

Water-logging gets worse

Where is the remedial action?

BOTH vehicular traffic and pedestrian movement have been obstructed in most parts of the city due to water-logging caused by heavy down-pours with the very onset of the monsoon season.

Lives of nearly four lakh people, living in the DND dam areas alone, have been paralysed by incessant rain. Most of the roads and lanes in those places have been flooded and people have virtually been stranded in their homes. The situation has not turned that critical in other areas, but it is clear that water-logging has become a major concern for the city dwellers. In the first place, traffic congestion, a perennial problem in the city, is further aggravated. The man hours lost on the road constitute a national loss. Furthermore, the already potholed roads are being damaged by stationary water, let alone the vehicles wading heavily through them. And the least said about health hazards the better.

Now, it is imperative that the reasons behind such constant water-logging are recognised and remedies found by the city engineering authorities. Digging of roads, an almost round-the-year phenomenon, contributes to water-logging, particularly because the ruptured roads are almost never put back to their original position. Then we have witnessed a lot of activities like construction and demolition of road dividers. Only experts can say how much these changes have had a bearing on water-logging, but there is no doubt that the situation is worsening day by day.

WASA, which is in charge of drainage in the city, does not have the necessary infrastructure to handle the heavy load of wastes and rainwater. Nearly one-third of the city is yet to be brought within WASA's drainage system.

The overriding aggravating factor, however, has been lack of coordination between the agencies involved in city management, urban development and service delivery. They seem to work independently without paying any attention to each other's needs and concerns.

It is time the problem of water-logging received due attention. A study should be conducted, preferably by a composite committee of experts, to assess the situation as a whole so as to tackle it head-on. Surely we don't want the city to be nicknamed 'something of a cesspool'.

Rohingya issue snowballing?

We need to take it up with Myanmar govt

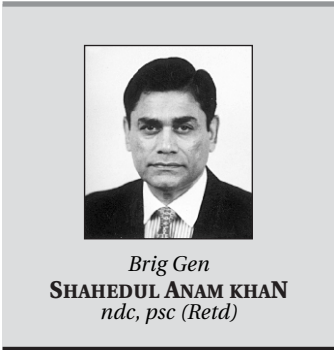
AN on-the-spot investigation by our roving correspondent in Cox's Bazar has led to some startling revelations. In terms of a statistical understanding of the Rohingya presence in our country we were living in a make-believe world -- that seems to be the eye-opening moral of the story scooped by our reporter. We were under the impression that all but nearly 20,000 Rohingya refugees have already been repatriated to Myanmar. As many as 2,50,877 refugees had trekked into Bangladesh 13 years ago fleeing persecution on the other side of the border.

The repatriation exercise was hailed as an international success because of the sheer magnitude of the humanitarian task involved. The UNHCR and Bangladesh government could congratulate each other on the positive outcome of negotiations with the Myanmar government. So far so good.

Now, with the foot-dragging on the issue of further repatriation involving 19,841 Rohingya refugees, their number perhaps exceeding the benchmark due to new births, we have an upshot which seems like almost a replay of the humanitarian concerns that had visited us a decade or so ago. By unofficial accounts, there has been a sizeable illegal immigration from the Myanmar side of the Rohingyas into our territory. So, the number of refugees sheltering in Bangladesh is said to be much higher than the 20,000 mark. We would like to have an official statement putting the whole issue in perspective.

Needless to say, there is a strong ground to carry out a census of the Rohingyas in our country and bring it up before the UNHCR on the one hand for humanitarian assistance and engage the attention of the Myanmar government on the other so that the exodus is stopped.

Hotline: Not a moment too soon, but more fail-safe measures needed



THE decision of the two South Asian nuclear powers to establish a hotline to offset the possibilities of a nuclear confrontation, has come not a moment too soon. Given the fragile nature of the relationship between India and Pakistan, the necessity of a nuclear fail-safe arrangement was felt by all, particularly the non-nuclear weapon states of South Asia (NNWS), described by many as a region with a very short nuclear fuse.

The two countries have also committed not to conduct further nuclear tests, "unless, in exercise of national sovereignty, it decides that extraordinary events have jeopardised its supreme interests."

These are positive attitudes, a departure from the rather hawkish dispositions displayed following the nuclear tests of 1998, as well as during the period of deployment of Indian troops along the LOC in 1992.

