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Flooding and government (in)action!

The attitude and conduct of the government regarding the rampant flood has been odd, negligent and extremely baffling. It is not clear why the administration tried to downplay the severity and impact of the massive disaster. Ministers and functionaries made insensitive comments to the effect that news-photos, depicting flood damage, were replicated from a previous flood and the flooding this time around is not as bad as those of 1988 and 1998. It refuses to declare a state of emergency, it balks at seeking foreign assistance, and it rejects the suggestion to deploy army in any significant way. It would almost appear that providing succour, relief and care without outside assistance has become a mantra of vanity and complacency. In the meantime, flood victims are suffering tremendously from lack of dry food, clean water, safe shelter and typical overall mismanagement.

Any government action, or lack of it, is open to sceptical and distrustful interpretation, often with good reasons. While the administration is reluctant to accept immediate disaster relief, it apparently will lobby for and eagerly welcome cash donation for rehabilitation and reconstruction. Some say that the government is less inclined to seek disaster relief because the opportunity of pilfering significant amount of cash is limited. It would rather ask for cash contribution from donors

for reconstruction, where the possibility of pocketing substantial amount of the aid money is endless!

Omar Khasru, One-mail

Right now the country is grappling with an unprecedented calamity. More than 41 districts in this country have been submerged & approximately two crore people are directly affected. They are living in the schools, community centres, even on the highways. I'm appalled, knowing that there is sloth in relief distribution. Reportedly, many countries and agencies like the UK and the IDB have announced a big amount of relief for the flood affected people. I'm happy that this amount will be channelled through UNFPA and UNDP, where there is little scope for corruption. The UN resident mission has formed a draft which will be submitted to the UN, and after that many of our development partners will hopefully provide the necessary funds.

I hope we shall overcome the crisis with sincere efforts.

Anis Rahman

Zahurul Haq Haq, Dhaka University

Monday July 26th a Daily Star journalist reports '... "If you don't bring any relief what use of you then?" a woman grumbles ...' The eternal dilemma of every journalist in a nutshell.

The truth is that you can do

something - maybe it's in the pipeline, we hope so.

Daily we read the reports about people affected by the floods and by the government's continued refusal to declare a state of emergency. We are all agreed it seems, apart from the government, that we are in the middle of a disaster. Would The Daily Star as a leader of journalistic integrity in this country, consider running a headline to this effect?

Maybe The DS can link with other newspapers and run it on the same day -- 'reports prove we are in a state of emergency' or something similar, with a full table of comparisons of this to previous emergency situations. The government perhaps is not privy to the impartial information that independent journalism can supply. If it is shouted from every Bangla and English daily loud and clear, the message may just get through this bizarre charade and make sense to someone with the power to bring relief to this woman who grumbled.

I hear people say the BNP's reluctance is something to do with 'sonman', 'respect' - that somehow they would lose face if an emergency were declared in their tenure; that the AL would somehow 'use it' against them. Are the needy being held hostage to a bunch of fatalistic soothsayers? If so, will the truth carry any weight at all?

A concerned friend

Dhaka

As a nation, we are heading towards a natural calamity. Every day flood water is creeping in like a silent monster across the country. Thousands of people are reeling under flood-water without food, drinking water, medicine. In some far-flung areas the inundation has been more catastrophic than the 1988 deluge. One third of the Dhaka city is bobbing on flood-water which is contaminated as well.

At last, the government seems to have awakened from its slumber to face the alarming situation. Sadly enough, the relief materials are quite meagre to meet the increasing demands. Staggeringly, people in some areas got mock relief of 75 paisa per head and this may be simply due to our bureaucratic tangle and political influence. At a crisis moment like this, we the residents of Dhaka should come forward with an open mind and bring succour to the destitute people. And this is a reminder to our politicians of ruling and opposition parties that it is the time to work hand in hand. No more politics with the miseries of the people.

I urge the government not to drag its foot in calling up the assistance from the army and making sure that the relief goods reach the flood stricken.

