

INTERNATIONAL DISASTER REDUCTION DAY

Partnering for safer cities



Over 28,000 members of union and upazila disaster management committees were trained, supporting decentralised management of the national disaster system. 644 unions across the 16 most disaster vulnerable districts in Bangladesh undertook systematic risk assessments and developed corresponding action plans, ready for integration into local level development planning.

Community-based risk reduction projects were funded across 381 unions. Bangladesh Meteorological Department and the Cyclone Preparedness Programme were significantly upgraded through technical support and equipment. And 22 public training and academic institutions are now integrating disaster management into their curricula, educating the disaster managers of tomorrow.

As such, CDMP has made great strides in supporting the achievement of the government's disaster management vision "to reduce the risk of people, especially the poor and the disadvantaged from the effects of natural, environmental and human induced hazards to a manageable and acceptable humanitarian level, and to have in place an efficient emergency response management system."

Yet, while much has been done, this year's theme for the Day, "Making Cities Resilient: My city is getting ready," reminds us that the challenge of fully attaining this goal remains formidable, particularly in urban risk reduction. Dhaka, already home to more than 13 million people, is growing at 4% a year, much of which is unplanned.

Disaster vulnerabilities in our urban centres are clear and immediate, and they pose special challenges. The earthquake felt in Dhaka and surrounding areas on the eve of Eid-ul-Fitr reminded us all of this, but urban risk is not limited to earthquakes. We need to remain committed to a multi-hazard approach to urban risk reduction that will see all of our cities safer in the long run.

In recognition of this, CDMP has been providing targeted support for urban risk management to the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence, and the Geological Survey of Bangladesh. For the first time ever, geological fault lines are being studied in Bangladesh, and this is providing policy-makers with the data to assess earthquake risks, and put appropriate contingency plans in place.

Building on this, UNDP together with the financial support of DFID, the EU, and the governments of Norway, Sweden and Australia have invested \$69 million in a second phase of CDMP. From 2010-2015, this expanded partnership will build on the successes and learning of the first phase, helping to develop strong

and professional national institutions and strengthen the management and coordination capacity within and across these; reduce the risks to rural populations and empower them; disaster-proof development funding across nine partner government ministries; and effectively manage community level adaptation to disaster risks from climate change.

The second phase will also see continued support to the government of Bangladesh in reducing the risks for urban communities (with a focus on the extremely poor), including among others, supporting and training a network of 62,000 urban volunteers; developing urban community risk assessments and risk reduction plans in many slums; and creating ward-based earthquake contingency plans for urban centres.

Much hard work is ahead of us. Bangladesh is not yet ready for a major urban disaster. Much more needs to be done to overcome the lack of inter-agency engagement on disaster preparedness and response planning; to address unplanned urban growth; to bolster technical and manpower of city development authorities; to tackle the limitations of the fire service to adequately respond; to enforce building codes and integrate disaster vulnerability considerations into the approval processes; not to mention the retrofitting of existing structural risks, such as in Old Dhaka or essential infrastructure like hospitals and schools. It is a large and daunting task.

Yet, the key to sustainable success will be found in us all working together. Responsibility for risk reduction does not lie with the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, or even the government, alone. We can, and should, all play a part in improving this situation -- from the concerned authorities to households in slums; from development partners to the private sector developers, we must all shoulder part of this task.

There is no doubt that Bangladesh can overcome these challenges. One only has to look back at the 1971 cyclone which took the lives of over 500,000 people and caused untold misery and damage. Today, coastal Bangladesh has an established and growing number of multi-purpose cyclone shelters, an integrated Early Warning System, and a clear institutional management arrangement through the Standing Orders on Disaster. Bangladesh's success in rural and coastal risk reduction can be replicated. Urban risk reduction is achievable.

Stefan Priesner is UNDP Bangladesh's Country Director and UNDP Resident Representative.

STEFAN PRIESNER

ONE of the often hidden successes in Bangladesh over the last 30 years is the remarkable achievements recorded in the disaster management field, and more recently in disaster risk reduction. The devastating reality of Bangladesh's disaster vulnerability is not hidden. As the tragic events of the Nimtoli fires earlier this year, or the comparatively minor flooding of recent days show us, the threats are real, often unexpected, and usually affect the most vulnerable the worst.

But the people of Bangladesh and successive governments have affirmed their commitment to addressing these threats, and have made tremendous progress as the establishment of a dedicated ministry, the development of the Standing Orders on Disaster, and the creation of the Cyclone Preparedness Programme -- a 50,000 strong team of volunteers -- so clearly illustrate.

