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Flood victims
Bangladesh is a low-lying land and hence, it is no surprise that we fall prey to flood almost on a regular basis. This year flood has once again hit us. It would be a little exaggeration if we term this year's flood, of course, taking into account the disaster it has created in a number of regions, as worse than what we faced in 1998. Nevertheless, as always, the flood has struck the poorer and underprivileged sections of society terribly, leaving them completely helpless, penniless and even shelter-less. Scores of people have had their homes washed away by the devastating flood, as they now have taken shelter temporarily in various school buildings and on embankments. Simply put, their misery speaks for itself. Now that the country is suffering from such a natural catastrophe, what we need to do is to stand beside these helpless people. The richer

efforts and united endeavours would be of great help to those passing their days in distress, without even knowing what tomorrow is going to bring them.
Mahmudul Islam
Tongi, Gazipur

Water, water everywhere ...
A deed is good indeed, when it serves the basic need/requirement of a large number of people. One such requirement is drinking water. In the past we saw many philanthropists who dug ponds, wells and sunk tube-wells for drinking water for the general people. We all know what the great saint Nizamuddin Aulia did. He dug a big pond (Dighi) near Delhi when he saw people were deprived of pure drinking water. We are heading towards acute crisis of drinking water, India is also apprehending the same. We are putting our own

treatment plants to avoid further damage to the nature. Arrangement for arsenic free water should be made available in the villages. Village people should be taught how to preserve rainwater during the monsoon and also to keep the pond water pollution free so that they can use the water after boiling it properly. The sooner we can do this the better for us, otherwise a severe catastrophe will strike, causing colossal loss of life and property.
M.A. Alim
Ex Banker
Indira Road, Dhaka

Jute mills
Last Saturday I visited my octogenarian uncle, Mr. K. Ahsan -- who worked in the recently closed People's Jute Mills (Khalishpur) during 1955-1957 and was associated with the jute business for about a decade. He is now living a

remembers his good friends/colleagues (S, H, R, etc.) and spending the weekends in Khulna. He requested me if I could convey his deep sorrow and due to the affected workers, traders and their families. Also, I couldn't answer his two queries: (1) Whether in this 'eco-friendly age' the government wants to completely whip out this crop from the country. (2) Whether we are going back to the pre-partition days when 99% of world jute was produced in East Bengal but all the jute mills were situated in West Bengal!
M. Emad
Oxford, UK

Workers' fate
I could not check my tears after knowing the fate of jute workers who have been given golden handshake but did not receive their wages.
It is really a shame for the nation that we cannot protect the interest of working people.
Aparajita
Ph.D. student
Dept. of Women Studies
Victoria University
NZ

Death traps
Nobody can foresee an impending catastrophe. I feel duty-bound to write this letter in view of the frightening condition of rail and road network in Bangladesh. A very recent incident jolted me to my bones. The bright day light was fading over the sky of Boston as my wife and I were leisurely sipping tea in our son's house at Braintree when the telephone blared and we got the news of the terrible bridge collapse in central Minneapolis in Minnesota. The eight-lane bridge was constructed only forty years ago over the mighty Mississippi river and over two hundred thousand cars crossed the bridge every day. What was more dreadful was that my younger son used to take this route to commute to his office. The time the bridge collapsed (6pm) he should have been on the bridge on way back home but with a rare stroke of luck he flew to New Jersey that same morning on a vacationing trip. The twisted steel and huge concrete slabs with vehicles strewn in a rumbled mess as shown on the TV made us chill in horror. Whatever the authorities reported we presume the number of fatality would exceed twenty with

