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Cyclone Aila



ADAM DRUKENS

Cyclone Aila has proved yet again how ill-prepared we are. It's either that, or we really need to wake up as should those who call the shots. "Being aware" and "being prepared" is one thing both of which we grossly lack, obviously. Add to that "down-playing" the situation - as did the Minister of Food and Disaster Management when (according to a report in The Daily Star of 28 May 2009 under the caption "Over 1,100 missing in Bagerhat, Bhola") the day after the cyclone he declared that the death toll would not cross 100 confidently adding that there might be only 10 or 12 people missing!

Now the numbers don't match up! In a country where communication with the backwaters is grossly lacking, he should have waited for more accurate numbers.

Dr. C. Zaman
Ottawa, Canada

Now it is going to be a week after the cyclone Aila hit the coast of Bangladesh. Hundreds of people died, thousands are injured and homeless. People are dying from diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases. The situation is almost like the previous SIDR. Thousands of people need immediate relief. But we don't see any relief activities from not only the govt but also other sectors. The army is working there but they alone cannot handle the situation. People from all over the country should come forward. Business enterprises should shoulder their corporate social responsibility by helping them. The govt. should have declared an emergency.

The relief operations have to be accelerated before more people die.

Arup Ratan Paul
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Our waterways

The DS has over the years carried out many investigative reports, but none as vital or as noble as the current campaign to save our waterways. Our lives depend on fresh water but it seems our 'leaders' are powerless to stop the onslaught or maybe they themselves are part of it.

The illegal occupation and pollution of the waterways is like thrombosis of our arteries and slow poisoning of our vital organs and the result will invariably be fatal not only for Dhaka but the whole of Bangladesh and its 150 million people if not checked immediately. This calls for quick and decisive action that cannot be left to the mercies of impotent ministries and departments. What is necessary is surgical implementation of existing laws by a duly empowered, fully autonomous select body duly authorized to carry out its mandate without any deviation on account of political pressure, vague rules, redundant laws etc. We, as well as our politicians, have to decide immediately, whether a legal imbroglio and narrow vested interests are more important or the very lives of all our citizens. There is such an example on record although it does not compare in magnitude with the present throttling of our waterways.

In 1960, Queen Elizabeth was due to visit Bangladesh and Dacca was being refurbished to accord a fitting welcome to her. The road from

Tejgaon Airport to Shahbagh was narrow and pot-holed, meandering through Karwan Bazar with all its jams and stink and not fit at all to receive a queen. A broad, tree lined avenue was in the Master Plan, but its implementation was bogged down by court cases, compensation claims and dozens of writs. With just a few weeks left, the matter was brought to the attention of the then Governor, Gen Azam Khan.

Gen Azam is reported to have asked just one question "Is this road in the Master Plan?" When this was confirmed, he ordered the DIT (or was it the DMC then) to assemble all their bulldozers and crew at both ends of the proposed road. Early next morning, he is said to have flagged off the wrecking machinery himself. In a matter of days the present Airport Road was completed and the houses on both sides were ordered to be repaired and painted. No doubt the court cases are still being fought to the detriment of the lawyers, but Dhaka got a trunk road that has given invaluable service now for 50 years.

Similarly, if Dhaka and indeed Bangladesh is to survive and prosper, the following remedies need to be taken in hand immediately by the afore-mentioned select body.

1. Demarcate all the rivers, lakes, haors, beels, canals etc as per their ORIGINAL boundaries clearly shown in authoritative maps prior to 1971.

2. Demolish all structures intruding beyond these boundaries.

3. Dredge all filled-in portions and remove the earth restoring the waterways to their original boundaries.

4. Remove and block all channels, pipes, culverts etc carrying untreated sewage, effluent and waste from factories, industries, houses etc to all waterways. To save lives, close down and fine the polluters without mercy.

5. Remove all temporary huts, bustees and slum dwellings within 50 metres of all waterways, without any exit for waste to the waterway.

6. Starting with the Buriganga, Sitalakha, Balu, Turag, Dhaleshwari and Dhaka's internal lakes, dredge all waterways to remove the sludge and deepen the channels as before.

7. Cost of 2, 3 and 4 are to be borne by those who have illegally occupied, filled in and polluted the waterways.

I realize this will be a mammoth task, costing a pretty penny but it has to be done as quickly as possible. In any case do we have a choice?

Sikander Ahmed
Niketon, Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Digital or educated Bangladesh?

Our government wants to build a Digital Bangladesh within 2021. Is this whole concept of digital Bangladesh only about getting fastest Internet on our cell phones

and computer? Who are these people that are going to be part of this digital Bangladesh? Is this only a segmented group of people who know the meaning and the use of it or should it be for everyone starting from the micro level? What is the meaning of this high promotion if everyone in our country is not part of it?

Our government is only emphasizing Digital Bangladesh, which will rather or somehow be there in future with the private sector flourishing if the government gives full support. Why does not the government build a proper Educated Bangladesh within the year 2021 by taking a proper and strong initiative?

It is not possible to create a digital Bangladesh without a strong educational backbone. Without education it is not going to be a digital Bangladesh rather it is going to be a Digital Group of public. The government should focus more on development from the grassroots, which will also secure the job of the immigrant workers. These workers can even apply for something better if they have adequate knowledge.

The need of Internet is surely there but the whole concept of Digital Bangladesh is baseless if the government cannot ensure education, which will make us stronger among the nations.

Sarah Rahman
East Delta University
Chittagong

Sad truth

Article 39 of the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees the freedom of thought and action. But in the last two years, the general people could not enjoy their fundamental rights, because democracy was not active. People say it was an army-backed government. Though Mr. Iajuddin was the elected president of a democratic country, he declared the emergency in an improper way. After a long time, Mr. Iajuddin has come back and raised a lot of questions through his recent comments. Last Sunday, he was interviewed by a private channel. But he could not say anything convincing!

Md. Nur Nobi
Student of EEE
Stanford University
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Chittagong arms haul

The whole nation must have been stunned at the news of the big arms haul in Chittagong during the BNP-Jamaat rule. They miserably failed to probe the incident and bring the ring leader behind the biggest ever arms smuggling case to book. Rather, they tried to bury it. Now with the coming of the AL led grand alliance to power, they started anew to reinvestigate the case and every day new things are coming to public view.

How could the BNP led government fail to handle the issue properly when it had such bearing on national security?

Abdul Mannan Howlader
One-mail

Greenhouse Effect

Greenhouse gases are the components of the atmosphere that contribute to the Greenhouse Effect. The greenhouse gases are naturally occurring and include carbon dioxide, methane, water vapour, chlorofluorocarbons and other trace chemicals. But it is now known that man-made chemicals have caused a massive build-up of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere.

The world is getting warmer. The increase in global warming is caused by increased amounts of carbon dioxide around the earth. Most experts believe that the Greenhouse Effect is the likely cause of global warming. Indeed, greenhouse gases are the contributors to Greenhouse Effect and the ultimate result is 'global warming' and due to global warming several other effects on the environment have been identified such as sea level rise.

The amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is increasing steadily. The issue has to be handled efficiently for the survival of mankind.

AKM Anisul Haque
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Metropolitan University
Sylhet

In the name of democracy...

Time and time again, we, the general citizens are being reminded by the politicians and their leaders/activists, that DEMOCRACY means we should get prepared to witness street agitation, rampant damage to public and private properties, party meetings blocking the busiest thoroughfares if necessary, etc. etc. The list is endless. These fine acts of politics were carried out again and again by whoever belonged to the opposition party. And we, the taxpayers, were compelled to watch helplessly how the drama unfolded in the name of democracy. We should remember that they hold the supreme power to close down the roads, while we pay the taxes, they have the right to vandalise anything anywhere, while we toil hard to earn those. So, what is our standing today? I guess, back to the time where democracy is being interpreted in these politicians' own terms, not by what we learn from the constitution. Nothing has changed, the thinking patterns of the politicians, their behaviour, their outrageous actions! On Sunday, there was a scuffle between police and the leaders of BNP, over the issue of submitting a memorandum to the DC. But to protest the police actions, what Mr. Amanullah Aman said to the rally, right in the presence of District BNP President, Barrister Nazmul Huda, was indeed mind-blowing. He literally declared that if necessary, they would lay a total siege to the whole nation!

Tariq Ahmed
One-mail

Land grabbing

I have been following the reports in The Daily Star on land grabbing from the rivers and water bodies in and around the city. I really appreciate this campaign and want to contribute as a citizen of this country.

On the southern most point where road no 34 is joined to the concrete ramp of the bridge approach, if one takes a look across to the other side, he will see on the opposite shore a mound of red soil jutting out of the water more than ten feet. Notice a square platform of debris at the water level around the mound. From this platform people crossing the lake now take the country boats that ferry them to and from Banani/Gulshan. Note the four bamboo pole marking an area of about 30m by 15/20m that will be filled up.

Down south from the filling area described in para one, note the row of tin shed houses that jut out, built on similar fillings. This area would be about 100 meters long and 12/15 meters wide. The sides are shored up with cement bags filled with soil. I have taken some snaps with my mobile phone while the work of filling up was going on in the morning. It is open for everybody to view. The workers or the people who are dishing out the cost of the filling are doing it out in the open as if they have Rajuk permission and are engaged on sanctioned development work.

M.A.A. Zakariah
One-mail

Encroachers

The DS has printed many photos (it did earlier also) along with detailed news on land encroachment by some unscrupulous developers or plot sellers. Those encroachers are filling up canals, rivers in and around the capital city under the very nose of the law enforcers. In most of the cases, the govt high ups are behind these plots. Though the illegal act has been continuing for a long time, the authorities concerned have not taken any punitive action against land grabbers. Already, Dhaka city is facing the threat of an environmental disaster.

To save Dhaka, urgent and stringent measures have to be taken to rein in the encroachers.

Md Zonaid Emran
Dept. of Political Science
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Politicians and people

Yes, 1/11 has taught us that the ultimate power is the people and the politicians are the ultimate instrument to run the country. This is a fact and everyone knows that politicians will have to go to the people to get the mandate for a specific time to sit at the helm and serve the people. It is a cycle of change in the democratic norms and all politicians should not only believe it, but they should also mentally accept this fact. This system is followed in all the democratic countries in the world.

Bangladesh is a new country and democracy in this country is still developing. We believe, since it has started somewhere, it will grow and attain maturity in the coming days. After all, the process has started and the people are getting used to the system gradually. The 29 Dec'08 election has given us enough proof that the people of this country have already learnt a lot.

But some politicians have not learnt anything yet, and believe that the people of this country are blind supporters of them. They still believe that there is none other than them who could get public support and be elected to run "their" (those politicians') country. They also believe that this country belongs to them as their leader proclaimed independence and earned the inherent right to administer it for generations.

Begum Khaleda Zia has said that the people voted for her and her party in the 29 Dec'08 election but certain quarters with the help of some outside countries changed the results and the present government is the result of an international conspiracy and this government is duty bound to serve the interests of those countries who brought it to power. She further said that the present government was selling out the state's interest by compromising security and sovereignty of the country.

As she called the intellectuals to speak against the present government, I call upon the intellectuals to please tell Begum Khaleda Zia that there are other people in this country who are also patriotic and she is not the only one who loves Bangladesh.

Shafiqul Islam, NY

Finance minister's comment

Most of the finance minister's comments are innocent and repetitive. But his recent comment on imposition of high taxes on reconditioned cars has created a havoc in the market. Prices jumped up creating a bonanza for importers and dealers. As I visited the market to purchase a car for my son, I found the prices up by 2 to 5 lakh.

The finance minister has willingly or unwillingly put the purchasers in trouble. Was it right to reveal such sensitive information to the press which is supposed to be submitted in parliament as part of national budget?

M. Sanaul Huq
Uttara Model Town
Dhaka

Good news

It is great news that I read in the Prothom Alo regarding public-private participation in the upcoming budget. As a student of economics, I think that it is a dire need, as Bangladesh is a developing country and here a lot of investment is needed for further development, especially in the field of infrastructure development such as roads, seaports, land ports, airports, railways, power generation etc. As Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world and every budget has to be shown as deficit budget, which is one kind of social burden, for meeting up these the government has to take loans from internal and external agencies with high interest rates. So, the role of the private entrepreneurs could come in handy as far as our development programmes are concerned.

Subir Kumar Das
Economics Discipline
Khulna University

SSC results

The SSC results have been published. Needless to mention that the students who achieved brilliant results in their first public exams could do so because of the efforts of their parents, teachers and the students themselves.

But it is a matter of great regret that most of the brilliant students will not get admission in the colleges of their choice.

The government should address the issue in right earnest.

Aiman Bin Shaofiqul Hamid
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International Islamic University Chittagong



BAYAZID AKTER / DRUKENS

Budget and the disabled

According to World Health Organisation, about 1.5 crore or 10 percent of the total population is disabled in Bangladesh. Of them, more than seven percent are physically disabled and the remaining intellectually challenged.

Statistics show that only one in 100 persons with a disability in our country get a chance for higher education.

Most of the disabled persons in our country are illiterate. The illiterate persons cannot initiate as well as participate in any disciplined, cooperative and community based development programme. More than half the disabled persons live under poverty line. Due to their economic deprivation, they are being deprived in all other spheres of life. Our population treat their subhuman life as their fate. They tend to avoid novelty and change. They do not show enthusiasm about development initiatives.

Disabled persons are socially ignored. They are considered a burden for their family. So, people



generally do not tend to welcome a disabled child in their family. They are culturally presented as subordinate to others. Due to their lack of economic activities, the majority of the disabled persons are economically dependent on others. Such dependence on others is mainly responsible for their disempowerment.

We cordially request our Honourable Finance Minister to provide the maximum budgetary allocations for the vulnerable, challenged and disadvantaged people, so that they can lead a better life.

Md. Nur-e-Alam Siddique
Faculty of Agriculture
Hajee Mohammad Danesh
Science & Technology University
Dinajpur

Two major issues

I congratulate this Awami League government for initiating the process of trial of 1971 war criminals and their local collaborators. No government had in the last 38 years even mentioned it ever.

At least, the AL could garner winning votes from the new voters with its advertising gimmicks like--digital Bangladesh, trial of war criminals and blah..blah..blah. Let's take a deep look into the AL's two major commitments. It will not be possible to turn this half clad and half fed country of millions into a so-called digital one within next 25 years. Automating all the government offices and grooming up officers to use it properly will take 10 years or more. You cannot teach old dogs new tricks. Maybe I am underestimating the commitment of the AL. The party can throw computers to each primary school--even it can give computers to every household. Every household will have digital cameras, TVs, etc. What it would not be able to provide with those cool

things is--power to run those electronic gadgets. To tap the hidden energy of coal, one or two more 'Kansat' have to be re-enacted. But let us hope for the best.

For the second major commitment, one thing has become clear to me that the period of five years is very short for completing the trial of war criminals. I voted for the AL. I have every right to demand from the party a clear course of action plan to achieve these goals.

Asif Khan
Circular Road, Dhanmondi
Dhaka

Terrible lapse

My heart bleeds to learn the news that an innocent boy, Sonjoy, was pushed into coma due to a mistake on the part of nurses in a hospital.

Such carelessness and poor medicare is not acceptable. The issue deserves a closer look.

Md. Zahidul Islam Zibon
Dept. of English
International Islamic
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Poor mango production

Mango production reportedly would decline by 35 to 40 per cent in Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj districts this year due to prolonged drought and other unfavourable weather conditions such as nor'westers or storms.

Experts at the Regional Horticulture Research Station, Chapainawabganj, mentioned that untimely rain caused the vegetative growth of trees with new leaves hampering their productive growth. Then the untimely budding of

mango trees due to fluctuation of temperature as well as knocking down by seasonal storms of green mangoes have been responsible for poor yield.

The mango is the king of fruits. So we feel research work should be carried on in order to overcome the adverse impact of climate change on mango production.

Habibur Rashid Ismail
Jamea Rahmania Fadi Madrasa
Chittagong



PHOTO: ANSUL RAHMAN