The International Day for Disaster Reduction provides us with the opportunity to reflect on how far we have come, and also to consider the challenges that remain. UNDP is proud to have stood with Bangladesh as this country has become a global leader in disaster management and risk reduction. Particularly significant has been the partnership forged with the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management in the development and implementation of the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP).

CDMP supported the paradigm shift from disaster response to disaster risk reduction. This meant building capacity of stakeholders at all levels to proactively prepare for the contingencies of multiple hazards in addition to reacting when disaster strikes. From 2004 to 2009, UNDP, with the financial support of DFID and the EU, provided the first phase of technical support, enabling the ministry to take a global lead in disaster management.

Turkey: No Longer the sick man of Europe



When the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923, some European politicians used to describe it as the sick man of Europe. No wonder, today many Turks feel great pride in describing their country as "the only healthy man" of Europe.

CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM

TURKEY is so much in the news these days in Spain -- partly because of the special relationship between Spanish Prime Minister Rodriguez Zapatero and Prime Minister Recep Erdogan of Turkey as co sponsors of the alliance of civilisations initiative (as opposed to Huntington's clash of civilisations theory) -- that I have been meaning to write a column on this great country for some time, and I am glad that finally I have got around to it.

There are many reasons why Turkey is in the limelight -- its rising status as a regional power in a strategically important part of the world, its role in defending the Palestinian cause, its growing economic clout and of course, its recent referendum.

Let me start with the referendum, which will certainly be remembered as a landmark event in the history of modern Turkey. Although ostensibly the referendum was about certain constitutional changes, the real issue was

something much more fundamental to Turkey's identity and future.

Whether the Turks wanted a real democracy in which the will of the people would be paramount, or a kind of guided democracy in which the military and their allies in the judicial establishment would control the destiny of the nation, was at the heart of the referendum.

The current constitution was imposed by the military after a coup in 1980. The military has always considered itself as the self-appointed guardian of Turkish democracy and Kemalist secularism. It is worth remembering here that during the last fifty years, there have been three military coups with the consequent loss of life and liberty.

It is good news for Turkey that M. Erdogan won the referendum by a huge majority. Besides limiting the influence of the military in politics, parliament will now be able to end the unholy alliance between the judiciary and the military by overhauling the judiciary.

Under the 1980 constitution, the military

courts could try the civilians. Now, the military courts will lose this right. What is even more important is that military officers will lose their immunity. From now on, civilian courts will have the power to try military officers plotting coups.

In an effort to advance individual rights, for the first time in Turkish democracy, individuals will have the right to file cases in the Constitutional Court. In order to remedy the discrimination suffered by the women for decades, affirmative action programmes will be introduced.

Until now senior judges of the judicial establishment have, with the connivance of the military, interfered in the running of a free and open democratic system by arbitrarily banning political parties. (Mr. Erdogan's own party, which has just won the referendum by a huge majority, was about to be banned in 2008 on flimsy allegations of being an Islamist party.)

Now Parliament will participate in appointing members of the Supreme Board of Prosecutors and Judges. In order to end the monopoly of power in the hands of the so-called Kemalist judges in the Constitutional Court, the president and Parliament of the country will have the powers to expand the membership of this court. (In Spain, the senate, at the recommendation of the political parties, appoints Constitutional Court judges.)

Now party closures will have to be approved by Parliament. I hope that, while banning political parties or individual candidates, the judges and Parliament members will make a distinction between one's religion and one's political ideology. A Muslim is someone who practises Islam as his religion and he should be free to do so. An Islamist politician is someone who is committed to putting Islam into politics, and that is what goes against secularism. The so-called Kemalist secularists and the CHP (the opposition party) would do well to take note of this difference.

In this context, the Kemalists should also remember that if their objective is to have a real democracy in Turkey, it is fundamental that they respect the rights of the Kurdish minority within the Turkish Republic. Banning Kurdish political parties will not resolve the problem. No democracy is worth its salt unless it protects its minorities. In Spain, the king and the government have achieved significant success in lowering the tensions related to minority problems by following the principle, "unidad entre la diversidad", i.e., unity among diversity.

General elections are due to be held next year. If Erdogan's party wins the elections, it is expected that the 1980 constitution will be

rewritten completely. I hope that proper checks and balances will be introduced in this constitution by the experts so that power is not concentrated in any one branch of the government.

It is interesting to note that the European Commission has expressed its satisfaction about the results of the referendum. Does this mean that the European Union will soon accept Turkey as a member? I am afraid, the answer is no.

