

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.

Flooding and government (in)action!

The attitude and conduct of the government regarding the ram-paging 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 Hall,
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

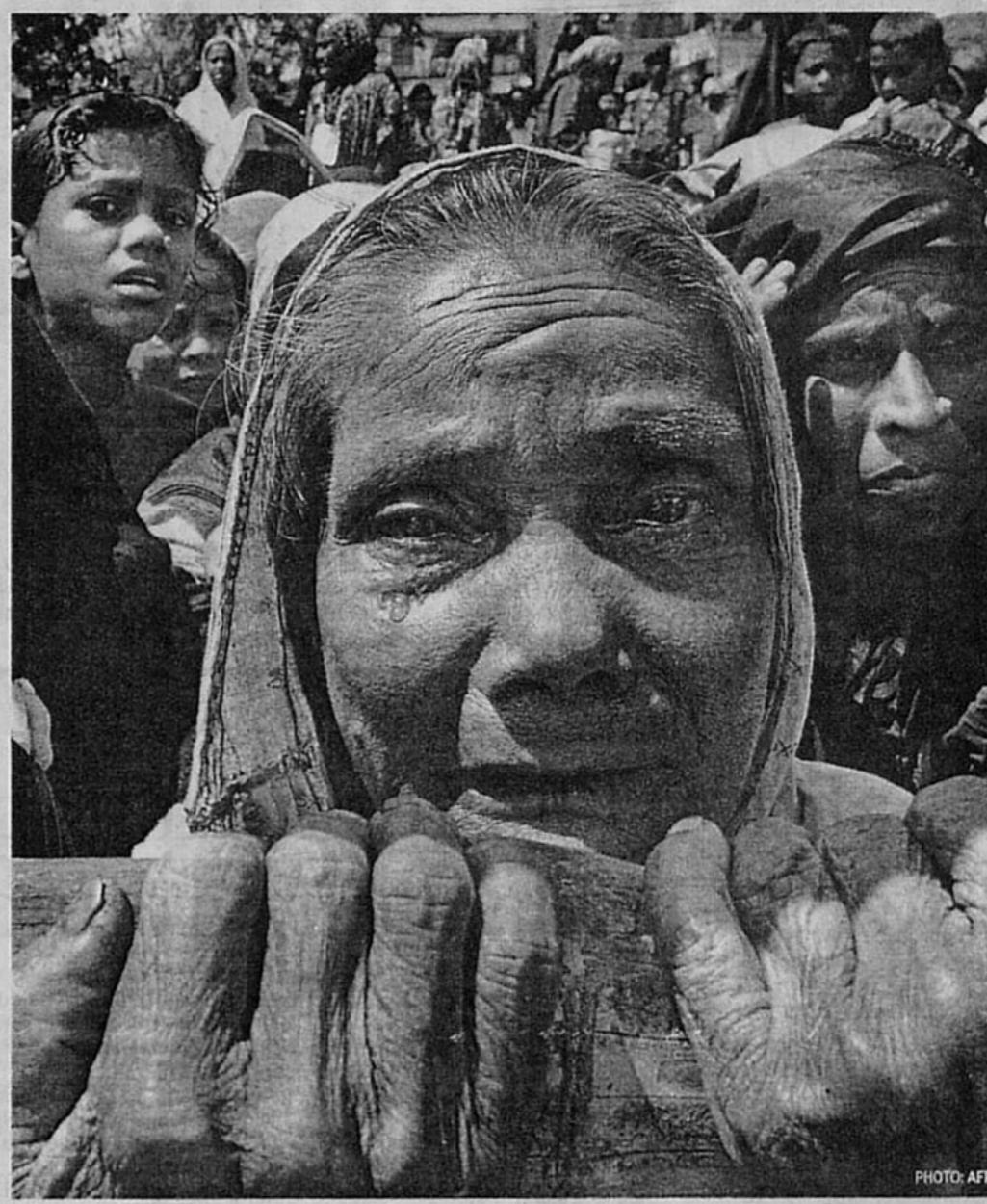


PHOTO: AFP

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.

ZRahman, 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 Mosaddek 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 *jonodordi* 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 1 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 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.

ASMSohel Azad
Assistant Professor, Department of Finance, University of Chittagong

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 transhipment and transit issues on the table.

From my common sense, I understand that transhipment 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. Its 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-mail*

Saudi paradox

Congratulations to Mr. Mohaleem (DS: 27 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 on a daily basis.

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Z, Mohammadpur

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

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.

I hope India will agree and at the same time it will stop manipulating the river water flow that erode our soil on the banks of the rivers in bordering areas.

Salman Safi, *One-mail*

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 as

used for that purpose as India is at

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