upstream wounded.
It is reported that simple routine repair work was going on two lanes. The real cause of such a major bridge collapse is still unknown and the FBI ruled out sabotage possibilities. My eyes, however, stuck on two revelatory items in the report of The Boston Globe. In 1997, Minnesota Department of Transportation cited problems with the approach spans on both ends of the bridge including 'cracks --- in the cross girder at the end of the approach spans'. In a 2001 report the department softly hinted on fatigue details on the main truss and the floor truss system but concluded saying that no fatigue cracking was expected in 'foreseeable' future and therefore the bridge did not require to be prematurely replaced involving high costs. Such palpable and sketchy reports on vital issues are common in the developing countries but one cannot help wonder how such a slipshod and blunt reporting could have been possible in a country like the United States. Undeniably, some structural glitch built up over years finally reached a critical mass to abruptly erupt in a hellfire to tear down the concrete Minneapolis edifice though the authorities were not absolutely unaware of the deteriorating process.
Looking back to my own country I simply shudder thinking of the thousands of road and railway bridges and culverts most of which are technically unfit for use or creaking ominously demanding immediate repair and renovation. Millions of innocent people are using these bridges in good faith not knowing when and how the catastrophe will strike. A few years ago the much vaunted Rajdhani Express of the Indian Railway plunged into the river as the dilapidated bridge could no longer hold the thundering monster. Our age-old ramshackle Hardinge, Boral, Bhairab and numerous other rail and road bridges and culverts lie exposed to terrible mishaps. The authorities prefer to depend more on providence than reality while bridge management culture in our transportation sector continues to descend from bad to worse. Keeping the urgency of the situation in view, the government should prepare both long and short term plans to take up bridge maintenance and renovation issues on a priority basis in order to avert colossal human tragedies in future. Adequate funds have to be placed for the purpose and schemes firmly implemented. The eternal plea of budgetary constraints and bureaucratic failures cannot be a rational alternative to the loss of human life and property.
Mohammed Nawazish
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Relief operations in disarray

With floods besieging the country, the Chief Advisor had to invite [through public address] the social groups to come forward with relief operations, as they did in the past.

Why was the response not spontaneous? Why this hesitation? Even the goals or national objectives are being debated, due to entrenched egoistic leadership, based on charisma and dynasty rules.

The NGOs in Bangladesh have earned a reputation for social services; but look at truncated ADAB (the union body), and the division at all levels of the society including the educational institutions and universities.

The relief operations carried out by the past regimes were heavily politicised--no plus points for public service! Today another misunderstanding prevailed in view of outdoor politics being banned. Now the CA has clarified the situation--can't govern like a pure lily above stagnant water!

NGOs like Brac and GB have extensive networks right up to village levels. Why the hesitation? Can't carry out relief work without set preconditions?

It is a trying time for the interim government, with high food prices, and Ramadan approaching. Get the NGOs on your side--after some filtration. Why social programmes have to carry flags of political parties? Politics here is still a hobby of luxury-easy come [and, easy go].

We have to set the foundations for new cultural patterns--but face the hen and egg syndrome. The general elections first, then take up the many phases of the new silent revolution. The CTG has opened the playing fields, setting new moods in the spectators [later players].

A Mahasen, Dhaka

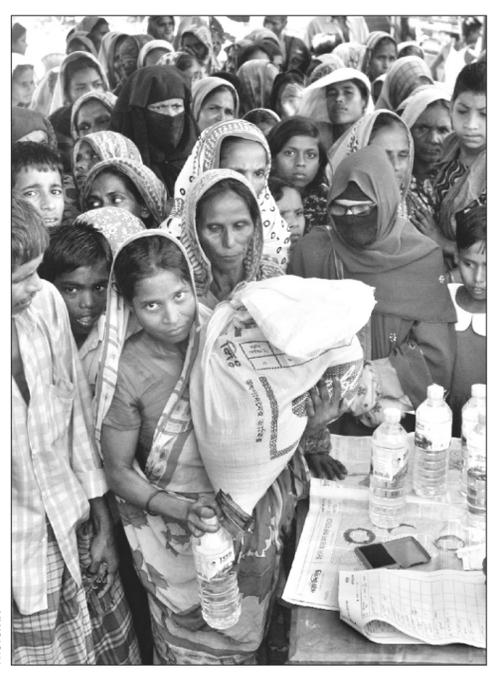


PHOTO: AFP

More CNG stations needed



PHOTO: STAR
These days people are driving their vehicles by CNG, but the number of CNG stations is not increasing. And the result is that people are suffering a lot, they have to wait for a long time at the stations. Cab drivers and CNG

drivers are suffering even more.
So, the government should take effective steps to increase the number of CNG stations.
Sharmin Rashid
Uttara, Dhaka

section of society, financially solvent and capable enough of helping others, should extend their helping hand towards the flood-hit people. We must not forget that we should deem flood as a national disaster in preference to a mere problem of some specific areas of the country. In the light of this assertion, it is clear that a collective and coordinated approach that will include people of all walks of life is worth taking which, in turn, hopefully, will help the flood victims overcome their hardships as the government alone would not be able to do much in alleviating their sufferings. In addition, various private and non-government organisations must come forward in mitigating what might be referred as 'hellish nightmare' for flood-affected people. In a word, our joint

survival at risk by polluting water of all available sources. Rivers/canals are polluted with industrial wastes and ponds are polluted with household wastes. Excessive use of insecticides/fertilisers in the agricultural land also causes pollution. During monsoon water overflows the banks of the ponds and makes them polluted.
We have chosen the underground water as the remedy to meet the requirements of the city dwellers which is discouraged by the experts for possible risk of exhaustion of water, making the nature imbalanced. A disaster like earthquake may bring everything to a standstill. We therefore should immediately stop dumping of industrial wastes and other things which pollute rivers and canals and use surface water installing water

retired life in London. I showed him some newspaper clippings on the closure of jute mills and miserable condition of thousands of workers, their families and small traders of that area. He has a good memory and narrated several events of those days. The (750-loom) mill was owned by the (late) Prince Aga Khan (and two other partners - diamond merchants Mr. Lakha and Mr. Gangi) and remembers their visit (separately) during that time. Mr. T. H. (Torab Hussain) Vimali was an efficient managing director. Many skilled workers - mostly people who during pre-partition days worked in the jute mills around Calcutta (West Bengal) - migrated to East Pakistan and joined the mills. The overall atmosphere was peaceful. The nearby Platinum Jute Mills was just started. He

Animal farm

Despite severe hardships such as poverty and natural disasters like the devastating floods, it is astounding to see that the people of our country never give up under any circumstances. They are constantly struggling against the adversities and vulnerabilities. Their hopes remain resolute against all odds. The people of our country are extremely adaptive when they are faced with the toughest challenge. I think that our country has a huge potential and our people are its living example. We have limited funds and expertise, yet we are ready to fight against all shortcomings. A few years back a remarkable initiative was taken by some creative animal farming companies to breed some of the valued species, especially the reptiles which included crocodiles mainly. They have started this

I would like the private farms to consider my suggestion and the government to kindly facilitate them as far as possible, which would benefit our country as a whole.
Naome Syed
Asad Avenue, Mohammadpur
Dhaka

Foreign interference

We are appalled by the interference of other countries and donor agencies in our internal matters. Their interference has extended beyond the diplomatic ethics or general conventions.
If we are living in a sovereign country, then it is the duty of our govt. to protest vehemently and request our loan and aid giving countries not to interfere in our internal matters.
G M F Abdur Rob
Bari dhara DOH
Dhaka

Reckless driving

short of the nation's expectation in the coming days.
Hafeejul Alam
Former civil servant
Kazi Nazrul Islam Road
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Why should people protect Jatka ?

Perhaps you are aware about the high price of hilsa fish in the market. The price is almost unaffordable for over 90% of the people in the country. The high price may be attributed to export of the fish. It is often seen that whenever an event takes place at state level on production of any item, farm or non-farm, the politicians and their fellow bureaucrats start talking about export of the item, simply ignoring the domestic demand. Some days back the political and administrative elites raised a hue & cry for exporting our natural gas. Similarly,

export of hilsa when people's demand is not met?

We are simply shocked at the news. The foreign currency reserve now stands at \$5 billion. Our poor garments workers have sacrificed their lives for earning the foreign currency. Do they not deserve to eat hilsa? How much foreign currency do our elites need? Why people should protect *Jatka* if the hilsa remains out of their reach? People will not protect *Jatka*. Hilsa should be extinct from our country if the elites continue to deprive our people.

In view of the above, we would urge the caretaker government not to change its decision. Ban on export of hilsa should and must remain in place.

Md Qamrul Islam
Dhaka

Bush and war

All of us well remember President Bush's anguish over Iraq's possessing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), which resulted in an attack maneuvered by the United States of America in Iraq in 2003. Since that launch of 'charitable effort' to rid Iraq of WMD, interestingly enough, no report of any such discovery of weapons has been achieved; the fact which clearly proves that Mr. Bush was wrong in his speculations. Later, instead of saying 'sorry' to Iraq and to the civilised world, he justified America's attack on Iraq by proposing another hypothesis that of Iraq's association with al-Qaeda and comes up with a solution that Iraq's autocracy has to be done away with and democracy established in order to rid the country of Islamic militancy (as if democratic Islamic states don't have religious militancy!) So, the attack continues and Iraq burns in a deadly conflagration that spreads to almost every part of the country. Human rights are horribly violated every minute and people are dying regularly in large numbers. Clearly, America played Iraq at will, caring not a fig for international community. And this has been nothing but a display of evil power. Therefore, whoever stands to it without a protest, is responsible for the mass-murder in Iraq in some way or other.

So, it is high time the US and its accomplices are tried in the International Court of Justice for crimes committed against humanity in Iraq.

Rajib Ahmed
Lecturer, Department of English
Southeast University, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

project with limited resources but have now been successful in their endeavour. Although there had been heavy rainfall and seasonal changes, they could keep up the reproduction of the crocodiles. These companies are owned by private individuals who had started their activities with a view to exporting the crocodiles internationally. If the government could have aided them, then this would be an extremely fruitful business and could be one of the most efficient sources of earning foreign exchange alongside the booming garments factories. However, at present these animal farms are concentrating on importing crocodiles from abroad and after further breeding and cross-breeding they have the plan to export them. I would like to suggest that if some of the exotic animals of our country like the local deer and birds could be exported, then that would yield more profit since they are in abundance in our country but rare and priceless abroad.

The roads of Bangladesh are beset with problems, reckless driving is one of them. Most of the drivers are not well trained. They do not realise that life is more valuable than time. They drive desperately. Even they are not conscious of their own safety needs. They do not follow traffic signals and try to overtake others. As a result, road accident take place frequently.
We should make them understand that life is more valuable than time. We have to train them properly.
Jakia Nasrin
Dept. of English
IUU, Chittagong

"My Lord, we beg to differ"

Yes, My Lord, we beg to differ and fully endorse the commentary written by you (The Daily Star dt. 13-8-2007). Howsoever, it's of no use to rip up the old sore.
Let's look forward and hope that the Supreme Court will no more fall

the hilsa was being exported to India since the beginning of the season. The demand of people was not taken into account. Considering the scarcity and high price of hilsa in the market, the caretaker government imposed a ban on the export for six months. We the common people must term it as an act of a government, which is responsive to peoples needs and demands.
Unfortunately, soon the vested quarters came up with many arguments in favour of export of hilsa, such as India would stop export of rice to Bangladesh, India would be very angry, a small neighbour should not dare take such a decision, foreign currency earning would be disrupted and so on. Under the pressure from the vested quarters, which were joined by our foreign ministry, the authorities reportedly are reconsidering the decision. It may be noted that in the face of lower per capita availability of pulses in India, export of the item was banned. Why shall we not ban

Our politicians
Those who study political science or even have a little education must have learnt that the duty of an individual is to do some good for their parents, for themselves and for the nation as a whole, in their future life and politicians accomplish such jobs in greater terms. But the situation in our political arena is totally different. Here politics is done to destroy the backbone of the country, persecuting numerous people and providing a profound background for terrorism and corruption. It is operated under a certain dynasty, leaving the generous politicians with professional integrity behind. Lots of party men from the Awami league and the BNP are now locked up in prison, caught on different criminal charges, mostly corruption.
The caretaker government has revealed their real face in front of the public.
Shatabdi
RPATC, Officers Quarter
Rajshahi

Public and private universities

Many write-ups on 'public and private universities' have been published in newspapers to depict the

overall situation of the universities.
As a student of a public university, I'm familiar with

discrimination between public and private universities. Private universities have been both praised and criticised in comparison to public universities.

Rationally speaking, we must notice that both public and private universities have something in common, highly skilled teachers, well equipped lab facilities, compatible subjects and so forth. One might experience the dearth of the said components in some universities, but that is an exception indeed.

Why then do the majority of students show interest in public universities over private universities?

First of all, public universities provide well recognised certificates, the universities provide more options that include debating, cultural activities, volunteer work and so forth. Public university campuses are spacious and accommodative and of course far more cost effective than private universities.

With the exception of noted private universities like NSU, EWU, AIUB, and BRAC, many private universities have failed to build a bright image.
Md Badiuzzaman Tamal
Farmgate, Dhaka