Turkey's journey towards EU membership has been a very slow, painful and frustrating one. It started in 1959, when Turkey submitted its application to sign the European association agreement as the first step to become a member. Four years later, in 1963, it signed that agreement with the European Community, which at that time had only six original members. Since then the European Union has gone on expanding to have 27 members today. Countries like Malta, Cyprus (only the Greek part), Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania are full members of the EU. Yet, Turkey has been kept at bay.

Under Erdogan's leadership, Turkey has made sweeping legal reforms and enormous progress in the fields of human rights, women's rights and freedom of expression to bring them in line with EU standards. But given the current economic situation and the growing phobia about Islam in Europe -- which has, no doubt, been whipped up by the extremists -- it is highly unlikely that the EU will accept Turkey as a member in the near future.

After over 50 years of rejection by the EU, Turkey has now turned eastwards. It has forged close commercial and cultural relationships with Syria, Iran and other Middle Eastern countries. This revised foreign policy has converted Turkey into a major regional power.

Turkey's economy is growing at a significant rate. Industry is booming and foreign investments are still pouring in. Trade with the neighbouring countries is expanding. By European standards, unemployment situation is acceptable. In the international debt market, Turkish government bonds are getting the highest ratings. It proves that Turkey's economic fundamentals are strong and reliable.

When the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923, some European politicians used to describe it as the sick man of Europe. No wonder, today many Turks feel great pride in describing their country as "the only healthy man" of Europe.

Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam is a columnist for the Daily Star.

IN MEMORIAM

A doyen of journalism

KAZI LIAKAT HOSSAIN

THE nation observes the 3rd death anniversary of Obaidul Huq, a doyen and legend of journalism, with a heavy heart. He was born on October 31, 1911 in Feni district. It's a miracle that he was born in October and died in October as well. On Eid day, October 14, 2007, we got the news like a bolt from the blue that Obaidul Huq had breathed his last day before. In truth, he was great with the great and lowly with the lowly.

I came to know of Obaidul Huq from late Mizanur Rahman and Nayeem Gauhar, and had already painted an imaginary picture of this legendary person in my mind long before I actually met him. Once I had an opportunity to attend a function where two giants were the main speakers, renowned philosopher and educationist late principal Dewan Mohammed Azraf and late Obaidul Huq. I immediately realised that I had come across a person (Obaidul Huq) who was every inch a gentleman with an amazing personality.

He used to deliver a quotation whenever the topic needed it. His style of speaking and narrating was wonderful. We junior journalists listened to his valuable speeches very attentively so that not a single word could slip from our minds. He emphasised the importance of clarity, directness and compactness of language. He wrote: "Unclear writing betrays a muddled mind."

Obaidul Huq's style of talking was smooth and clear, and he used quotations in a way that taught us a lot. He was called king of quotation. He was a film director, producer, script-writer, novelist, poet and journalist. He got his MA degree in philosophy from Dhaka University, and a law degree from Kolkata. He resigned from Bengal Civil Service in 1944.

In 1946, this versatile genius made a successful film, *Dukhe Jader Jibon Gara*, but could not release it as communal tension was prevailing in Kolkata. He was urged by distributors of the film to change his name to Himadri Chowdhury, keeping in view their interests at the box office. He wrote a novel, *Sangram*, which was turned into a film called *Azan*. He had heartfelt love for our rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, who visited his residence in Feni.

He joined the then *Pakistan Observer* in 1951 as assistant editor under another giant editor A. Salam. He became editor of the *Bangladesh Observer* in 1972 and served till 1984. He later joined *The Daily News* (now defunct) as editor and also became the chairman of the Press Institute of Bangladesh.

He was a great satirist. He earned name and fame for his humorous and sometimes stinging and biting satires, which gave readers pleasure. He was a prolific writer. For his excellent writings and immense contributions to journalism, he won the prestigious "Ekushe Padak" in 1983. In recognition of his literary genius he received the Bangla Academy Award for Drama in 1964. He also won a Unicef Award for his courageous editorials in 1983.

In his last years he concentrated on writing columns, mostly for Bangla dailies, particularly in *Janakantha*. He valued some norms, principles and ideals, and those distinguish him as a writer, editor and above all a creative man. Creativity was his forte along with vast knowledge, and he could analyse and interpret events in a most objective manner. He will mostly be remembered for his witty, saucy and insightful columns.

Whenever his face flashes in my mind's eye I cannot control my tears. Let his spirit live amongst us forever. May Almighty Allah rest his soul in eternal peace.

"Death is the golden key that opens the palace of eternity" -- John Milton

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Obaidul Huq

PHOTO: STAR