

# Management of 1998 flood: An experience to emulate

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airlifted first on priority basis.

## Rehabilitation

THE country has once again been ravaged by a deluge of extraordinary magnitude. Although there are signs of flood water receding now but the fear of another bout of flood looms large in the horizon. The period stretching upto first fortnight of September is fraught with danger. The purpose of this article is to look at the salient features of the management techniques of 1998 flood which was worst in our living memory and secondly, if we can make use of any lessons learnt from that year's experience.

## Flood: 1998

Amid flood situation deteriorating with maddening unpredictability and the weather prophets failing to make any definite prognosis, the first meeting of the National Disaster Management Council (NDMC) was held with the PM in the chair on 16 July, 1998. As more and more areas were engulfed, the marooned people needed food, shelter, medicines, clothes, drinking water and what not? (even dry match box and candle). Cattle were swept away and 53 of country's 64 districts were crying for succour. In retrospect, when the total flood management of 1998 is looked through an analytical prism today, four glowing bands appear prominent. They are: a) Relief operation; b) Post flood rehabilitation programme; c) Resource mobilisation and d) Coordination, supervision and monitoring.

## Relief operation

Identification of genuinely distressed families making food stocks available in local godowns with arrangements for quick replenishments from CSDs/silos, providing medicines, ORS, water purifying tablets and guarding against misappropriation of relief materials were the foremost tasks that had to be addressed with utmost care, firmness and precision. Armed Forces Division (AFD) was integrated in the operation and normal channel of inter-ministerial communication was short-circuited at times to facilitate prompt action. NGOs were persuaded to mobilise their resources to augment government's relief effort. (This year, somehow, NGOs' involvement appears to be less pronounced). Partisan politics took the back seat and the local administration was advised to involve the local people irrespective of their political leanings. Nearly 2800 shelter centers were operating and more than 4000 medical teams worked ceaselessly. The supply of relief materials from friendly countries was so synchronised that life saving drugs and water purifying tablets were

imported first on priority basis.

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**There is a success story of Bangladesh which is worth emulating.**

prompt actions were taken to remove those snags. Almost everyday, the district administrations were contacted over telephone to know the ground realities there. Few examples will elaborate the working mechanism of the cell.

Towards the beginning, there were some reports of pilferage the reason being that the carrying cost had to be met by selling a portion of the foodgrains. When this was brought to the notice of the PM she instantly changed the system and allocated money from her own relief fund to be used as carrying costs. This proved to be an effective deterrent to relief misappropriation. The cell drew up a nationwide scheme to replenish the local food godowns immediately and the food department was asked to

implement and monitor the replenishment process so that at least 15 days' revolving stock was made available at each lowest level godown.

For any impasse, they would contact the cell immediately. Similar mechanism was also drawn for medicine, ORS, water-purifying tablet, C.I. Sheet and sundry others. There were occasions when the cell would ask the local administration to deliver urgent relief materials from government godowns/ storage facilities pending arrival of D.O. The cell would take responsibility for this act of irregularity. The people in the central cell worked with zeal and confidence and did not procrastinate actions for time consuming bureaucratic formalities. It was the immediate intervention by the PMO

that ensured procurement of medicine and water purifying tablets on a priority basis and this move was prompted by news report in media.

The PM would visit flood affected areas almost everyday although some visits had to be cancelled or rescheduled for inclement weather or because of helicopters being unable to land. Her intensive tour gave her clear understanding and first hand impression on the colossus of the flood. She would leave Dhaka in the morning, return in the evening and hold review meetings with various agencies after magreb prayer on the daily situation.

News reports on flood in media were treated with utmost seriousness. The personal staff would scan the newspapers and no news item on

corruption, scarcity of materials or instances of administrative lapses or cases of irresponsibility would go unattended. The man at the job would receive a telephone call from somebody in the PMO for clarification on the report. Not that all newspaper reports were found credible but many reports helped detect snags which prompted timely intervention of the cell that saved the programme.

By August 1998 the full-blown flood was unleashing havoc with severe ferocity. Foreign media reports expressed concern that millions might die of starvation, disease and malnutrition. But the PM in her usual gusto loudly declared that not a single person would be allowed to die on any of these counts.

The government's decision to



The all-engulfing flood of 1998.

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coordination, supervision and monitoring mechanism was brought into operation that kept the juggernaut of disaster management under the grip of the government.

This year quick home work is essential before events slip out of control. Dark cloud looms large and no longer can we afford to sit on the fence knowing well that international agencies, too, suffer from bureaucratic constipation. Water borne diseases are spreading wildly and dengue is a new menace this time. There are reports of shortage of medicines, water purifying tablets and the law and order situation is not a satisfactory level.

While stressing upon the need for an action oriented, down to earth coordination mechanism, it goes without saying that the apex unit should work from a distance and should not get involved in the day to day activities of ministries, agencies or coordination committees at various levels. The central coordination body should be more of a policy formulating body, a hard task master whose foremost responsibility is to ensure accountability at each tier of administration and getting things done by removing bottlenecks. In 1998, it was a national crisis and obviously country's top office had to assume command and responsibility.

