

A response to Dr. Rizvi

ENAM A. CHAUDHURY

IN response to Dr. Gowher Rizvi's article in The Daily Star (DS) making a plea for national and scientific discussion on Tipaimukh, scores of learned articles have come out in different newspapers including the DS. I have not read a single write-up where authors, known to be knowledgeable, have agreed with Dr. Rizvi's findings and surmises, though there pervaded a general feeling that there should be further research and investigation, and arrangements for joint survey and evaluation and all these will have to be facilitated or organised by the government of India (GoI) prior to the commencement of the execution of the project. Here, the GoI is miserably failing.

Our government is also not being able to pursue this vigorously and successfully. Rather, people like Dr. Rizvi and his colleagues in the government seem to be advocating the case of the dam and supporting the points of view of the Indian central government rather than boldly upholding the interests of Bangladesh. The widely-known statements of the Water Resources Minister Mr. Ramesh Chandra and his state minister exemplify that.

At the outset, Dr. Rizvi stated that "knowledgeable experts have been pushed aside by those who are not so well-informed but have strong views and opinions." Who are the "knowledgeable experts" and who are "not so well-informed?" It appears that whoever points out the interests of Bangladesh, whoever cites international law and terms of bi-lateral agreement, whoever, on the basis of available facts and figures, reveals the destructive nature of the Tipaimukh Project earns disfavour from people in the government like Dr. Rizvi. Perhaps they are the experts whom a former Indian High Commissioner Mr. Pinaki Chakravorty had the audacity of calling "so-called."

This is an unacceptable situation for Bangladesh. I fail to understand why Tipaimukh issue is not discussed in the Joint Rivers Commission or in a specially set-up committee of experts with authority to hold survey and investigation. If the outcome of such efforts is in favour of a dam, then only, with the consent of co-riparian countries, such dam should be constructed. Otherwise it would be, in all fairness, treated as definitely not a friendly gesture.

A member of the Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN), Albelee A. Haque, in a well-researched article with purely scientific approach (the DS December 26) wrote: "Tipaimukh dam is a direct threat to both Indian and Bangladeshi population and ecosystem of the entire Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin" and took pains to scientifically explain the basis of the finding. The author says in the article: "Water vapour is considered a greenhouse gas. Mega dams/barrages can alter the river dynamics and natural balance of evapo-transpiration and cloud cover by wasting huge amount of water through evaporation loss." This point has to be borne in mind.

Dr. Rizvi has surmised that the flow of water through Surma and Kashiya is "unlikely to be affected as there will be no withdrawal or diversion of water in the project." But what about the other scientific reason? Besides, though in the dam project no diversion is indicated in the agreement signed by Manipur government and the National Power Commission, how about withdrawal of water by an Agreement with the government of Assam (down-stream) for the Cachar agriculture or

irrigation project? Dr. Akbar Ali Khan and Prof. Asif Nazrul have also pointed that out.

As indicated in the "Hydrological Impact Study of Tipaimukh Dam Project on Bangladesh," the Institute of Water Modelling of Bangladesh, while elaborately bringing out the bad effects of the dam, has mentioned that as a justification for the dam. The Central Water Commission of India and North Eastern Electric Power Corporation have said that facilitating flow of water for the Cachar irrigation project can be ensured by creating diversionary structures 100 kilometers upstream from Bangladesh border at Amalsid. In the JRC, the government of India did not give a clear negative response to the query of Bangladesh. So it is clear that the conclusions already drawn by Dr. Rizvi or his colleagues in the government are not based on scientific reasons, facts or reality.

Dr. Rizvi has mentioned that "Assam and Nagaland, like Bangladesh, are also lower riparian ... and the governments of those two states have not objected to the project and have actually welcomed it." To the best of my knowledge, Nagaland is upstream of Tipaimukh, which is located in Churachandpur of Manipur at the juncture of the Taivai, flowing in from Mizoram. For a distance upstream, the Barak is on the border of Nagaland and Manipur, but there is no reason why Nagaland could be equated with Bangladesh as a lower-riparian. It seems to me that this is an effort to create a smoke-screen.

In Assam, only the Cachar district (which is Bangla speaking) is lower-riparian, and not the Ahomia speaking Assam or Brahmaputra valley. But the people

of Assam and Manipur, many socio-economic organisations, political parties (non-Congress), peasant and workers' societies, students, environmentalist and experts have lodged strong project against the proposed dam. Participants in different seminars have spoken against it. The people of Manipur even demolished the foundation-stone twice. Now it is under army protection.

The Indo-Banla Moitree Sangathan, along with others, has launched a movement against it. Only about a weak ago, a big delegation from the organisation visited Sylhet and Dhaka and held rallies and press conferences against it. A delegation comprising leaders from Manipur also had earlier visited Dhaka and Sylhet with the same purpose. So, it is not a fact that the proposed dam is a welcome idea in the affected areas of India. They are vehemently against it, as are the people of Bangladesh, and on very justifiable grounds.