Md. Nazrul Islam Sumon

Department of English, University of Dhaka

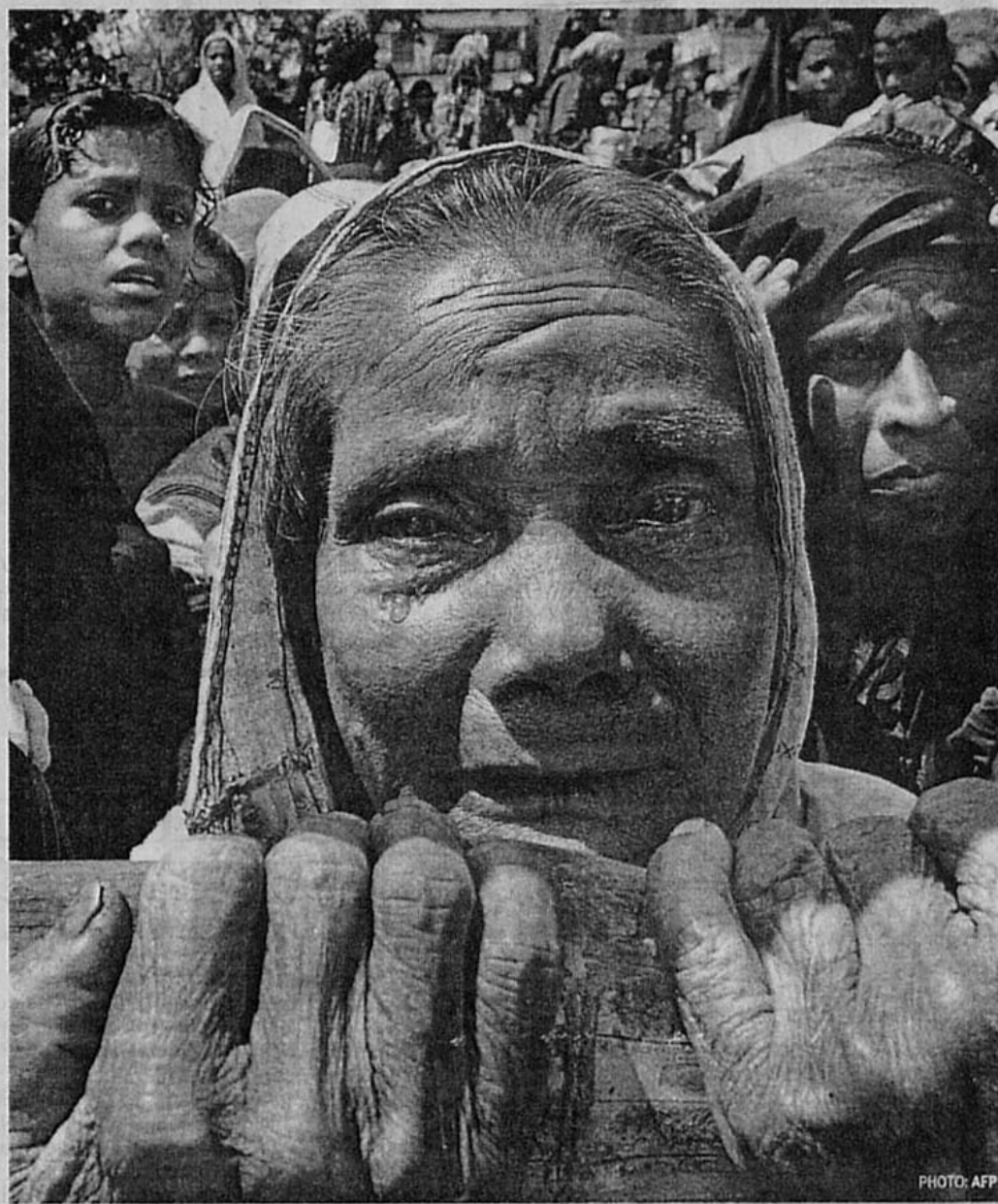


PHOTO: AFP

into the Dhaka city. That decision is good for prevention of flood. But at the same time WASA should install sufficient number of water pumps in all sewerage outlets to force out waste water. As WASA did not perform this required task, which is understandable from the news report, it is going to invite a health disaster for our citizens.

