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# Help Sidr victims



PHOTO: AFP

Sidr caused much damage to the world's largest mangrove forest, Sundarbans, which is situated in Bagerhat and Khulna district covering a total land area of 6,784 square kilometres. Sundarbans is a natural shield against cyclones. But a large part of the forest has been destroyed by Sidr. Cyclones are occurring more frequently in recent years. Scientists say that the reason behind it is global warming. This is a matter of great concern. More cyclone shelters should be constructed and the government and NGOs should be prepared for extending necessary relief and medical support.

We have our duties also. The students should come forward to help the people in great distress. **Rajeshwari Kokey Siddique**  
*School of Development Alternative (SODA)*  
*Dhanmondi, Dhaka*

Sidr has dealt a big blow to the nation, its GDP and the innocent peoples of the region who just survived the devastating floods three months back. It also destroyed one of the biggest world's mangrove forests "Sundarbans". We have the honesty, will power and good wishes to help

these needy people. Day before yesterday (23/11/2007), we saw on ntv 10'0 clock news and it really astonished us. Through the broker, people were being sold to owner of fishing trawlers. By the unwritten contract or deeds, these innocent poor people have to do fishing if their co-workers die in the sea. It's also showed how they are being tortured and kept starving and not getting their wages! Is there anybody or authority or government agency to look into the matter?  
**W. Islam**  
*Uttara, Dhaka*

## Hasina asks for justice

I have reluctantly read Hasina's deliberations with the enquiry team where she asked for justice to the 21 August grenade attack. We fully agree with her but still wonder why she could not mete out justice to all the people who were killed while she was in power and when she was out of power, especially due to her party's destructive activities and actions, such as hartal.

## Story of Hasan

"No one believed there would be a real cyclone. Villagers stayed in the village till 10:00pm, fighting to save their houses. When the houses started falling one by one, people started marching towards the cyclone centre forming a long line fighting the strong wind. I was carrying my infant in one hand and with the other hand I he was guiding my little niece. At one point I found my nephew Hasan following me to heels. As I had two kids to take care with my two hands, I could not look after Hasan. Forceful wind and incessant rain made everyone nervous. As soon we walked on the dam, a strong current of water wrenched away my niece from my hand. When I

was looking right and left for my niece, I found Hasan was floating on the water. With one hand Hasan held a broken tree and in his other hand was my niece. When I got close to Hasan he said 'Uncle, my father is not with me, please do not leave me here, take me with you'. I assured Hasan that I would not leave him. We started walking again and soon we could see the cyclone centre just about 200 yards ahead of us. Suddenly something shook me violently and I was afloat. I took control, hugged the kids to my bosom and looked back for Hasan; he was not there. Next moment my eyes were set at a broken part of the dam. There was a whirling current of water and Hasan was in the eye of the whirl going down. I went to the cyclone centre, kept the two kids there and went back to the broken part of the dam to look for Hasan. I searched desperately for Hasan but could not find him, he was gone. Oh, if only I tied Hasan with me by a rope!" says Hasan's uncle Badsha while recalling the dark chapter of the Sidr night of 15 November 2007. At this point he threw a question at me "Sir you are educated, you have studied a lot and have built this dam, still why does the dam break down? Can you not build a dam which will not collapse even during the mightiest cyclone or flood?"

Hasan's dead body was found on Saturday (17th November). Hasan's father came back from the sea the same day, but Hasan did not need a father anymore. Hasan had an inseparable relationship with his mother. He handed over his 9-month old brother Saiful to his mother and Morium to his grandmother during the cyclone. His mother asked "How will you go?" Hasan answered "Am I not grown up, an 11-year old man?" Hasan's mother regrets Hasan would not have died if they had taken shelter in the cyclone centre in time. Hasan's family is now standing on debris. Local Union Parishad Chairman Hiron Kazi donated Tk.10,000 to Hasan's family. Probably more support will be available for this family, but Hasan who was lost in the chasm of the dam, will he ever come back to comfort his mother? Hasan's family lives in Char Najib village of Kalapara. It is in Patuakhali district in southern Bangladesh. Hasan's father was trapped in the sea during the cyclone. **Dilir Akhtar Khan**  
*MBA (IBA)*  
*Student of MDS (Master of Development Studies)*  
*Brac University, Dhaka*

## Comments

I would like to thank The Daily Star for publishing the article "Time to rethink" by Afroza Ahmed regarding the next steps on handling the catastrophe of cyclone Sidr. Nothing can replace the necessity of a good emergency management plan to handle a post-disaster situation. For disasters like Sidr, the necessity of a buffer zone along the coastal line banning permanent human settlement is of extreme importance. It is also necessary to identify and designate the coastal land zoning and introduce regulations for Coastal Zone Management (CZM). Also the multiple uses of resources like the writer has described is important. Therefore, instead of making cyclone shelters serving only one purpose, construction of community facilities that can be used as cyclone centres when necessary - will be more worthwhile in terms of infrastructure. Given that global warming is becoming more and more a threat for the world, Bangladesh will see more disasters in the coming years. Since we can't control the catastrophe, we must be ready to handle when it hits us. A proper plan and its implementation is a must for our survival. **Ferdouse Oneza, AICP**  
*Senior Planner*  
*City of Kennewick, WA, USA*

## A suggestion

In my roller coaster ride through life, of all my successes, our freedom struggle is the most pleasing experience, where I had the opportunity to take part. It is extremely satisfying that, the country appears to be united today, on the question of trial of the war criminals. There is a debate at the moment in the country, about the timing of conducting that trial. The caretaker government seems to be reluctant to conduct that. I believe they should not be pressed to do that. They are not our representatives, none of the advisers are known to have participated directly in that great war, and the most disturbing is that, one of them very clearly appears to be against such trials. We will not be sure about the sincerity of the prosecution if that adviser is entrusted to appoint those prosecutors. The whole noble exercise may fall flat. Rather, it will be better to call upon the Election Commission to abide by their own draft reform proposals and the directions laid down in the Constitution and in the Special Powers Act; if they do so, then they CAN NOT and SHOULD NOT accord registration to the Jamaat, the rest should be left to the elected government. If the EC does so, and the Jamaat is prevented from taking part in the elections, then the ideal condition will be created for such trials. **Dr. M. Hussain**  
*One-mail*

## Situation in Pakistan

The promulgation of the amendments to the Army Act is alarming. These amendments give wide powers to military courts. Civilians can be tried for a number of offences including for expressing views that citizens of Pakistan comprise of more than one nationality by military courts. Antiquated laws that had lost their teeth through judicial reviews are now being resurrected and made punishable to be tried by the military. Trials will not be open to public hearings; lawyers will only be allowed to attend the accused in the capacity of a friend. Investigation will be carried out by military personal and ordinary rules of evidence will not apply. In the past offences under the Prevention of Anti-National Activities Act were tried by a specially constituted tribunal headed by a Judge of the High Court. The presiding judge was appointed in consultation with the Chief Justice of that court. The Anti-National Activities Act as well as several other offences now to be tried by military courts has remained controversial. Lawyers and leaders of civil society vehemently denounced them for being oppressive. The government had powers to detain any person under the Security of Pakistan Act, 1952 but a Review Board consisting of judges of the Supreme and High Courts examined the grounds of such detentions. The amendments made under the Army Act are blatantly violating all norms of human rights and the Constitution of Pakistan. In order to settle scores with lawyers, human rights activists and defiant journalists the law is given effect from January 2003. This also allows the government to legitimise the illegal acts of disappearances carried out by the intelligence agencies with impunity. It may be recalled that the Supreme Court of Pakistan was hearing a number of petitions concerning several individuals who had been picked up by state agents, tortured and kept in clandestine detention centres. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan had also filed a fundamental rights petition on behalf of 198 persons. On the intervention of the Supreme Court 99 were released. General Musharraf in a public statement defended the government. He assured the people that

none of those who had gone missing were picked up by the government but had voluntarily gone for jihad. This was yet another cruel distortion by the General. Perhaps a handful of those who disappeared may have gone 'jihading' but not one person on the Commission's list was even accused of al-Qaeda style terrorism. A large majority were young secular minded Baloch nationalists. The statements of a number of them, who reappeared, including a few journalists, only exposed the horror of the excesses of the security forces. The Attorney General justified these amendments on the grounds that these were essential for combating terrorism and that similar laws also exist in the United Kingdom and the USA. Firstly, two wrongs will never make right. Secondly, the UK and the USA have an independent judiciary that has also struck down provisions of the Patriot Act. The military courts in the UK or the USA do not try their own citizens. Moreover, journalists, lawyers and activists in the UK or the US have not been charged for terrorism or treason. In Pakistan, police have filed reports accusing several lawyers and activists of terrorism. There are at least three FIRs against me under the Terrorist Act. Judges of superior courts are not under house arrest in either the UK or the US. There is little doubt that the

Musharraf regime is no mood to change course. They want absolute power. They will tolerate no dissent and will continue to use the terrorist card to keep the international community at bay. How long will the bluff and a state of self-denial work? (Asma Jahangir is in detention in her house). For more information on the happenings in Pakistan, please visit the Rapid Response Alert section on our website [www.southasianrights.org](http://www.southasianrights.org)  
**Irfath**  
*coordinator*  
*South Asians for Human Rights*

## Road accidents

Every year thousands of people are facing road accidents. But successive governments have done little to prevent such accidents. Is it not a serious issue? How long will these continue? It is my earnest request to the Chief Adviser to cast a serious look at this matter. Stern measures should be taken against those bus-drivers and helpers who have "eaten up" their conscience. It is time to wake up. **Pradip Das**  
*Lecturer in English, BHPI*  
*CRP, Savar*

## Relief operations

Frankly speaking, the government's mobilisation of relief activ-

ities and its handling of relief goods in the hurricane affected areas has fallen short of public expectations. Every day we see in print/electronic media how these vulnerable people are crying for help whenever they see someone. Now there is a growing danger of the outbreak of waterborne diseases due to non-availability of potable water. The situation may take a serious turn if proper care is not taken. The situation must be tackled with the participation of people from all walks of life. In order to do that I have a suggestion - I think the government should right away invite the political parties and ask them to conduct and organise relief related works. This is because of the fact that we have seen that it is the political parties which have effectively handled many natural calamities in the past. The reason behind their successful handling of the situation is that these political parties have vast manpower and resources. I think the government should give a serious thought about engaging political parties in conducting the much needed relief operations without putting any string to it in order to save the millions of unfortunate people who are depending on us and desperately looking for help. **Humayun Hyder**  
*Zigatola, Dhaka*

# Trial of Pol Pot's associates

Key Khmer Rouge figures charged: Ieng Sary has repeatedly denied responsibility for any crimes. Cambodian authorities have arrested two leading figures from the notorious 1970s Khmer Rouge regime and charged them with crimes against humanity. Former Foreign Minister Ieng Sary and his wife, Ieng Thirith, were taken into custody in the capital, Phnom Penh. The pair, who deny any wrongdoing, are due to appear at a UN-backed genocide tribunal on Wednesday. The brutal Maoist regime, which ruled between 1975 and 1979, is blamed for more than one million deaths. A tribunal was established last year to bring the surviving leaders to the dock. "Today Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith have been arrested in execution of an arrest warrant... for crimes against humanity and war crimes as regards Ieng Sary and for crimes against humanity concerning Ieng Thirith," a statement from the tribunal said.



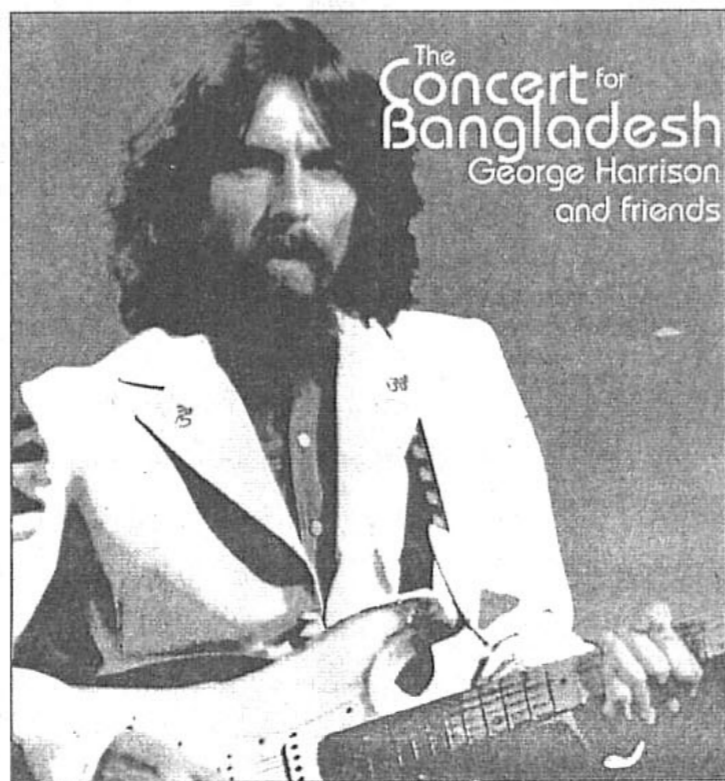
Purge of intellectuals: Police surrounded the couple's Phnom Penh house early in the morning. They searched the house for three hours and then drove Ieng Sary and his wife to the tribunal in a convoy of vehicles. The couple, who have been living freely in the Cambodian capital for more than 10 years, were key members of the Khmer Rouge leadership. Ieng Sary was Pol Pot's brother-in-law - his wife's sister was married to the Khmer Rouge founder. His wife, Ieng Thirith, was the Khmer Rouge's social affairs minister. As foreign minister, he was often the only point of contact between Cambodia's rulers and the outside world. He was responsible for convincing many educated Cambodians who had fled the Khmer Rouge to return to help rebuild the country. Many were then tortured and executed as part of the purge of intellectuals, some of them diplomats from his own office. Prosecutors for the tribunal have said there is evidence of Ieng Sary's participation in crimes, including planning, directing and co-ordinating forced labour

and unlawful killings. Ieng Sary has repeatedly denied the charges. In 1996 he became the first senior leader from the Maoist regime to defect and as a result was granted a royal pardon. But analysts say the validity of that agreement looks set to be tested with his arrest by the court. Ageing leaders Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith are the third and fourth people to be targeted by the tribunal. In September, Pol Pot's second-in command, 82-year-old Nuon Chea, was charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity. Two months before that, Kang Kek Ieu - or Duch - the head of the notorious Tuol Sleng prison, was charged with crimes against humanity. Their trials, before a team of Cambodian and international judges, are expected to start in 2008. Other top leaders are already dead. Pol Pot died in 1998 and Ta Mok - the regime's military commander and one of his most ruthless henchmen - died in July 2006. **Abdul Momen**  
*One-mail*

# George Harrison

The late Beatle, George Harrison, is long remembered by those of us of a certain age for his contributions not only to music but also to the struggle of our people for independence. In 1971, at the behest of his friend, the great sitarist Ravi Shankar, Harrison organised the Concert for Bangladesh at Madison Square Garden in New York City. He invited his famous rock star friends to participate, including such legends as Bob Dylan and Eric Clapton, and the concert was a resounding success. Proceeds of the concert and the best-selling album that was subsequently released, and continues to sell, was for the people of Bangladesh and their struggle for liberation.

All these years later, and despite the death of George Harrison himself, his legacy to this nation lives on. The George Harrison Fund for Unicef has announced a donation of 4.5 lakh dollars for the ravaged victims of cyclone Sidr. At the time of his death, Bangladesh had still not formally recognised the contribution of this legendary musician to our nation's struggles. It seems to me that this recognition is long overdue, and that the government should posthumously honour George Harrison for what he has done for us and what is still being done in his name. **Syed Hamde Ali**  
*The Nawab Palace*  
*Bogra*



# Underground railway or elevated expressway?

We have spent crores of taka from our public exchequer for construction of many overhead crossings, underground passages and flyovers. We have earmarked VIP roads and made one-way road traffic in various areas of Dhaka city. We have also decided to build a giant flyover from Jatrabari to Gulistan, the work of which is temporarily suspended. But unfortunately we have not been able to make any fruitful progress in overcoming our road traffic hazards, chaos and gridlock in road traffic. We now understand that our authorities concerned are contemplating to build an underground railway or elevated expressway to ease our problems. We would like to request our authorities concerned to examine the following matters seriously and sincerely before arriving at a final decision on the construction of under-

ground railway or elevated expressway 1. We do not have an effective master plan for Dhaka city. 2. Shortage of electricity is acute in Dhaka. 3. If elevated expressway or underground railway starts operating, would millions of vehicles buses, cars, trucks, rickshaws and pushcarts vanish and there would be no road traffic jam? Have we ever thought, examined or found out the real cause of jams and gridlock in road traffic in Dhaka? The area of Dhaka city is very small, people are living in crowded and congested areas. The roads and streets are narrow, zigzag and serpentine-like and filled with parking of vehicles, hawkers and vendors and goods and commodities of shopkeepers. Above all, there are thousands of road crossings, road corners, road squares and road junctions in Dhaka city.

Let us work out, find out and make a survey as to how many times we are required to stop here and there, wait and waste our time when we travel by any type of vehicle from one place to another, say from Mirpur to Motijheel C/A, Gulistan to Airport, Shantinagar to Sadarghat, Hatkhola to Azimpur, Gulshan to Sadarghat and so and so forth. Why don't we consider construction of some one or two-storied over-bridges at some important and busy road squares, road junctions say at Farm Gate, Bangla Motors, Naya Paltan, New Market, Gulshan Market, Hatkhola, Mouchak, High Court, Maghbazar etc., for movement of motor vehicles to move round the clock without falling into the gridlock of road traffic? **O H Kabir**  
*Wari, Dhaka*