But the recent agreement answers only partially the concerns of the neighbours of an accidental nuclear conflagration. One, however, hopes that this is merely the

beginning of a more constructive dialogue towards de-weaponisation.

Without sounding cynical, it could be said that this region is more vulnerable, with a high degree of probability of a nuclear exchange, because of the fact that we have two nuclear states with shared borders, a long history of animosity, and unresolved issues that have proved intractable over the last fifty-five years.

NNWS, which reflect the unease brought about by the proximity factor, are justified.

However, the West had appeared more worried about Pakistan's prospects for acquiring nuclear weapons. It being a country under military dictatorship, the prospects of it using nuclear weapon were reasonably more, according to their logic. While the concerns about Pakistan were valid, the reason was unconvinc-

India's motivations for going nuclear are quite different from that of Pakistan, whose motivations remain entirely Indo-centric, designed to offset the asymmetry in conventional forces and weaponry. The statement by Pakistan's Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar at Lahore, on February 25, 2000, amplifies this immensely: "Acquisition of nuclear capability by Pakistan has proved a positive factor for peace. Scholarly studies perceive nuclear deterrence at

Deterrence also entails attaining a second strike capability that should not only be flexible enough to withstand the enemy's first strike, but should also be able to take out the enemy's second strike capacity as well. This automatically requires perfecting the delivery "triad" to ensure flexibility and survivability of the weapon systems. Thus, nuclearisation itself is a recipe for nuclear proliferation.

The acquisition of the Sagarika nuclear submarine, indicates

the wake of nuclearisation of the two countries.

So much has been the strategic disadvantage of India in the whole equation that it has been forced to come up with a new strategy to circumvent the situation, which is called "cold start" strategy. This envisages a shorter build-up time prior to any offensive, as well as plans to commit Pakistan's front line and strategic reserves simultaneously, and in a manner that would pre-empt a nuclear response from Pakistan.

All these hazardous prospects beg for more fail-safe measures beyond a hotline.

Reportedly, there were more than a dozen fail-safe arrangements in place between the two superpowers at the height of the Cold War, yet the two came to the brink of nuclear confrontation accidentally many times.

The advantages of a large physical standoff distance and the absence of a common border between the two superpowers which were warranties against an accidental actuation are absent in the case of the two South Asian neighbours.

Thus the urgency of a range of fail-safe measures. The stakes are very high since it involves the entire region. As the saying goes, a nuclear cloud knows no frontier -- it drifts with the wind. It would do us all well if India and Pakistan were to heed the sagacious warning.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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ing. One cannot see a correlation between the type of government and the propensity to use nuclear weapons. It is well to remember that the only country to have used nuclear weapons also happened, at the time, to be the largest democracy in the world.

We are not, however, concerned about the nature of governments that possess nuclear weapons, but about the compulsions and pressures that might motivate them to exercise the nuclear option.

Although not used so far, the chances of their use, even accidentally, cannot be ruled out. That is why we consider that the recent arrangement does not go quite far enough as it does nothing to prevent an accidental nuclear outbreak.

work in 1986 when India massed a quarter million troops close to our border on the pretext of a military exercise. The nuclear capability prevented war in 1990 and again in 1999." This understanding in itself is self-fulfilling -- giving rise to the vicious cycle of proliferation, both nuclear and conventional.

The dynamics of deterrence and proliferation are unique and are inter-linked. First, nuclear weapons by themselves do not prevent proliferation of conventional weapons. Deterrence on the other hand gives snowballing effect to proliferation, particularly nuclear proliferation. That is so because deterrence, to be effective, should not only be seen to exist, its potency must also be clear to the potential adversary.

India's attempt to complete the third arm of the "triad," and its enhancement of the delivery range of its Agni missiles, and the Ghauri tests by Pakistan, also lend credibility to this argument. The size of India's defense budget, of around 14 per cent since 1999, while Pakistan's expenditure of 5.3 per cent of its GDP on defense, are corollary consequences of proliferation.

On the other hand, the recent proliferation in conventional weapons disproves the typical argument that nuclear weapons, as a deterrent, cost the state less in the long run since they preclude the need for conventional weapons.

That possession of nuclear weapons also does not prevent conventional conflict is borne out by the Kargil war that followed in

OPINION

Falling asleep at the wheel

MIR SHAFI

I am an industrial products buyer from New York, who recently contacted the Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh (EPB), requesting their help in finding some manufacturers of certain products in Bangladesh. After calling the EPB main hotline, I was referred to a certain Mr. A at their Trade Information Centre. I called Mr. A, who acknowledged that he would certainly be able to help me source suppliers in Bangladesh for the products I mentioned to him.