I am strongly condemning WASA for its inability to think right and demanding remedial measures.

Salman, Dhaka

Maritime piracy

While most of us in Bangladesh today are passing through the anguish of a terrible flood, the news of piracy at sea or in territorial waters may not seem to be very significant. But it can have far-reaching effect on our sea-borne trade at any time and more so now for import of essential / relief materials by way of shipping surcharges as well as possible reluctance on the part of international shipping agencies to call at our ports.

BBC (overseas service) in its radio programme on 26 July 2004 quoting IMO (International Maritime Organisation) dwelt on the issue. And Bangladesh, Nigeria, Malacca Strait and the Philippines waters were referred to as the dangerous areas with casualty records including deaths of many seafarers due to piracy.

The issue deserves immediate attention, though there has been no news of deaths of sailors in our territorial waters so far.

Z Rahman, Gulshan, Dhaka

IGP's directive

I am surprised to know that the inspector general of police issued orders to his subordinates not to give interview to the media without permission. Definitely, it will hinder investigation and will only help criminals. One reason behind the directive could be to save the criminals in the ruling party.

I think if junior police officers give interview to the media, it helps to unravel the truth which the present government doesn't like.

I demand withdrawal of the directive.

Dr. Mahboob Hossain
Niigata University of Pharmacy
Niigata, Japan

NTV and a grinning politician

Not a single day goes by without Moshaddek Ali Falu being shown on NTV. According to the order of precedence he comes later than the PM, the president, the leader of the opposition and the fifty some members of the cabinet. Nevertheless, NTV is projecting him as the most jondorodi leader of our times. In fact, the degree of coverage for Mr. Falu on NTV news in the run up to Dhaka 10 by-election was a reminder of the BTV's coverage for Ershad during the eighties. Now, the election being over, NTV is still finding enough reason to show him on a daily basis.

The entertainment programmes of NTV are quite impressive. The picture quality is much better than that of its competitors, Channel I and ATN Bangla. Even the news could be termed as objective and impartial if the Falu factor is not taken into account.

Sadly, our politicians never learn from the mistakes of their predecessors. The Awami League earned only disgust from the people when they made it a habit of conjuring up the name of Bangabandhu on every occasion. Mr. Falu, on his part, should know that he is representing an electorate who are knowledgeable urbanites. Too much of media coverage will only make him unpopular.

Z. Mohammadpur

University teachers

As I have seen in the end of his paper titled 'The sixth National Pay Commission: Some thoughts' which appeared in The Daily Star on 17th July that Mr. Mondal was a former secretary to the Bangladesh government, I must thank him for his kind suggestion regarding appointment of talented students in public services. The current poor salary package, without any doubt, causes not only brain drain but also induces the brilliant students to look for highly paid jobs in other sectors.

Since the above named person has had a long experience in public services, I expected in the article that he would have also put the miserable conditions of the university teachers/professors, some of whom (not me) want to be settled in other countries after getting any scholarship. I don't know what has prevented him from discussing this issue in his article.

Currently, most of the university teachers in Bangladesh are passing through very miserable conditions, except a few professors from selected faculties and departments who are getting part-time lecture/ professorship in private universities. I, therefore, believe that if the education sector is not considered as the thrust sector for overall socio-economic development of our beloved country, then things will never improve.

ASM Sohel Azad
Assistant Professor, Department of Finance, University of Chittagong

Paradox in the land of poverty

In the late 1940s, our English third paper text for matriculation was 'Our India' written by Mino Masani, a renowned Indian economist. An important examination question was explaining the paradox 'poverty in the land of plenty'. In contrast in Bangladesh with pronounced inferior quality of life we face the paradox of the opposite kind. Our society suffers the ills of the lack of reasonable habitation, acceptable standard of drinking water, healthcare and education, to say the least. New additions to the list of woes are unbridled corruption, absence of law and order, deplorable shortage in the sectors of power, transportation and employment. Yet we have 'plenty in this land of poverty'. Volvos, BMWs, make record-breaking sales in Bangladesh. Opu-

lence and wasteful luxury is openly touted; palaces adjoin shanties, and lavish food is destined to the dustbins in all night parties, while beggars plead for a slice of bread.

Our paradox is 'plenty in the land of poverty'. Could someone explain the paradox and suggest a way out of this vortex of misery? But our leaders when in power tell all of us to only harp on the brighter side of things; and refer only to the non-existent silver lining of the looming dark clouds. Do they ponder or care? I wonder.

A confused citizen, Dhaka

Rein in the RAB

The custodial deaths at the hands of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) is another clear proof of this government's lack of ability to run any operation professionally. I read your editorial RAB operations (DS July

23rd) and would recommend the government to pay heed to the suggestions that you have made both for itself and the country.

This government has shown resolve in dealing with the serious issues quite a few times in the past. But its resolve almost in all these cases was not sustained and it has ended making a bigger mess of the issues than when it started dealing with them. We all welcomed the prime minister when she came down so heavily on crime and criminals and brought the army and the para-military to deal with the serious deterioration in law and order.

At the start, she did not spare even the people of her own party when the army and the para-military cracked down on organised crime. In fact, in the initial days of that crack down, the brunt was borne by the criminals supporting the BNP. But then when things were going

fine, the army and the para-military started getting arbitrary and criminals were not just being nabbed; they were dying in custody. When the government needed to rein in the armed forces and the para-military by making them responsible for these deaths, it made the fatal mistake and instead of responsibility, provided them amnesty. The whole initiative of the PM thus fizzled out and the criminals, who were scared out of their wits with the army action, came back with a vengeance and more than made up for what they lost during the brief period the army had them on the run.

Having failed with the army and the para-military for totally inexplicable reasons, the government came up with this idea of the RAB. The public though utterly disappointed by the aborted introduction of the army/para military to deal with the law and order situation, were willing to give this government a second chance with the RAB whose composition they never fully understood but one that they felt had no relation with the police and thus not corrupt and without links to organised crime. The custodial deaths and the style of operation of the RAB now have us thinking differently. The government is not thinking of making the RAB responsible for its arbitrariness either. It seems like another good initiative is going down the drain. Before that happens, we appeal to the government to take these custodial deaths seriously.

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmandi RA, Dhaka

ICT job seekers and professionals

This letter is in response to the letter 'An open letter to ICT job seekers' by the Vice President of Southtech Limited published on 28 July 2004. It was mentioned that ICT job seekers don't have adequate skills to meet the employers' requirements. I agree with the point in general, but there are good ICT professionals in Bangladesh -- I also believe.

If we look into the background of ICT and its profession in Bangladesh, the reason behind not getting adequate skilled professionals will be clear to us. This is an open profession and anyone who understands mathematics, logic and English can do well. In the late 1990s, thousands of university and college educated people from different academic background came (or tried to come) into this profession to survive in the country and some had the goal of going to the US. Besides, many private universities and training institutions have been established so far. A few of these may be good in producing a few good professionals but most of these cannot ensure any kind of standards in terms of quality of education. These are the main reasons of having thousands of ICT professionals without reasonable standard of skills. On the other hand, I believe that there are some excellent ICT professionals around the country -- specially in Dhaka. But have we ever thought about the balance of their skills and remuneration that we can offer? How many of local companies can really afford (or want to afford)

these talented professionals? How many of these companies can really provide all standard benefits for the employees?

Government and corporate sectors can invest in this possible sector which will attract foreign investment and will create more jobs. The final result would be better economy for the country.

Faruk Ahmed, Bangkok, Thailand

About JEC meeting

I want to draw the attention of the government to the fact that whenever we discuss about bilateral trade with India they bring the transshipment and transit issues on the table. From my common sense, I understand that transshipment and transit are issues completely different from trade. Our representative should strongly defend that point and could only agree to discuss such things in

Shocking indeed

As I browsed through your online news edition, pictures of helpless Bengalees affected by the flood caught my eyes. My heart was broken. It's amazing how the poor countrymen are keeping their spirit up as they float to safety in make shift boats.

I know that Bangladesh is poor, perhaps I should say very poor compared to the US, but, nevertheless, I must ask a question to the corrupt politicians on all sides. What are you people doing? What are you doing to help this nation?

I hold the government and the people of Bangladesh responsible. If you vote for uneducated thugs, you will get just the service that you deserve.

Shadabul Mujib
One-mail

whenever she shows sympathy for the people, that's only shedding crocodile's tears?

AF Rahman, Via e-mail

Saudi paradox

Congratulations to Mr. Mohaiemen (DS: 27th July) for an incisive article supported by historical facts and figures. He depicts the unnatural and immoral attitude of the Arabs.

What a sad state of affairs; more so as the Arabs have directly had the wonderful example of Hazrat Mohammad (pbh) who was a beacon of humanity, civilisation and human rights, centuries back. He has demonstrated to Muslims all over the world these noble concepts. Despite prevalence of slavery in those times, he was the greatest exponent of freeing slaves both by words and deeds. By transgressing these noble standards set by Hazrat

AIDS: a looming menace

HIV, Human Immune-deficiency Virus, destroys the immune system of human body. The infected drift into death, posing a looming threat to mankind as a whole.

Bangladesh, geographically, is not out of the danger of an AIDS epidemic, as her contiguous countries have thousands of HIV positive people.

The UNAIDS reveals that India has 3700,000 HIV positive people, Myanmar 530,000, Thailand 755,000, Pakistan 75,000,

Nepal 34,000 and Sri Lanka has 7,500. According to the government of Bangladesh, there are only 188 HIV positive people in the country, but the UNAIDS report says the number is 13,000, and according to WHO it is 21,000.

So we should remain prepared to face the menace.

Nasir Uddin Roney
Dept Of Anthropology
The University Of Chittagong



PHOTO: AFP

the regional, not bilateral context. We should also emphasise that our land is very small, so in case of any future deal we can ask for land compensation of twenty times than used for that purpose as India is at least twenty times larger (I am not sure) than Bangladesh.

Why now?

When Bangladesh is floating on water Sheikh Hasina went on a pleasure trip. (This type of adventure is on her past records as well). Her sudden visit to India is drawing concern and alarm amongst common people. She is showing her concern for lack of adequate supply of food and funds for assistance to flood victims, but she also left them behind in distress.

Should I then conclude that

Mohammad (pbh) the Arabs have demonstrated their uncivilised and bigoted minded trait. They have tarnished the name of Islam which believes in the equality of all people, irrespective of geographic, physical or racial characteristics.

A citizen, One-mail

WASA's decision

I read a report today about sealing the storm sewerage system by WASA to prevent back flow of flood water



PHOTO: RASHID TALUKDER

History rewritten

In a country like Bangladesh, where everything is possible, the declarer of the liberation war has been changed after 32 years of independence. We, the post-war generation, have had the misfortune of not being witness to those great moments. School-level textbooks were the lone primary informers. Unfortunately, present and previous ruling parties believe in correction of history (how it is possible!) as far as proclamation of independence is concerned.

Already the BNP-led government has made changes in the newly reprinted Swadhinata Juddher Dalipatra to serve us the real (!) history.

Can history be modified? Even they had changed the date of declaration. We would like to request those who are playing with the past to refrain from igniting the fire of controversy, and from splitting us.

Please let us know the truth.

Abir Rahman, CSE, DU