Special feeder service of BIWTC berths were commissioned to carry export related goods between Narayanganj/Demra and Chittagong/Mongla ports to meet shipment deadlines. Massive import of foodgrains coupled with fall in export (resulting from flood) brought tremendous pressure on country's FE reserves. Policy options were weighed and decisions taken to meet any eventuality. The relief minister spent days together in the affected areas, the agricultural minister visited rural areas to see for herself the condition of farmers and identify pitfalls in the agri-rehabilitation programme and the finance minister kept liaison with donors and oversaw the working of fiscal and monetary measures. Inflationary effect on food items was marginal. The advisor to PM on agricultural affairs sat regularly with people from SPARSO and allied scientific organisations and scanned the weather satellite data obtained through the courtesy of Japanese GSM satellite and advised the policy planners. The PMO was kept open on Saturdays.

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Now that the country has again been subjected to the scourge of flood, we must be adequately equipped to face the cataclysm. Intelligent people learn from others' experience and we too can draw heavily on the lessons learnt from the experience of 1998 flood. It is no longer treading through an uncharted hostile sea. All the information is available in government offices. Just dig out those files, clean the dusts and see how best we can be benefited from the knowledge and experience buried in the files of that unforgettable year. There is a success story of Bangladesh which is worth emulating.

Ahmed Mahmudur Raza Chowdhury is a former civil servant.

His attitude is understandable and even commendable.

Planning encourages better use of time at all levels. All efforts are targeted on meaningful activities and through integration of work, redundancy and useless wheel spinning are virtually eliminated.

# No Vietcong in Iraq

**The only way out of this global crisis is the United Nations. Defanged by the US and haemorrhaging credibility, this institution still offers the best hope for peace in Iraq. Only a UN-led multinational force can bring stability to the region, replacing the US as the primary player in the region, and at the same time, removing the most effective recruiting tool for the fanatical insurgents.**

NAEEM MOHAIMEEN writes from New York

LOOKING at the scared faces of Tilak Raj, Sukhdev Singh and Antaryami, we have to ask, are these really the agents of Neo-Empire? Desperate men, who went to Iraq for their Kuwaiti employer, are now hostages and pawns in the power struggle between the Occupation and the Insurgency. The fate of the seven new hostages -- three Indian, three Kenyan, and one Egyptian truck driver -- illustrates that the Iraqi insurgency is no heroic rebel army. By targeting civilians and employing brutal methods, they have lost any righteous air, just as the US occupation force has also lost its own legitimacy.

Speaking to the Indian press Sher Singh, one hostage's father said, "With great hopes we had sent our son abroad in April this year by selling a piece of land. Little did we know that we will have to face this." His wife Jaspal Kaur added, "What can we do? We are very poor people." It is desperate poverty like this that forces millions of Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis to work in sub-human conditions in the Middle East and Gulf region, and it is that same cycle that has trapped these seven men in this terrifying ordeal.

When I read about the Indian hostages, I was reminded of my old barber in Bangladesh, Himangshu Datta. One day, in the middle of cutting my hair, he calmly informed me that he was changing his religion to Islam, at least on paper. Apparently, in the tremendous outflow of Bangladeshi migrant workers to Dubai, being Muslim sometimes gave an advantage in unspoken quotas. In the hopes of getting a job as a sweeper in one of the government offices, he was going to get a certificate with a Muslim name. I asked him what he would do about his nether regions, and he sadly answered, "Listen, I need to make some money to send back to my family

in the village. I will do anything."

For a man to abandon his religion for migrant-level work in the Middle East, with its nightmarish work standards, speaks volumes about the desperate poverty people are escaping.

A recent Human Rights Watch report

even described the condition of Indian and Bangladeshi workers in Saudi Arabia as "near slavery" -- and yet, the flow of migration continues unabated. Commentators talk about fanatical hordes in the Third World, willing to die for religion. But the experience of migrant workers shows that poverty trumps ideology and religion as a driving force for the vast, working class population of these nations. In this aspect, they share a commonality with the GIs who are mostly from the American underclass, and joined the army not for ideology, but to escape poverty.

By kidnapping poor migrants, and using them as pawns to punish the US occupation, the insurgents of "Holders of the Black Banner" show their brutal streak of inhumanity. I view with similar distrust groups such as the Al-Mahdi Army, Ansar-al-Islam, Jamaat-al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad, and Jaysh

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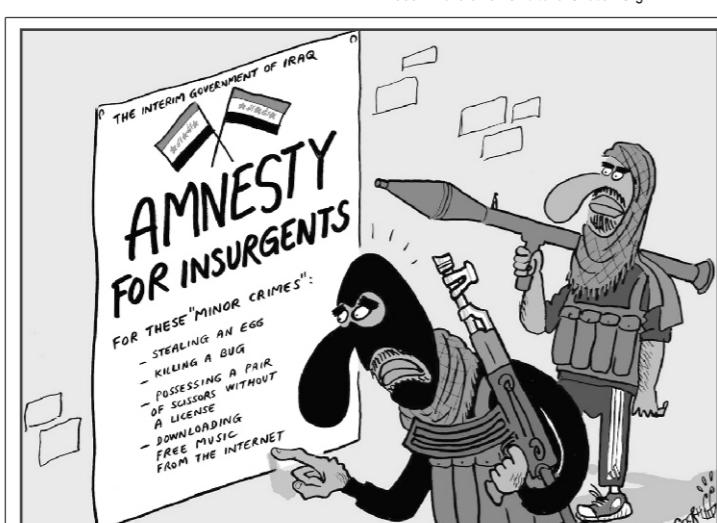
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Mohammed. During the Vietnam War, anti-war activists saw the Vietcong as a people's liberation army because they stood up to the US army. But in the present crisis, there are no good sides, reflective of our tangled global politics.

Many of us in the modern anti-war movement opposed the US invasion, and true to our predictions, the occupation has turned into a bloody mess and a recruiting ground for fanatics and terrorists. But in opposing the occupation, we also cannot find anything to support among the insurgents. Especially for those of us from majority-Muslim nations, Muqtada al-Sadr or Abu Musab al-Zarqawi are no latter-day Che Guevaras.

The only way out of this global crisis is the United Nations. Defanged by the US and haemorrhaging credibility, this institution still offers the best hope for peace in Iraq. Only a UN-led multinational force can bring stability to the region, replacing the US as the primary player in the region, and at the same time, removing the most effective recruiting tool for the fanatical insurgents.

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# Business planning -- a look at some major benefits

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

MANAGEMENT experts consider planning very much synonymous with decision making. For it is planning that forces a clearer definition of what the company is trying to be. As a matter of fact, planning demands the development of specific work to accomplish its objectives.

Among the critical benefits that can be derived from business planning, the most important has been its direct assistance to managerial problem solving. Yet the manifold benefits accrued from business planning do not stop at any particular point. The companies which are serious about their planning are able to find a number of byproduct benefits generating almost automatically.

Perhaps the most important among them is the impact of planning upon

the large sums of money that must be committed. In the presence of such kinds of factors at play, proper planning provides enough scope for analytical type of decision which is far more likely to be in the better interests of the business than any opportunistic decision. The reason is that it is based more closely upon fact and a systematic weighing of alternative actions. In any case planning should not be thought of as restrictive or as a retirement when it comes to making managerial decisions.

There is yet another significant byproduct of the planning process.

It is the better communication

that it affords. Indeed the plan turns out to be management's most effective communication tool because it

contains a written account of everything that is vital to the business for the period covered by the plan. As such, it is irreplaceable in creating an intelligent understanding of what is expected at levels where it is exposed. Concurrently, it virtually eliminates the kind of misunderstanding that a business normally faces when its plans are carried around in someone's head rather than recorded for the appropriate managers to read, understand, and work with.

Another most handy advantage that a well-designed and written business plan has, is its support to a far more realistic appraisal of an individual manager's work. This is because the plan contains a detailed outline of specific action assignments for the period covered. With this, the manager has a detailed measurement device which has been agreed to by the people who have been assigned work responsibilities as a part of the plan. Appraisal then becomes meaningful because the manager can compare results against the programmed action and never forced to rely upon vague appraisals.

The cost of making a business plan has risen many times what it was just a scant 10 or 20 years ago. For example, the cost of new plant and equipment, of personnel development, developing of a new product and introducing it into the marketplace, to name only a few areas where company expenditures have soared. Decisions affecting these areas now are for more consequential than they have been in the past partly because of

substantially, almost automatically. The plan as a communication tool tells what is to be done, how it is to be done and who will do it. Many the questions which introduce a high content of personal insecurity into any business are clarified. When security is ensured confidence is built which in turn, instills a desire in the individual manager/ employee to a better job since, by now a clearer understanding of what is to be done and why it is important is available to the concerned person(s). In a single word -- motivation, which, of course, is the essence of morale.

The presence of a comprehensive company plan, it is claimed, helps attract capable people. In the same manner, once an individual is part of the organisation and sees for himself

exactly what his contribution is toward the achievement of the company's objectives, he develops a kind of satisfaction that he may very well doubt he will find elsewhere. All else being equal, it affords the employee a kind of personal opportunity, particularly if he is exposed to the planning process early in his business career.

Many a bright young man today is searching for the answer to the question: Where am I going? Interviews with this type of individual indicate that he is quick disenchanted with the business that has not found its own answer to the same sort of question. He soon wonders how he can intelligently find the answer in the kind of business climate where no such answers exist at a higher level.

In fact, these by products of effective planning are formidable and they are very real. It is such added benefits that have made many a business enthusiastic about the kind of process we are discussing here. We may yet try another personal bit of pulse taking. Mentally list those businesses which have a clear understanding of what they are trying to achieve, an atmosphere that attracts and retains capable individuals, a management that is purposeful and not opportunistic, an effective system of communication, and a realistic method of appraising work. Far more likely than not, the business you pinpoint as having made serious headway in each of these areas has done so because it has taken a planned approach to its management.