He requested that I send him an email with the requests to him, which I did on the same day. He "offered" to respond to me within 24 hours of receiving my email. At that point, I was quite impressed with his enthusiasm and assurance. I contacted him on May 31, and waited for his reply. Since that point, I have called him three times and sent him numerous emails (please review the emails in sequential order), to which I received no response.

This is June 20 and I have yet to receive a response from the official at EPB. He is a gatekeeper in Bangladesh's export market and a representative of Bangladesh's commitment to foreign buyers. He obviously failed at his responsibilities. If the main gatekeeper in Bangladesh's trade information centre is this indifferent, how can Bangladesh ever succeed in keeping the interest of foreign buyers?

On the other hand, when I contacted Malaysia's External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) on June 11, inquiring about the same products, I was very professionally and efficiently given the information I needed the very same day. I didn't even need to send an email and wait for a

response (although I am sure they would have responded the same day if I had contacted them by email).

I received the same co-operation when I contacted Thailand's Department of Export Promotion (DEP), who referred me to their Chicago, USA trade centre office. Upon contacting them on June 14, I received a call back from one of their officials the very same day, with names and addresses of manufacturers they recommended.

This is what trade is in the real world. Bangladesh's government officials fail to deliver on their responsibilities that costs the entrepreneurs in Bangladesh in a big way. I may have the patience to go the extra mile and search without the EPB's help in Bangladesh for sources, however, very few foreign buyers ever will take a second look after EPB's failure.

Here is my correspondence with Mr. A:

Dear Mr. A,

Thank you for taking my call yesterday and assuring me of your support and help in my search for suppliers of certain products I am looking for from Bangladesh.

I am a Bangladeshi expatriate living in the U.S. and formerly a buyer for a large electrical devices manufacturing firm based out of Houston, Texas. I am currently in the process of facilitating the outsourcing of some products from Asia for some of the vendor contacts in the New York region. I have picked a few item categories that I think may be potentially sourced from Bangladesh. As I explained over the phone yesterday, I would appreciate all the information you could provide me with to help me find the right manu-

facturers in Bangladesh for the products I am looking for. I have listed the products below:

1) **Paint accessories** -- Paint rollers and brushes (bristle, foam, towel, etc). I am looking for quality manufacturers of these products in Bangladesh who have good financials and facilities. This is the most important category that I am looking for at this time. I need contact information for 1 or 2 top companies in this field.

2) **Copper and music wire** -- for spring and wire manufacturing. Need the names of some top manufacturers who have experience in manufacturing quality spring products from music wire and copper wire (at the very least, a company who produces quality music wire that could be used for spring manufacturing).

3) **Turning tools and parts**. I believe the Machine Tools Manufacturing plant in Bangladesh is capable of manufacturing these types of items. Is there a specific contact in that company that I can be put in contact with? If there is an engineer (preferably an English speaker, who can communicate directly with the buyer), please provide his name, email address and office telephone number.

4) **Foam products**. I need suppliers who can produce foam gaskets to be used in electrical devices. Neoprene and sponge rubber are some of the materials used in the gaskets that I am looking for. Most of the foam products that go into electrical devices in North America require certification by UL (Underwriters Laboratories) for fire resistancy. If there are manufacturers in Bangladesh with good laboratory/engineering departments that can work on these issues and understand and work towards meeting UL and other specifications, we can be successful in this

area. There are other plain foam products that we will need, but I am eager to work with a foam producer who has wide capabilities in the foam area and have a sales staff that will be able to communicate effectively with me and an American buyer.

5) **Rubber products**. I need a manufacturer that can produce good quality rubber moulded parts that are highly specific (in terms of dimensions and material composition). If there is any company that can produce their own moulds or have access to companies that can produce and repair their moulds quickly, they will certainly be more qualified to get some of these orders.

6) **Plastic** - I don't have anything specific at the moment in the plastics area, however would appreciate it if you would please forward me the information of one or two top plastics moulding companies in Bangladesh who also make/repair their own moulds. This information will be useful in the near future.

I would appreciate it if your organisation would assist me in getting in touch with suitable manufacturers per your recommendations. I must stress that it will be extremely helpful to be in contact with a qualified engineer or salesperson in these companies who will be able to understand and communicate specific manufacturing and engineering related issues between the buyer and the factory on a regular basis. Also, all of these manufacturers should be willing to mail product samples when needed at their own cost via international courier service at the request of the buyers in the US.

Please provide me with contact information (Company name, address, telephone number, fax number, email, and contact name)

for manufacturers of these types of products. Again, thank you in advance for your help in this matter.

Hoping to hear from you soon.
Best regards,
Mir A. Shafi

3/6/04

Mr. A,
I am writing to confirm whether you have received the email I sent to you a couple of days ago regarding my product inquiries. Could you please write back to me to confirm that you have received my email and are working towards a response? Thank you, and again, I appreciate your work.
Regards,
Mir A. Shafi

7/6/04

Hello, Mr. A. Are you there?
Regards,
Mir A. Shafi

10/6/04

At this point, I finally received an email from Mr. A on 8/6/04, stating that he couldn't find the email I sent him with the original product requests in his email account mailbox. He requested me to re-send it to him. He confirmed that he had seen the original email I sent to him on 5/31, but seemed to have lost it.

8/6/04

Mr. A,
I am re-sending my inquiry requests. I would appreciate a response from you as early as possible as I am scheduled to meet with two buyers this week regarding the paint rollers. I would really like to give them an indication of whether there is a suitable supplier in Bangladesh. At this time, I need information about the paint accessories, foam products and rubber products suppliers the most. I

would appreciate you focusing on these first before moving on to the other requests. Thanks. Please find the details below. [Details as in initial email.]
Best regards,
Mir A. Shafi

8/6/04

Mr. A,
Please confirm that you have received the email I just sent you with the information about the products I am looking for.
Thanks,
Mir A. Shafi

9/6/04

Mr. A, There is one additional item I need. Can you please let me know if there is any company in Bangladesh that can supply urea used in plastics moulding/manufacturing? If so, who? Please advise.

Regards,
Mir A. Shafi

10/6/04

Mr. A,
I really need some information about the paint accessories and foam suppliers. Have you any information yet? Time is of the essence with these buyers and I really need to get back to them. Please advise.

Regards,
Mir A. Shafi

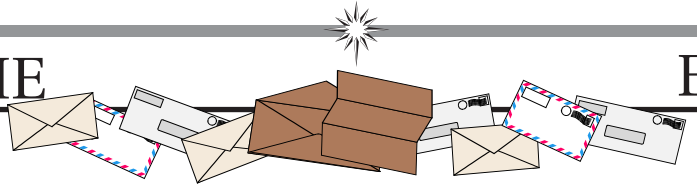
15/6/04

Mr. A,
I have yet to get a response from you about the supplier info. I requested. Are you going to help me or not? Please advise.

Regards,
Mir A. Shafi

I am still waiting to hear back.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Regional catalyst

It is high time for SAARC to click into preparatory mode, after decades of processing for model projects. India should be moving into higher gear after their recent fairy-tale general elections.

With an economic growth rate of eight per cent per annum, (the target being ten), the new Indian regime, led by two economic wizards, have to (indirectly) fulfil expectations of the one and a half billion people living in the SAARC region. Bangladesh also has an experienced finance minister to add to this team effort. Pakistan too, has to pitch in economically, as signs of economic progress impress those citizens of the member states who are not directly interested in politics. With more money in circulation amongst the lower income groups, the politically sensitive issues would automatically take a back seat, for calmer approach to political solutions. Beware of the whisper: keep political issues alive. Is it good politics?

The region is rich, potentially, in multi-purpose ways, and foreign eyes are watching the booty for

exploitation. It looks silly if the lack of political consensus offers *prasad* to foreign *sharis*, to rule and subjugate the hard working people once again.

US imperialism is now showing in naked form, with consultancy services from the abdicators of the former British Empire. The Indian Raj fed and sustained the lords and ladies for two centuries; so why can't a united SAARC sustain the declining industrialised countries? The products and services of the region are for sale -- but freedom is not for sale. History should not be allowed to repeat itself. This challenge is easy to overcome with a united stand.

Abu Abd
Dhaka

Static politics

Like the political experts, we, the common citizens, also think about politics, specially when it remains static, and is not delivering. Good politics should be like the air we breathe (involuntarily) -- doing its job quietly in the background. We cannot work quietly, there is too much drum-beating all the time.

The two-party politics by the two major political parties has bogged us down, and is not taking the country forward at the pace it should; mainly due to stubborn resistance by the opposition (during any regime). The political leaders are incapable of resolving the inner conflicts.

Therefore it is time to think about a third platform, to break the duo-poly. They have nothing new to offer, and should allow others to try out something fresh. Since the game of politics indirectly involves all the citizens, the people's verdict cannot be ignored, regardless of the blind faith on the party leaders. At present the silent majority is being ignored. It is a danger signal.

It is understood that each party has its aims and objectives, which has its own mandate to implement. But the other side of the coin is the style of politicking. This is the problem in Dhaka today.

The other weakness is personality-based politics, which is rather common in the third world nations, due to lack of competition, which is subsequently due to limited opportunity.

Bangladesh enjoys a cultural

homogeneity which is rare in other parts of the world. Still we are stalled, and suffering, with for too much emphasis on marginal issues, like trade marks, symbolism, and styles of play (the core issue was resolved after liberation). This is wasting time, and we are paying dearly for it.

What we see is subjective politics, rather than open, objective political programs. The tendency to butter up is apparent in all leaderships. What has happened to the leadership filters? The followers cannot advice on this point. The top carries too much fluff and garbage, dimming the light from the political lighthouses. The sense of direction in politics is weak, transferring it to the people. A leader who believes in such transfer of burden has to fade out eventually.

The political party workers have to be moulded with the right dies. Here too much autonomy has been bestowed on hot-headed youths, who do not have the right experience and enough maturity. It boomerangs and some signs of it have been indicated in the media reports. Others cannot be disci-

plined without self-discipline, first and foremost. Such issues are not discussed by the leaders, openly.

The leaders depend too much on the followers. Enthusiasm, wrongly directed, could cause havoc and it is doing so for quite sometime. Sycophancy is another metal block, which has to be discouraged firmly. Political chanting is a deadly poison, which hits suddenly and swiftly.

Anyway, our society has able persons who can contribute to political leadership. The stumbling block is monopoly, regardless of ability. The point is how much longer we have to wait.

I had the privilege to teach a

number of English medium students as private tutor and also act as a part-time teacher in one of the famous English medium schools (name withheld not to hamper their flourishing business).

But I found the students divided into two major groups. Some are really good in English (which is supposed to be the main objective for enrolling there) and equally efficient in getting hold of other subjects. I must admit I learnt a lot from them and it was a pleasant experience. Unfortunately I found most of the students fall in the second category -- not good either in English or in Bangla. They are hardly mediocre or even in between.

The students are burdened with lots and lots of homework imposed by the school. The guardians are busy comparing the exam scores of their child and boasting about it. It becomes a matter of prestige and you cannot even imagine how fierce it can turn out.

As a part-time teacher, I had the chance to have a glimpse into a few aspects of the condition inside the school. For reasons not known to me, the authority always prefers

female teachers. I don't want to speak ill of my former colleagues, however I must say when it comes to teaching, a minimum standard should be maintained. The most disturbing fact is the teachers seem more skilled at make-up than teaching. They are taking care of tiny-tots and teaching them wrong pronunciation and wrong interpretation of words. The entrepreneurs of the English medium schools admit within the circle that it's like a business venture now, and like all businesses, the competition is ruthless. When I left that school, a portion of teachers were breaking away to establish a school of their own.

English medium schools are part of our education system. A watchdog to monitor their activities must be formed to increase their efficiency.

Saif
Dhaka

Scandal for Bangladesh

Bangladesh has been pulverised by Turkey in OIC race. Really, it has scandalised the image of our coun-

try. Bangladesh's assiduous lobby proved diplomatically abortive. As a Bangladeshi, I am not shocked at the defeat of our country, but I am optimistic that Bangladesh will take a lesson from this debacle. It augurs well that the OIC is going to be democratised by and by. Mr Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu of Turkey has outsmarted Mr SQ Chowdhury of Bangladesh in the OIC SG election. Bangladesh made a blunder by selecting Mr Chowdhury as its candidate. He is a controversial person in our country. Besides, he has no diplomatic credentials. The government was castigated for its wrong and suicidal decision. But public opinions were shrugged off. Bangladesh would select Mr Reaz Rahman, a seasoned diplomat in this post. Bangladesh has been cheated by many countries in this race. It has spoiled the normal relations with many countries, e.g. Malaysia and Turkey. We are bamboozled at the jejune statement of Mr SQ Chowdhury that the pro-Israeli camp was behind his defeat.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen

Dept o English, DU