

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 waterlogged.

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.

Mobility



K.A.S. MURSHID

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. Any one who has visited SE Asia will immediately know what I am talking

rural – 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

BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

In SE Asia one 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 over-slept and then called to say he had dengue fever, and so 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 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 Dholakhal 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

leaves us with (a) increased fuel cost, (b) increased repair and maintenance costs, and therefore (c) higher fares and prices. And if you decide your time does in fact have some value then 'costs' of bad quality roads rise even higher. How high? Most road improvement projects are required to swear by the amount of money that will be saved, i.e. such projects are (should be?) approved only if it can be demonstrated (at least in principle) that the amount of savings (money and

18 years of road-longevity is habitually (mis) appropriated. In a country famous for *pukur-churi* this slight innovation should surprise no one. Is there any wonder then that our roads are what they are? Perhaps we should just declare these roads' as waterways during the rainy season and as walkways during the rest of the year. With the much-anticipated rise in sea levels the waterways will become permanent in 20 years. Those of you eyeing the newly opened Mercedes workshop

about. In the whole of Indo China (and beyond) the love affair with the motorbike is self-evident. The concept of the good life revolves around ownership of a couple of motorbikes along with a roof over one's head – middle class ambitions that are not that difficult to meet perhaps. You don't have a motorbike? Well, no matter, a bicycle will do for the time being – but an independent transport one must have! And this is true for men, women, boys and girls, urban and

of South Asians, and especially those residing along the Bay of Bengal. Would you like to be caught riding a bike? God forbid. Even a motorbike is beyond the pale, unless of course you already own a car. And to be seen walking along holding an umbrella over my *bhadrolak* head would be the unkindest cut of all.

The question is why this S/SE division? Frankly, I haven't a clue. The consequences, however, are easier to predict. In SE Asia one

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