The way Dr. Rizvi has brushed aside concerns about salinity and a possible disaster arising out of an earthquake in a most earthquake prone area has been totally unscientific. He just relied on Indian expertise. Even with the very bad record of Indian violation of terms of agreements and international law and conventions, he and his cohorts ask us to rely on the apparently hollow assurance of Dr. Manmohan Singh!

To the government of India and to Dr. Rizvi and his colleagues in our government, we would like to say that Tipai, Teesta and Farakka are a life and death question for Bangladesh. Please organise a joint survey, J.R.C deliberation and open discussion by national and international experts of both the countries before the construction work commences. And then advise us.

The writer is a former Chairman, Privatisation Commission.

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Change thinking enhance life

FRANK PETERS

THE electronic age is near completion. This year I received scores of electronic-generated Christmas cards from around the world, many from students and government officials in Bangladesh. Added to those are all the paper Christmas cards I received hand-delivered, which number just one!

If not for Ronald Biswas, the Country Manager of Intertek in Bangladesh, I would have none at all, but there it sits on my desk in a forlorn state to remind me of the old Bob Dylan folk song that "times, they are a changing." Change for the better we must always welcome and embrace if we are to move forward; and waving 'bye-bye' to the humble Christmas card, I guess, is just one of those.

It surprised me to discover that Bangladesh produces some of the best Christmas cards and special occasions cards in the world, and the locally-produced Ideal wedding stationery is second to none and should be exported far and wide before the electronic age catches up and takes over in that area as well!

At this time of year I am continually asked what Christmas means to me. Primarily, it's the time I give myself to think and re-assess my life and the direction in which I am steering it we are all captains of our own ship and creators of our own happiness and destiny. I take time out to evaluate new acquaintances and old friendships and assess if they are worth keeping or if they are burdensome like excess baggage that needs to be cast out. I am also a great believer in giving credit where it's due.

It was Christmas in the early '70s when I coined the expression "today is never too soon ... tomorrow might be too late" a philosophy by which I have lived ever since. I was a houseguest of my business partner in the UK. His father, Stan Waller, continuously said "thanks"

for everything you did for him, however small.

If you made him a cup of tea, he would thank you. After he had a few sips, he would say something like: "That's a lovely cup of tea, thank you." He expressed his gratitude unflinchingly at every given opportunity. One day when we were alone, I asked him why he thanked everyone so often, and he confided he did not know when he would die and it was his wish to express his thanks while he was still alive and had the opportunity to do so.

As I lay on the bed that night, I recalled the conversation and wrote down those words: "Today is never too soon ... tomorrow might be too late," which later I had printed on my personal and business stationery, as more of a reminder to me.

As I was in Public Relations at the time, many of my clients assumed it meant, today is never too soon to get a story/photograph in the press, because tomorrow might be too late and the opportunity is gone, but that was not it.

Today is never too soon to tell someone you love them, you admire them, you appreciate them, because



The greatest craving of mankind is to be appreciated and we can all afford to give our appreciation generously to those who deserve it.

only Allah knows what tomorrow will bring you could die or they could die and the opportunity would be lost forever.

Some months later I was visiting my mum. I remember sitting opposite her having a cup of tea and a chat and trying to manufacture the courage to tell her that I loved her!

LOVE YOU!
I know, it sounds ridiculous, but it just wasn't done. In those days boys were not in touch with their feminine side as they are now.

Telling your mother that you love her was sort of sissy-like and something exclusive for the ears of one's girlfriend.

I waited for her to finish what she was saying, looked her straight into her eyes and told her that I loved her. Then got up, walked to her side of the table, threw my arms around her, gave her a big hug and planted a loving kiss on her weather-worn cheeks, which totally embarrassed her! She just wasn't expecting it and became all flustered and shy but she loved it. The "X"s (kisses) at the bottom of every letter I had

sent her after that were more special and meaningful than ever before.

Little did I know then that was the last time I would see her alive. Following her death, I have carried no hang-ups or regrets. I had told her that I loved her while she was still alive.

The most beautiful and most powerful sound in the world to hear, if said with honesty, is: "I love you."

When my sister Joan was dying of cancer, she entrusted me to handle all outstanding family affairs. This included the heart-rending task of informing her children of the sad news. Before meeting with her on a one-to-one basis, I gave each child two instructions: to tell their mother that they loved her and secondly to unburden their conscience. For example, if they had stolen money from her purse (or something else naughty), and I assured them that they would be forgiven and they could get on with their life with a clear conscience for having done what was right to do.

Initially, I was met with the usual distort: "She knows I love her," but that's beside the point and just isn't the same. Besides when is it right to limit those whom we love to a certain number of times we tell them? The children did as I had requested and are most grateful now that they did.

