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Flood management

Two-thirds of the flood-affected people are poor and have low human development index.

Bangladesh is a major theatre of flood, and its impact is devastating. Social and economic progress achieved over decades of initiatives by the community and the advances in health and other sectors are hopelessly degraded and devastatingly reversed by floods. Despite the recognition of the impact of floods, the country lacks a national disaster management policy. The responses to disasters are often ad-hoc, characterized by a knee-jerk reaction, panic reaction and unprofessional attitudes.

There is a growing concern about the way in which disaster management and rehabilitation programmes are conceived and implemented today. Post disaster rehabilitation programmes should be judged by its contribution to strengthening absorption capacity of communities and by how it contributes to the long-term

developmental needs. While a swift action is a must, especially for the millions threatened by water-borne diseases in a post-flood scenario, or threat of starvation, today, everybody realizes that post-disaster program that does not leave a permanent positive change is not acceptable. Speed should not come in the way of breaking the cycle of destruction and vulnerability.

Sirajul Islam
Shyamoli, Dhaka 1207

Flood disaster in Bangladesh has become a cyclic phenomenon. Though we have flood every year, usually it is minor; managed and contained without a great deal of worry and effort. Every four years or so, it seems to come in the form of a national calamity! Our objective should be the paradigm that people always quote "Prevention is better than cure". However flood prevention is a

big issue, which needs considerable time, resources and really committed effort. China, particularly the communist regime, has transformed the Yangtze River from a "river of sorrow" to a "river of vitality". To do that, however, we need the determination of the Chinese government. Harsh and often cruel measures were adopted in China to get it done; with a lot of suffering and sacrifice from many. It was a cruel way to do it, but it was realistic, and as the saying goes "all is well that ends well".

Living in a democratic society such harsh measures cannot be adopted by us. May be we should go for the TVA model in the US which tamed and transformed the mighty rivers of the central US. They were however lucky to tap on to the boat loads of needy immigrants from China and post USSR revolution poor who migrated en masse to the US during that time.

Relief operation however seems to be gradually improving as we learn from our experience. Foremost however is the political will, for I believe if there is a will there is a way. I can only humbly appeal to our politicians of all shades and doctrines to once come together to face this national calamity with goodwill and unity. I am confident that the whole nation down to every man, woman and child will be behind them and do whatever is needed.

S.A. Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka.

PHOTO: AFP



English medium schools

This letter is in response to all the news that has surfaced in recent times regarding the tuition and annual fees increase in English medium schools. I graduated from one of the respected English medium schools in Dhaka in the early 1990s. Why did I study there? Because it was a good school and I got the opportunity. I did not go there because it was the most expensive school. Although not all the schools and colleges run under the London University are of high standard, there are those few which stand out. Even in our time there was always a rush of prospective students but the authorities of reputable schools could not take everyone due to various constraints. I remember one instant in the principal office when a magazine reporter was asking her to place an advertisement for the school. She refused, since she already had too many applicants without the advertisement. Is this how you behave if money is the only objective?

I agree, the fees are exorbitant, but that is no reason to go to court. Now my anger turns to the so called "Guardian Forum". If they cannot afford it, why are they so eager to have their children enrolled into the best schools? Everybody can't study in the "best environment".

It is the same worldwide, expensive schools are for those who can afford it. Just because the fees are high doesn't give them the right to attack the school authorities. Instead, they could be more constructive in getting proper authorities to improve the quality of education.

And there are other schools which might not have the same kind of reputation, but good students still graduate from there. Why don't they look for those instead of criticising others? Next thing these guardians will want is to have the NSU/UAP/IUB authorities admit their children, whether they are qualified or not. It is not about money, it is the desire to be among the best.

Kazi Parvez Fattah
MASc, UBC

DCC diversions

We went to the health department of the DCC on October 25, 2003 for getting a drainage problem solved. We are now told, after nine long months, to go to another office (Conservancy) of the DCC. If we go to the latter office we may very likely be told, "who the hell you think we are to solve your drainage problem?" Having failed to get any redress for the mosquito infested drainage system, may we try 'To whom it may concern' through your newspaper.

Syed Waliullah
Dhaka

Imams do good things

Last week during the Jumma Prayer, the Imam of our mosque read out two notices. The two notices were from two opposite parties. The ward commissioner sent out one notice urging people to communicate local ward commissioner office for information related to self-assessment of holding tax. The other notice was sent by local citizens' association asking house-owners to join a discussion meeting on the same subject. Our Imam read out the two opposing notices without taking any sides. These days, a lot of people are suspicious about religious people considering them to be fundamentalists. However,

our Imam has shown that they are in fact more tolerant than a lot of people. A couple of weeks back, the same Imam urged the people to plant trees to save our environment. He gave a lot of examples to encourage people to plant trees instead of using all of their lands for commercial usage.

Imams can help us attain social objectives. So, instead of suspecting them we should utilise their knowledge and expertise.

Mohibul
Dhaka

"Shakhi Bazaar: Sustainability in the Cultural Context"

I am pleased to get a response on my above-mentioned article from an informed reader as Mr. Islam (DS: 23.07.04). He is right in noting the Shakhi Bazaar issue as a relevant one. That this issue has been haunting the policy planners for decades is precisely the reason for writing the article, to resituate the issue within the cultural context. My point was, and still is, that culture matters. If someone is yet to be convinced about this view, I believe reading the recent 'Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World' would help. Mr. Islam's key assertion that the way of life and living is more important, and not the buildings (in Shakhi Bazaar), leaves us to think water without its container. Within his preferred premise, that only water matters, we wonder why Old Dhaka people are on the move, away from their habitat? Do they take away their unique way of life and living to New Dhaka, and recreate another old Dhaka? Findings to these questions, I presume, would be quite revealing for Old Dhaka. However, he is wrong in saying that I pointed to late Prof. Nazmul Karim for sustaining Shakhi Bazaar. Please check the original copies. His reference to Mr. Chowdhury's view (DS: 19.07.04) left me with no choices but to reflect on, although I am not quite sure yet whether any specific reference was made to my article. I wonder if Mr. Chowdhury had checked, with his stated academic affiliation (BRAC University), what prevented RAJUK

and DCC from intervening earlier? I have an inherent limitation that I hope Mr. Islam would understand. I cannot propose, let alone endorse, uncritical and patronizing gesture to those who have been in the printed media and research repeatedly for wrong reasons, to say the least.

Dr. Shayer Ghafur, BUET

Gravity of the situation

Our over-enthusiastic politicians have to learn one grave lesson from the recent launch disasters. Keep your center of gravity low for stable equilibrium.

What is this center of gravity? Any college textbook has the definition, but it is the application in daily life which matters. We are weak in applied science in the under-developed countries, as the tugs of the pocket and stomach keep us preoccupied. The concentration is more on the self than on public service. Multiply by several thousand public service providers, and the image that comes clearly is that of Bangladesh.

Our corruption and poverty indexes have crept up a little bit from the bottom layers. Our political social workers are playing naughty with the left-overs. Is this a vague statement? Yes, that is the way the politicians speak. No one believes in micro-sheba to our *chasi bhais*. All are intensly looking for macro-credit of self-achievement.

A. Mahasen, Dhaka

New arsenic theory

The newspapers are agog with the report of a new theory on the cause of presence of arsenic in underground water, which is causing havoc in Bangladesh (and West Bengal) for the last one decade or so. It says (as far as I could grasp as a layman) that some microbes eat the

metal for energy and release the arsenic, which contaminates the underground water (later pumped up through tube wells for drinking).

I was wondering what these microbes were doing fifty, hundred or centuries ago; and why this arsenic menace is localised or confined in the Bengal delta region, and other delta regions in the globe do not report such findings. What is the new catalyst to change the behavior pattern of these 'modern' microbes?

Other popular hypotheses point to the cumulative effect of the downstream Farakka dam in West Bengal, and raising of the river beds and coastal seabed in the Bay of Bengal due to deposit of billions of tons of silt for centuries. The arsenic problem occurred late, or its presence in human bodies was detected late?

The new theory is very interesting for public awareness, as a simple solution is conjectured: bring up the underground water, air it, and expose it to the sun for some time, then filter and drink.

Can the readers have some more information from informed sources?

Alfa Ahmad
Dhaka

Desensitized leaders

Personal clashes distort history. Party loyalty mists the historical mirror. The nasty ego-stretching games in Dhaka tarnishes the image of contemporary political leaders. What is political sincerity, and how is it measured and judged?

The political leaders listen to none, and harass all who criticise or comment. What happens after they are no longer in the scene? Postmortem public judgments are sometimes harsh and cruel, and the situation is aggravated. We like to keep issues pending, as we are ruled by the heart. That is not the way to administer a country. It is the sensitive politicians took rest for a while. They will not agree to it, but cannot avoid it, the way things are getting out of control. The catalytic strike may come from outside, as it usually happens in the new emerging nations in the third world.

How the political leaders learn their lessons, sheathed in rhino skin? They have two types of sensitivities, one based on hypertension, and the other just the opposite, impervious to neutral appeals.

The new edition of the books on the history of liberation war has opened the flood gates to unbridled outside criticism from the right, left and the centre. How long are we going to witness such naked and unashamed politics? Today, it appears, no political deterrent tools are available in Dhaka to tame or untame our misguided politicians, who are hell bent on personal and party agendas. Why the party leaders do not and cannot realise that they are holding millions of citizens hostage to their party fights? They are themselves inviting outside intervention (a common phenomenon in many countries). As a voter, I have a message for the misguided politicians: you take corrective action, or we will.

Abdul Khan
Dhaka

corporate houses to come forward to the rescue of the flood victims of the country.

Waheedul Fazlaman
Intern Corporate Communication & Business Development Department Siemens Bangladesh Limited

people are sinking in floodwater, don't these politicians have some responsibility? Please just keep your eyes open and see the sufferings of the flood hit people. Nayeem Islam,
The Aga Khan School, Uttara, Dhaka

which brings in a lot of foreign currency to its market. It is a media that highlights the social, political and overall condition of society and is also a source of entertainment. By setting satire, irony, farce, humor and so on, it corrects or rectifies social discrepancies.



PHOTO: AFP

Deforestation

Deforestation is a serious threat to our country. Our forests are being annihilated.

Some plunderers cut down trees from the forests disobeying the forest preservation law. Those engaged in these illegal activities are undoubtedly criminals. They never care for human existence or the role deforestation will play in the long run. Our whole ecological system is going to be ruined by deforestation. If this is permitted to continue, then our existence will be threatened and wildlife will decrease rapidly. To prevent deforestation every citizen should plant more and more trees. The forest preservation law should be enforced. Our media can play a vital role in making people aware of the value of the forests.

Md. Zaminur Rahman,
Karatia, Tangail

is trying to build a bridge between the ICT resources capabilities and actual performance. In general, I do not write to job-seekers. Nonetheless, it is imperative to share and bring the actual pains in the forefront so that people like you and so many other talented ones can understand that there is a "major gap" between job-seekers' expectations and employers' expectations.

To tell you honestly, we could use at least 20 skilled ICT professionals. However, it is very uncommon to find one individual who meets the required skill sets or job responsibilities. It is also very rare and difficult to find one individual who wants to learn or take initiative to meet the job requirements.

I have observed that most of you do have the foundation to contribute

job responsibilities, nature of business, technology utilisation, business value, quantifiable and measurable achievements can only help the resume screeners to call you for a face-to-face interview. Above all, you cannot afford to have any mistake or grammatically wrong sentences in the resume.

Do you really know what your strengths and weaknesses are? Do you know what your capabilities and limitations are? One should take each day as a challenge to learn something new.

Vice President
Southtech Limited

Stars disappear

Our film industry has great potential. India has a booming film industry

it creates characters. But it's an irony of fate that the quality of our films is degrading day by day. Renowned directors are leaving the film industry. They are replaced by so-called 'mass directors'. Side by side, the number of talented actors and actresses is going down. Stars like Shabana, Alamgir, Razzak, Faridee, and so on are slowly disappearing or have already disappeared, leaving behind unworthy successors. We have lost another valuable thing along the way, that is, the heart touching old Bengali filmsongs.

The FDC and the government should re-think this matter seriously and save the film industry from total ruination.

Md. Shafique, Sadat
College, Tangail

Sharon, Bush, Blair, each of them a slayer



PHOTO: AFP

The governments of Spain and the Philippines have done the right thing. We appreciate the withdrawal of their troops from Iraq. America, Britain and Australia are blaming them, saying it is giving in to the terrorists and it will further encourage them to kidnap foreigners.

But have the US and the UK forgotten that they have attacked Iraq without UN mandate and on a false pretext? People all over the world protested this action but they did not pay any heed to it, then why do they need any help from the other countries now? These kidnappings would not have happened if Iraq was not invaded unjustly. Then who is to blame for the consequences?

I think it should be put like this "Terrorism by US-UK", not 'war on terror'.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong