

The monstrous tsunamis: Humanity, battered, triumphs

MAHFUZUR RAHMAN

IT was a quiet morning after Christmas. The Indian Ocean gently lapped the vast jagged horseshoe of a coastline stretching from Sumatra to Sri Lanka. Along the length of thousands of miles of the ocean rim, millions of people were getting ready for a new day. Fishermen were out in their fishing boats, holiday makers getting ready for a day on the beach. Zoom on to the place in your imagination from somewhere high above and what a sight it is: a vast assembly of humanity, a great assortment of native Asians -- Indonesians, Malaysians, Thais, Indians, Sri Lankans -- and a multitude of tourists from dozens of countries of Europe and the Americas. You are reminded of the poets' adulation of the shores of India as the meeting place of all humanity; only the scale here was vaster.

Suddenly disaster struck. Monstrous tsunamis lashed the shores, shattered the idyll, and forever changed the lives of millions. Near the Sumatran shore, the earth shook, the sea bed rose, and the sea swelled, sending out waves of vast quantities of water at force far greater than a typhoon's. The waves grew in height, reaching several metres in places, before crashing over the

coastlines, wreaking unimaginable havoc. The catastrophe left over 155,000 people dead, injured over two hundred thousand, and left perhaps five million people without shelter, food, water, or medicine.

Loss of life of this magnitude is not unprecedented. In 1970, a cyclone and the tidal waves that followed killed three times as many people in Bangladesh, a small nook in the north of the same region. What makes the devastation of the tsunamis of 2004 stand out among the worst natural disasters in history is that it took its toll of death in so many countries, and the destruction was so widespread. Some towns and cities in Sumatra were just about obliterated and death took its toll not only from among Indonesians, Indians, Sri Lankans, and Thais, but also among visitors from as far away as Scandinavia and America. It looked like disaster had struck the human race.

The scale of the destruction wrought by the tsunamis is horrendous. In many of the coastal cities and villages hit by the waves, hardly anything remains standing. The town of Meulaboh in the Aceh province of Sumatra was almost totally destroyed and what remains resembles Hiroshima after the bomb. Banda Aceh is an unending mountain range of debris that was

One day, as the extent of the disaster became clear, Europe from Stockholm to Paris to Rome, stood in tearful silence in remembrance of all those the cruel tsunamis had carried away in another part of the world. In Phuket, candles burned in memory of all those the world has lost. That was the moment when humanity finally triumphed.



PHOTO: PHILIPPE DESMAZES AFP
A woman and a little girl wait at the site of where their home used to be two weeks after a tsunami hit the city of Meulaboh. Concerns remained 09 January that an unknown number of tsunami survivors in Indonesia's Aceh province have not received any aid, two weeks after the disaster killed more than 104,000 people in the country.

once houses, shops, schools, and hospitals. In Sri Lanka, a railway track is a zigzag of twisted metal. A train was lifted off its tracks and hurled hundreds of feet, killing most of its eight hundred passengers. Thousands of fishing boats were lost or destroyed, along with the livelihood of thousands of fishermen. Hospitals filled to capacity with the injured. Makeshift morgues filled with corpses. Many of the dead had to be buried in mass graves.

The days that followed unfolded countless stories of destruction, bereavement and suffering, as well as courage, love, and compassion -- many of them captured on video and television cameras, and in newspaper reports and photographs. As the first waves lashed the shore, a woman grabs her two little boys, takes them to higher ground, then comes back for the third child only to find it was gone, and was then herself swept to her death.

You see the picture of a father grieving over the body of his dead

child. Fishermen come back from their fishing trips only to find the coasts strewn with bodies and their homes and loved ones gone. Women in tears are searching in vain the ruins of their houses for survivors. A little girl, unforgettable with her large, liquid eyes, waits for food at a relief camp. An injured little girl who has lost her entire family wipes her tears at a hospital. A forlorn, hungry little boy has only coconuts for meal. You hear the story of a father losing his grip on his two-year-old son as a wave crashes through their hotel wall, and never seeing him again. Two sisters

caught in the rushing waters try desperately to save one another and only one survives. And in a miscellany of stories of the will to live, you see the picture of a man on a floating tree trunk a hundred miles off shore ten days after the tsunamis had struck. Compassion was writ large in the picture of an injured child clutching a medico carrying him to safety.

The first response from the rest of the human race was slow, partly because the scale of the disaster took time to sink in. The early offers of assistance have been called stingy, and rightly so. But then things changed dramatically. Never in history has a natural disaster been followed by such overwhelming world-wide support for its victims. Help from foreign governments rose from its shameful initial paltriness to unprecedented proportions. Private

donations poured in from literally millions of eager donors from all over the world. Dozens of warships and scores of helicopters were in action to save lives. A great international effort was under way to bring relief to the suffering people and help them rebuild their lives. It was a victory of human compassion over narrow factional interests and ideologies of which there are far too many in the world.

One day, as the extent of the disaster became clear, Europe from Stockholm to Paris to Rome, stood in tearful silence in remembrance of all those the cruel tsunamis had carried away in another part of the world. In Phuket, candles burned in memory of all those the world has lost. That was the moment when humanity finally triumphed.

The writer is a former United Nations economist

Voodoo elections

RON CHEPESIU

GEORGE Bush, Sr., while running against Ronald Reagan in the 1980 presidential election, described Reagan's views on the US economy as "Voodoo Economics." I think "Voodoo Elections" might be a good term to apply to the views of those who assert the American electoral process is still the most viable of all possible democratic systems and the model that the rest of the world should emulate.

I say that because election day here in America has come and gone and President George, Jr. is prepping for his State of the Union address, but for many Americans, the results of last November 2 remains a bitter bone of contention. Challengers have even gone to the US Supreme Court to contest Bush's contention that he won Ohio, the swing state that guaranteed his victory over John Kerry in the Electoral College.

Meanwhile, after three vote tallies and 58 days of waiting, Democrat Christine Gregoire was declared governor-elect of Washington state on December 30. Her Republican rival, Dino Rossi, who initially appeared to have won the election, hasn't conceded and wants to have a new special election. Gregoire won a statewide hand recount by a mere 128 votes out of the 2.8 million cast.

Even in Florida, which for the most part avoided the big embar-

INSIDE AMERICA

Given the questions about Election 2004 and the mistrust it has generated, clearly for the good of the country a systematic and thorough investigation is needed to clear up the air. That isn't going to happen, but we can start the reform movement at a more basic level.

rassing problems it had in the 2000 election, some Democrats are questioning the result, suspecting that the voting was rigged through systematic computer hacking.

These developments reflect the bitter feelings that remain from what many pundits are calling the country's nastiest election ever and indicate that serious reforms in the election process are necessary to restore faith in the system and improve our image abroad.

We are not talking about minor glitches here. In Ohio, civil rights leader Jesse Jackson and Cliff Arnebeck, a lawyer with the Massachusetts based Alliance for Democracy, accused the Bush campaign of "high-handed vote stealing." Last December 13, congressional Democrats read a letter to the governor of Ohio, asking that he delay or at least consider the result unofficial until the dispute is resolved.

A coalition representing the Green Party and the Libertarian

Party paid for a hand recount of each of Ohio's 88 counties, which began in mid-December. Ohio Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell said the recount will end up costing taxpayers \$1.5 million, but recount supporters say it's well worth the cost, given the host of problems they found in the voting. Too few voting machines in Democratic precincts, orchestrated campaigns to direct the voters to the wrong polling stations, and computer equipment problems are some of the major ones they've catalogued.

In their suit, the challengers said that "while the existence of anomalies can possibly be explained by human error or technical malfunctions, the fact that, in every case in Ohio known to the contesters, the error favoured the Bush-Cheney ticket, strongly indicates manipulation or fraud."

To cite just one incident, election officials said that an "error" with the electronic voting system in Franklin County gave Bush 3,893 votes extra

in suburban Colombia, which was more than 1,000 percent than he actually received. How can one explain such a huge error? Not without the use of sophistry.

Ohio was the key to Bush's victory last November, and Republicans have been boasting ever since that his victory was "decisive." Bush did win the popular vote by about 3 million, but he still needed Ohio to win the Electoral College and hence the presidency. Bush has said ad nauseam this "decisiveness" has given him the "political capital" to push through his radical agenda during his second term.

Bush won by about 119,000 votes. A swing of some 59,501 votes could have sent the election to John Kerry. That's about the number of people who live in my hometown. That's some mandate!

In Washington state, the governor's race won't affect the outcome for the presidency, but a victory was important to the Democrats for morale purposes and to build on for the future. Dino Rossi had won two earlier rounds by 261 and 42 votes, but more than 700 votes surfaced the third time around in Democratic King County. This allowed Gregoire to "stretch" her lead from just 10 votes to 129. Rossi said he would look closely at the election data in King County before making a decision about contesting the results.

Rossi has suggested that, to avoid a lengthy court battle, the state legislature, which convenes this January 5, pass a bill to create a new special election across the state. The Secretary of State Sam Reed, a Republican, certified Gregoire the new governor declaring "at this time there is nothing that appears fraudulent." It's been nice for a change to hear conservatives whine about this election on Fox News, the Republican news channel.

In Florida, exit polls showed Bush winning about 14 percent of the Democratic vote statewide, but, incredibly, Bush racked up more votes than the number of registered

Republicans in 47 out of the 67 counties in Florida. Moreover, in four of the counties Bush tripled the number of registered Republicans, and in 15, he more than doubled the number of that number.

How does one explain these strange statistics when even Republican pollster Dick Morris concedes that "the exit polls are never wrong"? After all, the exit polls showed Kerry winning. The Bush camp would like the public to believe that the 2004 election was the most incompetently polled election in US history was the reason. They say no hanky-panky was involved; I say voodoo elections.

There have been other strange but potentially disturbing reports as well. A University of California at Berkeley study conducted by seven students and one professor concluded that Bush received more votes than he should have in Florida counties using the new touch screen voting machines. Two professors from Drexel University and one of the State University of New York branches quickly released their own study that has attempted to debunk the Berkeley study.

Then in mid-December, whistle blowing software programmer Clint Curtis claimed that representative Tom Feeney (R-Fl) asked him (he was then a Feeney employee) to write software that would alter votes on electronic voting machines in Florida.

While authorities investigate Curtis' claims, bloggers on the internet are running wild with the story, fueling more suspicions about the US electoral system. Given the questions about Election 2004 and the mistrust it has generated, clearly for the good of the country a systematic and thorough investigation is needed to clear up the air.

That isn't going to happen, but we can start the reform movement at a more basic level. A lot of mistrust has been caused by the new proprietary voting software and secrecy surrounding it. Some groups wanting electoral reform have strongly endorsed passing a law requiring that the voting software be open to public inspection to protect against fraud and to help restore the public's confidence in the electoral process. That's sounds like a damn good idea...for starters.

Ron Chepesiu is a Visiting Professor at Chittagong University and a Research Associate with the National Defence College in Dhaka.



United Nations Population Fund

INVITATION TO BID

Policy Dialogues & Policy Briefs on Population related Challenges

UNFPA Bangladesh is inviting proposals from the reputed NGOs / Institutions / Agencies for undertaking policy dialogues with policy makers & program planners, and developing policy briefs on population related challenges. The activity is expected to help in evaluating the existing population situation critically, and suggest the trends and patterns at the policy level.

The NGOs/Institutions/Agencies interested to undertake the above-mentioned activity may download the TOR from the web-site www.unfpa-bangladesh.org under other announcement section. The proposals must reach UNFPA office by c.o.b. 26 January 2005 in closed envelopes marked "Policy Dialogues and Policy Briefs" to UNFPA Representative, IDB Bhawan (15th floor), Begum Rokeya Sharani, Sher-e Bangla Nagar, Dhaka - 1207.

