something like

wistfully better hope that they are going to come out with an amphibious model fairly soon. In the meantime do continue with your bumpy ways.

I have been deeply thinking about another aspect of mobility that, to my admittedly superficial knowledge, has not received any attention. This has to do with mobile and relatively less mobile cultures. Anyone who has visited SE Asia will immediately know what I am talking

about -- resulting in a hugely mobile and independent-minded population. One had read about the hordes of Genghis Khan who it seemed remained permanently on horseback from birth to death. Modern-day SE Asians are truly their spiritual descendants. Thus for example, you would be hard put to find even one Khmer or Vietnamese older than 10 or 12 who does not know how to manoeuvre a motorbike. Contrast this with the mentality

doesn't worry about transport -- everyone manages on his or her own. In Bangladesh, no one manages: you were late for work because the office transport arrived late or broke down. Your son missed his classes because the driver overslept and then called to say he had dengue fever, and so on. In SE Asia, this type of *transactions costs* are small as everyone, even a poor farmer, will have at least a rickety old bike to ride to town on. And it is NOT a question of resources but one of attitude and for want of a better word, culture. Our middle-class culture demands that you own/ride on a 'carriage' drawn by somebody else. Anything less is an affront to an overdeveloped sense of prestige -- the sort that leads to acid being thrown on a young lady who resists the advances of the local hero. In SE Asia it would be slightly more difficult to aim acid at the young lady -- as more likely than not, she would be moving quite rapidly on her motorbike! Unfortunately though, mobility does involve a price -- potentially, a rather heavy price: Good roads make it easier for HIV/AIDS to spread quickly, especially when there is inadequate awareness among the people. On reflection, perhaps the sorry state of our roads isn't such a bad thing after all. It may well be a secret, anti-AIDS weapon that has been deployed by a deeply worried government.

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National affront

SYED BADRUL HAQUE

ANOTHER day, and probably another display of murder, gangsterism, killing, mugging, vandalism, kidnapping, extortion, sexual assaults looms in metropolitan cities and rural areas across the country. The basic rights of citizens to a peaceful and unmolested existence are taking the worst battering without a respite. The print and electronic media carry chilling stories and pictures of victims and their wailing near and dear ones almost in a routine manner. One wonders if we are already left with no tears to spare for the victims. At the end of the day, the civil society comes out loser in its day-to-day confrontation with the offenders; it sets in train a destabilising process in our social psyche with far-reaching effect. What is worse, such an atmosphere saps the social confidence and dissipates energy.

It is commonly held that the explosion of criminality/terrorism that we witness today in our society is inextricably linked to poverty or social deprivation. But, much to our amazement, it is not infrequently that the people involved are not easily identifiable underclass at all; they are often people with resources as not to necessarily impel them to venture into crime adventurism. So the old, comforting alibi that it is all due to social deprivation such as poverty, poor housing, unemployment, illiteracy does not explain the phenomenon in a blanket fashion. It has a dimensional stretch much beyond notional social parameters. Growing imbalance in our social

development aside, it arises out of some even more uncomfortable and unpalatable development in our culture. Add to this the vastly increased public recognition of the shabbiness of public life -- including the frailties of policing ethics -- and you get a potent recipe for cynicism, alienation and despair.

Presently law and order is at the nadir in governance. Yet it is something that has to be aggressively protected by the police on behalf of the polity. The key to any success the police may have is public support and trust. Unfortunately much

contributing to the country by draining off eleven thousand crore taka per year, and by their assessment we occupy the number one position as the most corrupt country in the world in 2001 having been pushed up from the previous fourth position. Whichever band of politicians come to power, criminality is not to ebb till the society reaches an equilibrium of sorts. If the police is to deliver, it is urgent that the issues inhibiting their performance should be addressed in right earnest.

As is evident, the ruling party or parties remain so engrossed in their

to process arrests, give evidence, police sports, and for many other duties beyond their normal call. If we are to defeat the anti-social behaviour that blights lives, we need a new, extra tier of patrolling uniformed staff who will not be called away. Should the police is to deliver, the service needs to be reformed and the signs are everywhere. We must not deflect from the fact that the police as the vital law-enforcing agency deservedly claim a high destiny. Efficient management of staff, sensible use of police time, elimination of corrupt practices and

tude of the threat posed by criminals to destabilise our society. Sporadic coverage could lead to a public perception that criminality is not likely to be a serious or lasting problem and therefore little needs to be done on a regular basis to combat it. Without broad public support, the police, in all likelihood, may not measure well with the job they undertake on behalf of the polity. Media reporters may dig out information that could prove critically important to the police in its campaign to bring the offenders to

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of it has eroded for very obvious reasons. Corruption cases reported do not help its image. In public perception its image is tainted with commerce and stock is very low as a result. Its moral degeneracy is highly reprehensible and a national concern no doubt. But to get it into perspective, it has to be viewed through the prism of the society, and not in isolation, for police are an integral part of the society which embraces us all. Corruption has admittedly become a way of life in our society and anyone with a stake in the economy is a part of it. There is already a public outrage at the scale of corruption and, to note, Transparency International informs us that the ministry-high officials are

political agenda that vital issues stalking the nation often go sabbatical. Politicisation in police remains a sore point so also the interference from above. Serving as a police officer is difficult and dangerous. They put their lives at grave risk when they chase the well-heeled criminals and terrorists with firearms of olden days. It pains one to see the police on traffic duty inhaling poisonous fumes emanating from motor vehicles. Pressure on the police grows, which means their adopting more intelligence-led methods. With increasing insecurity, people want to see the visible presence of authority more and more in public spaces. Yet, the limited policemen are regularly called away

the spreading of best practices are essential. They will continue to attract the best only if they reflect the society in which they operate. Regrettably the pay-scale of the police is too low and deserves to be raised proportionate to the service the society expects from them. A reforms commission to reorganise the police administration will be much in order.

Media has an important role to play in combating criminality in the society and should be seen as likely allies who can significantly contribute towards elimination of crime in the society. It is essential that media should give ample coverage to generating awareness of the magni-

justice and even isolate them from society.

Some terrorist groups with political tags like say Sarbahara Party, operate mainly in the southern parts of the country. Lumped together these terrorist groups masquerading as left political parties are woven into one purposive skein. They go for merciless killing of innocent people and looting their properties. There will be no chance to defend oneself, no warning and there is no reprieve. Thanks to the efficient handling of the law-enforcers that terrorism has largely been marginalised. By pointing out society's abhorrence of terrorism, the media

can become important force in the battle against it. If a relationship of mutual confidence and cooperation exist between the law enforcing agency and media, working on counter-terrorism will be a lot easier. Seminars and conferences that bring together those in the establishment and the media could be organised to help create a better understanding of the other's concerns which, in turn, should help promote responsible journalism in the coverage of terrorism.

By all appearance, the law and order situation has reached a crisis proportion when no cosmetic measure will do. A well-crafted strategy with a vision is needed to rein in the offenders. Contrary to our blame-culture, the situation has to be faced nationally across the political divide if the operations are to have a lasting impact. The ruling party, BNP, may consider to hold a national convention with the mainstream political parties to deliberate on the issue. If it can be materialised it certainly would be a watershed event in our suspicion-laden political culture. Administration should also prove that government is not unavoidably corrupt and that bureaucracy is not necessarily ineffective. Elected on the law and order and anti-corruption platform, these issues are unduckable anymore, for BNP.

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Democracy, governance and human development

HABIBUL H. KHONDKER

THE relationship between democracy and development is not always very clear. Over the years international organisations have become quite sophisticated in presenting development profile of countries by considering a basket of indicators unlike in the past when they only looked at the per capita income. They also now include political factors in their basket of data. The recently published UNDP report on Human Development for 2002 focuses on the issue of democracy and its spread and depth. The report notes that of the 200 odd countries in the world, multiparty elections take place in 140 nations of which 82 are truly democratic. Holding elections in itself is not a true indicator of democracy.

Countries enjoying political freedom in South and Southeast Asia are not necessarily doing better in terms of human development profile. Here I look at the 10 countries that make up ASEAN or Association of South East Asian Nations and include the big three South Asian countries, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh for my discussion.

I present the information drawn from the Freedom House ranking of countries according to political freedom. In this ranking, countries are ranked not just in terms of whether they are democracies or not but in terms of their degrees of freedom. Some of the economically successful countries such as Singapore and Malaysia are ranked as partly free, whereas some of the poorer countries such as the Philippines and India are

tries score higher points. Singapore and Malaysia are ranked 25 and 59 respectively compared to Indonesia and Bangladesh which are ranked 110 and 145 respectively. In the Human Development Index composed by UNDP, Norway ranks no. 1 against USA's no. 6. The lowest rank of 173 goes to Sierra Leone.

Polity score refers to the quality of the political system with a range between -10 which is least democratic to 10, which is most demo-

cratic. Both India and Thailand ranked 9 which is close to the maximum, while Myanmar and Vietnam received -7 which is close to the lowest point of -10. Press freedom has three categories. Most free countries are given the rank between 0-30. Partly free countries are given the range between 31-60. Not free is 61-100. Here again, Thailand (29) and the Philippines (30) received decent scores compared to

Myanmar's 100. Here, Bangladesh is judged unfairly. It is hard to imagine that democratic Bangladesh enjoys less freedom of press than military-ruled Pakistan.

Voice and accountability (V&A), Political Stability and Lack of Violence (PS & LV), Rule of Law and Government Effectiveness (GE) are composites of indicators drawn from World Bank Governance Indicators Dataset. Here the range of scores is

between a low of -2.5 to a high of 2.5. Higher the score is better. Not surprisingly, Singapore scored high on rule of law scoring 1.85 out of a maximum of 2.5. Bangladesh and Pakistan scored -0.76 and -0.74 respectively. On government effectiveness again Singapore scored very high; 2.16 out of a maximum of 2.5. Bangladesh was quite low on government effectiveness scoring a paltry -0.54 while the lowest score

went to Myanmar, -1.25. On law and order the range of score is between 0-6. Not surprisingly Bangladesh and Indonesia scored a lowly 2, while both Singapore and Brunei were given the highest score of 6.

Finally, on CPI or corruption perception index, the range is between 0 to 10. The more points one scores is better. Singapore scored 9.2 -- not a surprise. Bangladesh is again at the bottom scoring

against corruption (USA provides more recent and fresh evidence) nor against inadequate human development. However, this does not mean that the opposite of this statement is true, i.e., undemocratic regimes are better able to promote human development and ensure reduction of corruption. Take a closer look at the profile of Myanmar. Absence of democracy in Myanmar goes hand in hand with high corruption as well as all other indicators of bad governance. The lesson is: democracy is a prized possession but in itself it may not be enough to ensure human development. More work is needed to improve the quality of governance and for fighting corruption. Maintenance of law and order and rule of law are the pathways to good governance. To quote, Kofi Annan, "Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development".

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OPINION

Dengue epidemic and bizarre government priority

walk the walk or take a smidgen of useful action. The current crop of perilous mosquito population may appropriately be termed as 'Khoka mosquitoes.' He and the City Council have done more for flourishing of

not clear who they are issuing the directive to, other than a vain attempt to calm an agitated public mood. Unless this stern formal directive has been conveyed to the booming Aedis mosquitoes via high-

unrealistic pipe dream, seem totally oblivious of the fact that half the children in the country suffer from malnutrition, the government is unable to provide basic amenities such as pure water, electricity, gas

palace projects will likely have a high degree of foreign involvement in terms of technical assistance, high-priced consultants, financial support and, let's face it, ample opportunity to fulfil 'get rich quick'

The shortage of insecticide and lack of preparation and readiness, even with prior knowledge, smack of neglect and inattention of incredible proportion. The policy makers, grandiose project fantasists, power brokers and concerned authorities seem to be mired in a prolonged deep Rip Van Winkle slumber or like emblematic Nero clones, they fiddle as the country smolders.

these pests than they have for the comfort, safety and security of the city dwellers.

The Health Ministry and the exalted Minister have issued directive to take appropriate actions against spread of Dengue fever. It is

tech high frequency sonar waves, this is total drivel of a pompous and hollow executive order. Speaking of high tech, Communications Minister gleefully announced latest, super speedy Bullet train and Monorail. He and the ruling party, indulging in

and primary education, and his Ministry has failed miserably to remove aged, pollution spewing and poison emitting vehicles and smoke billowing old buses and trucks. The pricy, grandiose, out of place and out of sync white elephant, ivory

schemes. A metaphorical analogue 19th century bullock cart driven backward society indulged in unreasonable and unrealistic fantasy, day dreaming and wishful thinking supersonic rocket driven pie in the sky digital projects is a cruel hoax,

practical prank and a con trick, in addition to unnecessary waste of time, money and effort. They are living in a fantasy, futuristic, far-fetched sci-fi world, bereft of a reality check. Grandiosity, smug and sanctimonious behaviour and untenable, unattainable wasteful, extravagant fancy plans and tall talk should have a limit!

In the meantime Aedis mosquitoes multiply merrily and spread the virulent disease unabated without hindrance or control. The Daily Star reported in the front page on August 5, 2002 that Dhaka City Corporation is unable to mount a significant drive to check the growth of Aedis mosquitoes because of lack of larvicide. The shortage of insecticide and lack of preparation and readiness, even with prior knowledge, smack of

neglect and inattention of incredible proportion. The policy makers, grandiose project fantasists, power brokers and concerned authorities seem to be mired in a prolonged deep Rip Van Winkle slumber or like emblematic Nero clones, they fiddle as the country smolders. They are living in a fool's paradise, thinking that we have leased the country out to them for five years and they can do whatever they wish without concern for the wellbeing of the people. All authoritarian rulers throughout history have maintained this false notion. They were all sadly mistaken. William F. Buckley said, "The best defense against a usurpatory government is an assertive citizenry." This is more valid in this land than anywhere else and true now as any other time.