I'm of the belief there is little or no point in telling people whom you know that you love them, appreciate them, admire them or say nice things about them after they have died. Love and appreciation is best served to the living and only Allah knows at that particular moment if it is something they've been longing and needing to hear.

The greatest craving of mankind is to be appreciated and we can all afford to give our appreciation generously to those who deserve it.

The writer is a former newspaper and magazine Publisher and Editor, an award-winning Writer and Photographer of international renown, and a special friend of Bangladesh.

In Iraq, abandoning our friends

KIRK W. JOHNSON

ON the morning of May 6, 1783, Guy Carleton, the British commander charged with winding down the occupation of America, boarded the Perseverance and sailed up the Hudson River to meet George Washington and discuss the British withdrawal. Washington was furious to learn that Carleton had sent ships to Canada filled with Americans, including freed slaves, who had sided with Britain during the revolution.

Britain knew these loyalists were seen as traitors and had no future in America. A Patriot using the pen name "Brutus" had warned in local papers: "Flee then while it is in your power" or face "the just vengeance of the collected citizens." And so Britain honoured its moral obligation to rescue them by sending hundreds of ships to the harbours of New York, Charleston and Savannah. As the historian Maya Jasanoff has recounted, approximately 30,000 were evacuated from New York to Canada within months.

Two hundred and twenty-eight years later, President Obama is wrapping up our own long and messy war, but we have no Guy Carleton in Iraq. Despite yesterday's announcement that America's military mission in Iraq is over, no one is acting to ensure that we protect and resettle those who stood with us.

Earlier this week, Obama spoke to troops at Fort Bragg, N.C., of the "extraordinary milestone of bringing the war in Iraq to an end." Forgotten are his words from

the campaign trail in 2007, that "interpreters, embassy workers and subcontractors are being targeted for assassination." He added: "And yet our doors are shut. That is not how we treat our friends."

Four years later, the Obama administration has admitted only a tiny fraction of our own loyalists, despite having eye scans, fingerprints, polygraphs and letters from soldiers and diplomats vouching for them. Instead, we force them to navigate a Byzantine process that now takes a year and a half or longer.

The chances for speedy resettlement of our Iraqi allies grew even worse in May after two Iraqi men were arrested in Kentucky and charged with conspiring to send weapons to jihadist groups in Iraq. These men had never worked for Americans, and they managed to enter the United States as a result of poor background checks. Nevertheless, their arrests removed any sense of urgency in the government agencies responsible for protecting our Iraqi allies.

The sorry truth is that we don't need them anymore now that we're leaving, and resettling refugees is not a winning campaign issue. For over a year, I have been calling on members of the Obama administration to

make sure the final act of this war is not marred by betrayal. They have not listened, instead adopting a policy of wishful thinking, hoping that everything turns out for the best.

Meanwhile, the Iraqis who loyally served us are under threat. The extremist Shiite leader Moktada al-Sadr has declared the Iraqis who helped America "outcasts." When Britain pulled out of Iraq a few years ago, there was a public execution of 17 such outcasts their bodies dumped in the streets of Basra as a warning. Just a few weeks ago, an Iraqi interpreter for the United States Army got a knock on his door; an Iraqi policeman told him threateningly that he would soon be beheaded. Another employee, at the American base in Ramadi, is in hiding after receiving a death threat from Sadr's militia.

Moral timidity and a hapless bureaucracy have wedged our doors tightly shut and the Iraqis who remained loyal to us are weeks away from learning how little America's word means.

It's not the first time we've abandoned our allies. In 1975, President Gerald R. Ford and Henry A. Kissinger ignored the many Vietnamese who aided American troops until the final few weeks of the Vietnam War. By then, it was too late.

Although Kissinger had once claimed there was an "irreducible list" of 174,000 imperiled Vietnamese allies, the policy in the war's frantic closing weeks was icily

Darwinian: If you were strong enough to clear our embassy walls or squeeze through the gates and force your way onto a Huey, you could come along. The rest were left behind to face assassination or internment camps. The same sorry story occurred in Laos, where America abandoned tens of thousands of Hmong people who had aided them.

It wasn't until months after the fall of Saigon, and much bloodshed, that America conducted a huge relief effort, airlifting more than 100,000 refugees to safety. Tens of thousands were processed at a military base on Guam, far away from the American mainland. President Bill Clinton used the same base to save the lives of nearly 7,000 Iraqi Kurds in 1996. But if you mention the Guam Option to anyone in Washington today, you either get a blank stare of historical amnesia or hear that "9/11 changed everything."

And so our policy in the final weeks of this war is as simple as it is shameful: Submit your paperwork and wait. If you can survive the next 18 months, maybe we'll let you in. For the first time in five years, I'm telling Iraqis who write to me for help that they shouldn't count on America anymore.

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The writer, a former reconstruction coordinator in Iraq, founded the List Project to Resettle Iraqi Allies. ©The New York Times. Distributed by the New York Times Syndicate.