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# Disaster preparedness

We face Nature's wrath every year and with global warming it'll get worse - if not fulfill the dreaded theory of scientific projections of Bangladesh going under water in the next century.

For more recent events, can there be any NGO or grassroots effort for people in villages to make "safe-houses" - for emergency situations like these? like on a common ground like a school or so, where an underground bunker -

unlike the Israelis, or Jewish community in the US or the Amish in Pennsylvania - they train their people, kids, through regular drills in emergency preparedness held by synagogues, temples and in school classrooms.

I don't think we have any set methods or any curricular in schools of training people in Bangladesh or do we? Something similar can easily be

my friend's 5-year old niece was asking if I needed the Heimlich maneuver or if I am having a heart attack... when I was coughing at the dinner table from gulping water down too fast! It was funny - we all cracked up. But later I asked Emily - how did she know of those symptoms - from her school apparently and quite a bit too - such as what to do in a poisoning situation or during a bomb explosion. This abso-

lute and insufficient. There were early reports full of self congratulatory type words. Like, all is well type early news, (we got the impression from the ntv, the only channel available to us), but BBC and even US-NPR, and US Public TV did a better job than Bangladeshi media. There were no reporters on site as the storm hit, best I could tell.

It is understood that the present government is a mere caretaker government, and they have done a superb job so far, stopping the agitators and lawbreakers, our pretentious politicians, looters and thugs. Their hands were full. But in this matter of disaster preparedness their work has stumbled. The old blame game is bound to start. All the pundits, who had been in power before, had done very little, as we are well aware of their work.

There will be unfortunately many more disasters, we are very prone to them. It does not do any good to quickly forget the lessons learned every year. As if we are surprised, again and again.

We have had floods and tidal bores and cyclones since 1964 in my own memory. Then we had 1970, 1991, etc, the major coastal disasters.

Why can we not prioritise, and preposition, keep up, replenish / replace, large reservoirs of sanitary water, such as in plastic or metal containers, as can be hand carried, and dry foods as we are trying to drop from helicopters. Why can we not supply flotation devices, "life belts" and "plastic rafts" to our coastal fishermen, schools and places of worship (masjids and mandirs), agriculture offices, thana and police outposts?

It is not fair to criticise this brave and very capable temporary caretaker government, to whom we are all indebted for all they are doing. They deserve our sincere and heart felt thanks, they are the best we have ever had as a truly caring government. Having said that, it is my fervent appeal to the government, to assemble an energetic group of very forward looking and "can do" group of practical citizens, with a heavy representation of the local poor and islanders from the coasts to see that a "long term stockpiling of disaster relief materials" is made and kept up to date.

M. Hasan Choudhury, M.D.  
Springfield, Missouri, USA



sort of like wartime bunkers my parents used to have in their backyard in Pakistan before liberation. The Mid-West and South US are cyclone-prone so most houses are built with basement or they have a community basement to take refuge until the twisters go away.

In Bangladesh's situation there are floods as well where bunkers won't come to aid - so may be the same school's roof can be turned into a high flat platform for flood times.

I know these are ideas thrown at random but not unattainable. There's so much poverty and corruption that people are not used to the idea of acting like a community in disasters -

mobilised by organisations like Grameen Bank or BRAC where they already have the network established. I don't know if mosques can play any role - they can be very influential and just a half an hour of demo and instructions after Friday prayers can do wonders!

Then again on a second thought.. those bunkers can become the village-head's personal warehouse or "go-down" and hiding place for dead bodies.. who knows.. I am sorry if I sound like I'm losing faith in my countrymen - given the fact that they have had a series of bad luck with models or leaders, unfortunately.

Just an example, the other day, one of

lately adorable little girl with her big hazel eyes is getting prepared for adulthood into a world her elders made a mess of. Sadly, I can dream of a world of people living in harmony and love for each other until I turn blue in the face but I know I just have to settle with hopes that in the coming years, Emily'll still jump up and hug me - shouting "Z is here!"

Zakia Meraj  
One-mail

It is shocking that our media has failed to take an active role in warning people before the cyclone struck. The amount of deployment of our naval assets and helicopters were also very

## Drug abuse

Recent raids by the law enforcing agencies unearthed the deep-rooted yaba network in our country. Yaba has caused considerable damage and loss to our nation. Many youngsters in our society are now yaba addicts.

On August 25, 2006 I wrote a letter to The Daily Star with reference to a DS news item concerning the spread of yaba drug addiction. I had suggested enactment of a law to save our young people from the curse of the harmful yaba drug.

I would once again urge upon the authorities concerned to frame new laws prohibiting trade and abuse of all harmful drugs including yaba.

Prof. M Zahidul Haque  
Dhaka

## Dealing with corruption

The caretaker government is cooking a broth named "Truth

Commission" to give indemnity to corrupt businessmen. The Truth Commission will 'decriminalise' corruption. Corruption will be rampant in future.

So what's wrong with the former military dictator H.M. Ershad? I think the general people - the genuine sufferers - are not thinking so generously about this matter. They believe in judgment which reflects "an eye for an eye". Hope the caretaker government will immediately drop this approach to treat some elite corrupt elements.

Md. Bakhtiar Rana  
Yokohama, Japan

## Trial of war criminals

Over the past few weeks people have been claiming or denying any existence of war criminals or incidences of war crime during the liberation war of 1971. While these people are at loggerheads, I would request citizens of Bangladesh to look at the definition of war crime

at the following link [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War\\_crime](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_crime).

I was born in 1971 and so have no recollection of events surrounding the liberation war. I have spoken to a wide section of people and read a few historical accounts and what I think is that there was definitely war crime as per the definition adopted under the auspices of the Nuremberg Trials based on the definition in the London Charter that was published on August 8, 1945.

Now we know there were numerous events of war crimes in 1971, but who were the war criminals? I think this is the question we need to ask.

Khairul Hasan  
Surrey, UK

## "Post-disaster management"

Mr. Asif Anwar in his article (November 27, 2007) mentioned, "However, another agency within

our government will create more confusion than coordination (in relief distribution etc.), given the reputation and success of our civilian rulers of the last 35 years."

Natural disasters are no stranger to Bangladesh. During the last 35 years we had major natural disasters like flood, cyclone, tornado and what not. It is the agencies concerned within our government with the help of civil administration and also the armed forces that took the initiative and faced those calamities. It is true that most of our politicians are a lot more interested in their own well being, instead of that of the countrymen. It is a common misconception to picture government employees as willing aides to the misdeeds of political leaders. It is unfortunate to try to undermine the long history of arduous work done by the government agencies dealing with relief and rehabilitation.

The armed forces have the reputation of extending their helping hand to civil administration in

relief work etc., though their major area of specialisation is warfare. There are agencies within the government with major area of specialization in coordination of relief distribution etc. and naturally those agencies know best how to do that. Everyone should be given their due credit. If Mr. Asif Anwar noticed the news items along with the advertisements in the leading newspapers he would know that in spite of claims of enough relief material stock and more relief materials pouring in from abroad, thousands of Sadr survivors are not getting any relief only due to lack of proper coordination.

The term 'post-disaster management' points to an array of activities like rehabilitation of road network, restoration of electricity, telephone and other utility services, long term planning for such disasters etc. including relief work, the only thing the author was concerned with.

One of the reasons of the present

sorry state of the country is the blind admirers who seem to sing hymn of any and all the actions of whoever is in power and critical of all actions of the opposition. It is time to grow up and get out of the vicious tradition of sycophancy and develop an attitude to give due credit to the deserving people or agencies. The ground reality is thousands of hapless people including women, children and disabled are starving and crying out for some food out there in the cold. It is time to ensure a proper coordination of the relief work through the efforts of the local civil administration, local government bodies, engineering organisations, disaster management agencies and the joint forces so that thousands of destitute people can survive.

Saif  
Dhaka

## Truth!

The picture of the national disaster caused by deadly "Sidr" is emerging gradually with more and more sufferings of the affected people. The management issue is getting acute, collapse of a bridge and further loss of life and injury to hundreds of relief seekers is just a tiny example. The talk show aired by ntv is a good example of how important it is to seek cross section views to meet this kind of a national crisis. I appreciate the guests and the host for their very valuable observations and open minded moderation.

- We have heard a lot about the positive fallout of January 11 2007 and that was justified in the backdrop of total failure of governance. But I think the time is ripe enough to discuss the "negative fallout" of January 11 2007. Keeping in mind the picture of devastation by the deadly "Sidr" and the poor national response to come forward as one nation to mitigate the sufferings of the millions, one can easily see that the whole nation, except a few, is suffering from a very serious kind of "mental barrier" to address the crisis freely and spontaneously. I need not explain the missing factors which have been well described by the three distinguished talk show hosts on ntv.

The whole situation has further been aggravated by the behaviour of some teammates of Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, who is putting his best undoubtedly. I think "Sidr" has left behind a big lesson for us, especially for those who are now responsible for running the country. As an ordinary citizen I strongly think that it is high time for the CTG to evaluate their performance objectively and bring about some positive changes in their policy and management strategy.

The CTG by now has definitely realised that the nation and politics and politicians are inseparable when it comes to a situation like this. Why not sit with politicians and other cross section of people at least to find out a national direction for policy option and strategy to meet the present crisis? There is nothing wrong with it. We only need an open mind and high tolerance level to listen to valid criticism, if any. We guess some of the advisers have hit low mark of approval rating, either they may kindly upgrade their management pattern or voluntarily make room for the new blood in the team.

Finally, as an ordinary citizen we feel that Bangladesh needs an elected government to take over the responsibility of rehabilitation and reconstruction work in the affected areas. Sooner, the better.

There is a saying that the truth is the first victim in a war. Listening to the media news casting for the last one week or so, one is getting the

feeling that the "truth" in some cases is missing!  
A reader  
One-mail

## Retirement age

Is it possible to highlight in your paper the importance of extension of government service age limit from the present 57 to 60 or 62 years? You should agree that journalism is one of the best media for ensuring social justice, better economic growth, better atmosphere for democracy, fraternity, economic development, discipline, integrity and consistency. After liberation, you know better than me that the average life expectancy rose from 42 to 62. All Saarc countries adopted a higher service age limit except Bangladesh. In Bangladesh also the service age limit for certain jobs like judges, university professors, PSC members has been increased. But nothing has been done for the government service holders in general.

reasons unfolded in the media these days.

a) How long will this present pattern persist/continue?  
b) How can we change the present rural condition?  
c) What kind of political leaders can bring a change for the betterment of them?

The recent developments in Bangladesh have taught us like never before, the need of having the right person at the right position at all levels, national and local. We find hope to see the able, honest and hardworking team of Chief Adviser Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed at the national level.

The practice of so-called democracy in the past years, nomination of unworthy lawmakers, running of the country by corrupt political parties brutally killed the objective of our liberation war. Thanks to the intervention of our armed forces, the people, the rural people in particular, have found their lost paradise!

Though, our problems are huge in magnitude and complexities,

# Marvan quits



Marvan Atapattu has retired and with that Sri Lankan cricket loses one of its batting pillars. His batting may not have been that soothing to the eye, his innings very workman like, but most importantly, he scored runs and runs which earned his team victories.

He was their most reliable opening batsman and perhaps the greatest opening pair of Sri Lanka had been the pair of Atapattu and Jayasuriya. Jayasuriya the more aggressive, while Marvan the more serene always taking his time to settle down. But once Atapattu got accustomed to the wicket, it was very difficult to remove him from the crease. While some may argue that in today's fast-paced cricket, he does not fit into the bill for one-day cricket, but everyone will agree that for Test matches, he was the ideal batsman. In fact, I feel that he was also suitable for the one-day game because Sri Lanka has not had a stable opening pair for a while, or he could even bat one down in the one-days and steer his team through the more tenuous overs; particularly during times when his team was in danger.

His retirement does not come as much of a surprise since he was clearly dissatisfied with the board of selectors.

In the last match he scored 51 and 80 against the best team of the world - Australia. This just goes to prove his batting ability and the fact that despite his recent problems with the board, he solely concentrated on cricket. His departure is a big loss for Sri Lankan cricket.

Wasif Wahed  
Old DOHS, Dhaka

Now a non political caretaker govt. is in power. The government should look into the matter.

Md Nasiruddin  
One-mail

## Political leaders and rural development

What kind of political leaders do we need for development of rural areas in Bangladesh to achieve MDGs? Most of the people live in rural areas with inadequate healthcare facilities, lack of modern education system or limited access to scientific knowledge. Rural children are suffering from malnourishment, women are not empowered with education, health and regular income. Rural business community cannot make sustainable profit due to poor infrastructure and "just in time" relevant information.

Adult men and women from the rural areas are migrating mainly to the metropolitan cities in order to get low-paid jobs with various risks involved. Much of the international support to improve quality of life of rural population did not fully reach the target group due to

our resources are scarce, our human capacity is weak, still I believe it is possible to address the rural problems with the right kind of leadership and strategies. We need politicians with:

a) Vision, experience and wisdom of working with rural people to address local problems to create an enabling environment.  
b) Ability, motivation to work hard and work full time, with local people during and after election period, to identify local problems and to create necessary resources for appropriate solutions to existing problems.

We certainly cannot afford:  
a) Lawyers, businessmen who take politics as a part-time activity.  
b) People who are in politics because of their family connections.

c) Politicians who keep the people divided and enjoy ruling in an environment of conflict, fear & terror.

Let us all dream and act for a better rural living. A better rural life is essential for peaceful living in the cities.

Lt. Col (Retd.) Hannan Mridha  
Former director of ACC

# Reforms in political parties

The Law Adviser in his recent remark on the subject expressed dissatisfaction about the pace of reforms in the major political parties. However, he was very right in his observation that it would take time to get rid of the bad practices that have continued for so many years.

As a matter of fact we do not really see enough reasons that the political parties, mainly the bigger ones that governed the country most of the time since independence, will sincerely opt for any meaningful reforms that the people, like the Law Adviser, are demanding. As of today, we find no change or reform in the AL & the BNP except a big crack in the latter. The section of the people (their numbers being negligible compared to the total population) who actively support and work for these political parties do not want any change to introduce democracy and transparency in the parties as that would close the door of corruption on which they depend for their livelihood. I think everyone will agree that it is not necessary to spend money &

energy to go to power for serving the people because this service can be rendered any time without being a part of the party in power.

Now many people, like Mr. Shaheen Subhan of Atlanta, the USA, is asking why the CTG is going to hold the election! If election is held without any drastic reforms in the bigger political parties (mainly the AL & the BNP) then the same history will be repeated and the hard earned achievements of the CTG and the people's hope will be lost.

So let the Election Commission design a system encompassing democratic norms & practices which all political parties must adopt if they want to take part in the general election, so that only the honest and dedicated individuals are elected to parliament that will form the next government. For this to materialise, the CTG should take extra time, if needed and can even go for people's mandate through a referendum so that no one can question its legitimacy.

Engr. Md. Aminul Haque  
Khalishpur, Khulna