AGRANI INSURANCE COMPANY LIMITED

A Public Company Limited by Shares

Head Office: Moon Mansion (6th Floor), 12, Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka -1000

Issuance of 900,000 Ordinary Shares of Tk. 100 each (at par) total Tk.90,000,000
Underwriting Commission @ 1.00% on Tk. 45,000,000 aggregating Tk.450,000

The company's shares trading is likely to be placed in "A" Category.

Opening Date of Subscription: 09 January 2005
Closing Date of Subscription: 13 January 2005
Prospectus published on 15 December 2004 in "The Financial Express"

"If you have any queries about this document, you may consult your stockbroker or dealer, bank manager, lawyer, professional accountant or other professional adviser."

Statutory Declaration

"CONSENT OF THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION HAS BEEN OBTAINED TO THE ISSUE/OFFER OF THESE SECURITIES UNDER THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE ORDINANCE, 1990, AND PUBLIC ISSUE RULES, 1998. IT MUST BE DISTINCTLY UNDERSTOOD THAT IN GIVING THIS CONSENT THE COMMISSION DOES NOT TAKE ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FINANCIAL SOUNDNESS OF THE COMPANY, ANY OF ITS PROJECTS OR THE ISSUE PRICE OF ITS SHARE OR FOR THE CORRECTNESS OF ANY OF THE STATEMENTS MADE OR OPINION EXPRESSED WITH REGARD TO THEM, RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHICH LIES WITH THE ISSUER, ITS DIRECTORS, INVESTMENT ADVISOR, ISSUING MANAGER, VALUER AND/OR AUDITOR. IT IS, HOWEVER, THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION'S RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE THAT FULL AND FAIR DISCLOSURES ARE MADE IN THE PROSPECTUS IN TERMS OF THE PUBLIC ISSUE RULES, 1998, SO THAT THE INVESTORS CAN MAKE INFORMED INVESTMENT DECISIONS."

DECLARATION OF THE DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS IN RESPECT OF THE PROSPECTUS

The Prospectus has been prepared, checked, evaluated and approved by us; and that we collectively and individually accept full responsibility for the authenticity and accuracy of the statements, information given in the prospectus, documents or financial statements, exhibits, annexure, papers submitted to the Commission in support thereof, and confirm after making all reasonable inquiries, that all conditions and requirements concerning this public issue and Prospectus have been met and that there are no other information or documents, the omission of which may make any information or statements therein misleading for which the Commission may take any civil, criminal or administrative action against us or any of us as it may deem fit. We also confirm that full and fair disclosure have been made in this Prospectus to enable the investors to make an informed decision for investment.

Signed by directors and officers of Agrani Insurance Company Limited

UNDERWRITERS:

Equity Partners Limited, Southeast Bank Limited, The Trust Bank Limited, BAIRA Life Insurance Company Limited, Bay Leasing and Investment Limited, ICB Capital Management Limited, Swadesh Investment Management Limited

BANKERS TO THE ISSUE

Southeast Bank Ltd. Principal Branch, Dhaka, Dhammond Branch, Dhaka, Agrabad Branch, Chittagong, Khulna Branch, Khulna, Sylhet Branch, Sylhet, Utrara Branch, Dhaka, Barisal Branch, Barisal	Dhaka Bank Limited Local Office, Dhaka, Narayanganj Branch, Khattangonj Branch, Chittagong, Imanganj Branch, Dhaka, Baran Branch, Dhaka, Gulshan Branch, Dhaka	Bank Asia Ltd. Principal Office, 111-113 Motiheel C/A, Dhaka, Gulshan Branch, Dhaka, Corporate Branch, Noor Tower 73, Sonargaon Road, Dhaka, Utrara Branch, Dhaka
Investment Corporation of Bangladesh Head Office, Dhaka, Local Office, Dhaka, Chittagong Branch, Sylhet Branch, Barisal Branch, Khulna Branch, Bogra Branch, Rajshahi Branch	IFIC Bank Limited Federation Branch, Dhaka, Dhammond Branch, Dhaka, Shantinagar Branch, Dhaka, Uplatan Road Branch, Dhaka, Feni Branch, Feni, Pallabi Branch, Dhaka	Arab Bangladesh Bank Ltd. Merchant Banking Unit, Dhaka, Principal Branch, Dhaka, Karwan Bazar Branch, Dhaka, Nawabpur Branch, Dhaka, Khulna Branch, Khulna, Agrabad Branch, Chittagong, Darga Gate Branch, Sylhet
Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited Local Office, Dhaka, Karwan Bazar Branch, Dhaka, Dhammond Branch, Dhaka, Shantinagar Branch, Dhaka, Dania Branch, Dania, Dhaka	Prime Bank Limited Motiheel Branch, Dhaka, Mouda Bazar Branch, Dhaka, Mohakhali Branch, Dhaka, Agrabad Branch, Chittagong, Banni Branch, Dhaka, Prugati Sarami Branch, Dhaka	Eastern Bank Limited Principal Branch, Dhaka, Gulshan Branch, Dhaka, Mirpur Branch, Dhaka, English Road Branch, Dhaka, Jubilee Road Branch, Chittagong

NRI applicants shall be directly sent their application to the Company Office by 13 January 2005 so as to reach the company by 22 January 2005. Applications sent after 13 January 2005 or received by the company after 22 January 2005 will not be considered for allotment purpose.

Manager to the Issue: **EQUITY PARTNERS LIMITED**
DSE Annex Building (9th Floor), 9B Motiheel, G/A, Dhaka-1000, Phone 954/959, 956/1232, Fax: 954/2254

Make the right career connection with SQUARE TOILETRIES LTD.

We are seeking for a dynamic individual to join us as :

Marketing Manager

This is an excellent opportunity to apply your marketing skills on Branded Products.

Your key responsibilities encompass the following :

- Formulate and implement creative, aggressive marketing and sales strategies to achieve objectives of the company as well as to meet the needs of the consumers in a competitive business environment.
- Identify and explore new opportunities in the market and launch new products.
- Evaluate the external environment and identify opportunities for business growth.
- Generate new concepts in the marketing arena.
- Supervise all promotional activities.
- Direct the marketing team to deliver the full marketing service.

Pre-requisites :

- MBA with major in marketing capable of organizing and leading a strong team of marketing staff.
- Minimum 10 years working experience in handling/supervising various brands with any reputed consumer goods manufacturing company with 2 years experience in a similar position.
- Proven leadership qualities with excellent communication skills in English.
- Person must be resourceful, self-driven, result-oriented and people centered with pleasant personality.
- Enjoy traveling extensively.
- Should be a computer literate.
- Age within 45 years.

Compensation package will commensurate with knowledge and expertise.

If you have what it takes to excel in this job then please send your application along with resume indicating your current and expected salary and two non-returnable recent passport size color photos within January 25, 2005, addressing to Deputy General Manager, Human Resources Department, Square Toiletries Ltd., Rupayan Centre (11th Floor), 72 Mohakhali C.A. Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh.

Position applied for must be mentioned at the top of the envelope.
Only short listed candidates will be notified.

Any approach directly or indirectly for preferential treatment will disqualify the applicant.

SQUARE TOILETRIES LIMITED
MEMBER OF SQUARE GROUP



1% off on all loan products from 01 - 31 January 2005

My Loan

making HSBC a part of your life

from My Bank

- ▶ No personal guarantee or cash security required
- ▶ Reduced interest rate and low processing fees

For more information

Call : 011 88LOAN (5626)
011 88HSBC (4722)

▶ www.hsbc.com.bd

HSBC
The world's local bank

Issued by The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited