

A 'Faustian bargain'

BITTER TRUTH

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

SADLY true, either in our country or elsewhere in the world, policy makers have never been serious about saving the environment. Unfortunately, country leaders and policy makers, mostly out of ignorance and partly because of exuberance to win their case and establish their point and ego shy away from facts. By setting up a coal-based thermal power plant at Rampal, 14 km distance from the Sundarbans, a wealth of beauty and a natural shield against natural disasters which, we might face a calamity in absence of such shield. How could the government of Bangladesh go ahead with such a risky endeavour in the vicinity of the Sundarbans without evaluating the risk involved?

Policy makers in our country hardly see any point in worrying about plants, animals and insects. As a result of our relentless assault on nature, forests are on the verge of extinction. Extinction is an environmental calamity that is irreversible. By mounting assault either in or on the periphery of a natural forest like the Sundarbans, we are only hastening its extinction. As the different species disappear unnoticed, they take away with them a survival mechanism of other species. Given the complex workings of an ecosystem, it is not clear which species, if any, are expendable.

Environmentalists, biologists and nature analysts have said that it is not possible to protect high profile animals without a true balance between various ecosystems. Tigers will not be there without the deer, and deer will not be there without keora tree, because they live on keora leaves. Biologists and environmentalists say that diversity is the raw material of earth's wealth.

We are indulging in a risky game by installing the plant only a few kilometers away from the Sundarbans. How will we protect the Sundarbans from acid rain that will affect its vegetation when the power plant releases 142 tons of sulphur dioxide and 85 tons of nitrogen dioxide daily? The explanation given in a government handout and PDB rejoinder that the plant operators will be using "super critical" technology and the plant and animal species will not be harmed is hardly convincing.

The huge amount of hot water, 5,150 cubic metre per hour discharged to the Passur river day in and day

out for at least 25 years will definitely pollute the water systems of the Sundarbans region and disturb fish migration and breeding due to its changed temperature, velocity and dissolved chemical and other pollutants. Other than this, scared by the noise and dazzling search light of the navigational vessels that will be cruising the Passur river, too frequently, the rare Sundarbans animals like tigers and deer will run away to safer places from Bangladesh part of the forest.

It is expected that policy makers should not be driven by exuberance or ego-centric activities and should better be guided by a pragmatic decision that will prevent the country from being put in an environmental bottleneck. We have to be concerned about the current spasm of extinction which has been accelerated by the inexorable expansion of housing and industry near the forest. Sure enough, with the construction of Rampal power plant and the spate of industrialization that will follow stretching from Rampal to Mongla, the emerald mangrove forest of the Sundarbans will definitely lose its ecological balance affecting every species including humans living in and around the Sundarbans. It has to be emphasized that the well-being of our people is tied to the well-being of many other species and we can't be sure which species are most important for our survival.

The emerald mangrove forest of the Sundarbans seems to be an unspoiled showcase for the biodiversity of life. In the lush territory of the coastal belt of the Bay of Bengal there was hardly a break in the canopy of trees namely, sundari, gewa, kewra, goran etc., all naturally growing and virtually every acre was alive with the cacophony of insects, birds, and monkeys. But mainly because of human assault, many varieties of mammals, fish, birds and reptiles have disappeared in the meantime.

Deeply concerned at such human profligacy, University of Pennsylvania biologist Daniel Janzen says: "It is something that some nations of the world decided to burn their libraries without bothering to see what is in them." Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson called this profligacy the folly that future generations will not forgive. What we are doing in Rampal in the name of development might prove to be a 'Faustian bargain' because of our ignorance, shortsightedness and lack of proper judgment and analysis.

The question is, when will environmentalism move from being a philosophy promoted by a passionate minority to a way of life that governs mainstream behaviour and policy?

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"Sweet are the uses of adversity"



MILIA ALI

IN the all-time favourite movie Roman Holiday, a journalist asks a princess who is touring Europe: "Which of the cities visited did Your Highness enjoy the most?" The young princess (played by Audrey Hepburn) responds: "Rome. By all means, Rome..."

The sequence may be fictional, but in reality, too, no one can deny that Rome is one of the most magical cities in the world. With its undulating landscape, colossal ancient monuments, architecturally impressive fountains and quaint piazzas, Rome can charge even the most unimaginative mind.

As a matter of fact, Italy in its entirety offers an experience of joyful discovery. The home of geniuses like Da Vinci and Michaelangelo, Italy allows you to immerse yourself in the best of European art, culture and cuisine. However, my recent visit to Italy exposed a less endearing side of the country -- one that I would never have discovered had it not been for a mishap.

My husband accidentally fell down the stairs in a hotel in Palermo, Sicily, and was evacuated to a public hospital for emergency medical help. This marked the beginning of excruciating waits in overcrowded and under-served facilities for X Rays, CT scans, EKG, and doctor consultations. The entire process of "initial investigations" took 12 hours, at the end of which we were advised that my husband had a broken hip and wrist both requiring surgery. After two days of back and forth consultations, the doctors decided that he only needed bed rest. We were then subjected to a series of traumatic experiences -- inadequate physical facilities in the orthopedic ward, uneven nursing support, confusing signals from physicians, compounded by a language problem. Thanks to the exceptional support and effort of friends my husband was air-evacuated to a well-equipped facility in Rome.

In case some of you are wondering where all this is leading, let me clarify that there is a purpose to the long personal narrative. Currently, health care is a raging topic in the United States. The Republican Party has orchestrated a government shut down using President Obama's Health Care Plan as a bargaining pawn in the budget discussions. In fact, Congress has blocked the funding for the president's health care reforms. While these reforms would not provide free health care to all citizens like in Italy, they would allow some bene-

fits/options to those who are not covered by health insurance. In this backdrop the Italian experience becomes all the more relevant since it has succeeded in clarifying, in my mind, some issues on the public/private health care debate.

The quality of care we received in a public polyclinic in Italy might have been less than desirable. However, although we are foreigners we were not denied the benefits that everyone else received. A complete medical investigation, which would have cost thousands in the US, was provided to my husband free of charge. Despite the long waiting period, lines were maintained and patients seemed resigned to the fact that eventually everyone would be catered for. True, the infrastructure and nursing quality were unsatisfactory but the doctors seemed responsive and professional.

Surprisingly, I noticed a good-natured acceptance of the systemic inadequacies among the patients -- a kind of stoicism that underwrites the overall success of the seemingly chaotic health care structure. In addition, there is an informal support network where caregivers of patients help each other to make the hospital experience less challenging.

The American health care system may be more cutting-edge, efficient, and cushy but it is essentially an unequal arrangement. The quality of patient care is primarily driven by the benefits "sanctioned" by insurance companies. Most importantly, health care is still not the basic right of a US citizen, which it is for an Italian. The realisation that the Italian health care scheme is designed to provide average service for all, rather than the best for a few, has tempered my reservations about the system.

I end with an emotional anecdote. As my husband was being wheeled out of the polyclinic, I bid good bye to our ward mates in Palermo -- the 22-year old aspiring soccer player who had snapped a tendon in his leg, the old man recovering from hip surgery and the motor biker who had crashed into a car, dislocating his shoulder. I felt a tinge of guilt -- we were moving to a better facility, while these people would perhaps continue to suffer the discomfort of inadequate care. Surprisingly, all three kept smiling. I thought I detected a slight smirk on the face of the biker as if he was saying: "Don't worry, we, too, shall survive." I realised then, that the Italians are proud of their health care system. Although not optimally efficient -- it still takes care of the entire population without discrimination. And, that means a lot to the common folks!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER REDCUTION

Living with disability and disaster

MAHBUBA NASREEN

THE theme of the International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR), 2013 is 'Living with Disability and Disaster.' Linking disability with disaster deserves attention as about 15% of the people around the world are living with disabilities. The number of persons with disability may increase with the potential risk related to increase of climate and human induced disasters, different kinds of accidents causing injuries, increased use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides etc. Data show that cyclones Sidr and Aila (1991, 2007) in Bangladesh and Hurricane Katrina (2005) in USA caused death mostly for people with disabilities and the elderly. Disaster risk reduction effort thus should focus on disability and thereby include them in the development agenda.

In Bangladesh disability has been included in the national census since eighties. However, the reported prevalence rates between 7 percent and 4.7 percent are far below the international and national estimates. A survey on prevalence of disability in 1994 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics shows a rate of only 1.62 percent. According to the recent World Report on Disability (2011), WHO and World Bank estimated the rate of people with disability as 15%. However, there is great variation in the statistics on the numbers and types of disabilities in Bangladesh, and in part this may be due to the social stigmatization of the disabled in the country. They are often just not 'recognized' and become excluded.

Since last four years the Government of Bangladesh has been giving special emphasis on the issues of disability devising policies and legislation accordingly. The Sixth Five Year Plan and various policies, programmes of different ministries, for example, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Education and few others have been giving special attentions to the people and Children with Disability. Disaster related disabilities have been getting much more priorities in the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief since 2012. The Disaster Management Act, National Plan for Disaster Management and other policies have included the social exclusion issues in context of mainstreaming disaster risk

reduction. One may observe the steps of the Government of Bangladesh in bringing back hopes of the disaster victims of recent garment factories through providing various supports, especially to the survivors with disability. National and International partners are joining hands with the Government initiatives.

It must be mentioned here that any disaster may make people injured for which preparedness is an utmost requirement. To avoid happening disaster related disabilities attentions must be given on devising legislation, policies, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Mass awareness through different media including Government machineries should be the tool for making any effort successful. The cyclone of 1991 has made nearly half a million of people injured including making some of them disable. A study (Nasreen, 2008) indicates that violation of the rights of women and girls make their lives precarious during different phases of disaster.

Any effort related to Disaster Risk Reduction must be inclusive as the world's more than 1 billion people that comprise about 15 per cent of the global population are living with disabilities and the number is expected to rise because of factors such as ageing populations, increasing potential for accidents, and the predicted rise in hazards and disasters. In any disaster, mortality is much higher among the disabled than any other group. Most of those who died in Hurricane Katrina in 2005 in USA were people with disabilities and seniors. Again, disability-inclusive DRR can facilitate a wonderful opportunity for them to make contribution to socio-economic development of the country.

Including the needs and voices of persons with disabilities in disaster management can significantly reduce their vulnerabilities and increase the effectiveness of the government response and recovery efforts. Otherwise, the consequences would be many including their lives lost, further injury causing deterioration of their health, and extra stress on already stretched health resources. But most of the governments and their related agencies still couldn't adequately plan for them in their disaster management activities.

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Facing disaster together

NIGER DIL NAHAR

DISASTERS have a great impact on people with disabilities. This issue is recognised and addressed by Article 11 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It says: "States Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters."

As one of the world's most vulnerable and disaster affected countries, this day is very significant for Bangladesh. It focuses on disaster affected and vulnerable people to raise their awareness about disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness, and also to promote a culture of safety and disaster resilience in the community. The government has adopted a slogan in line with the international theme, "Facing Disaster Together with the Person with Disability."

In Bangladesh we regularly experience the adverse impact of disasters and population disabilities. Every year, lots of people are affected by natural and human induced disasters. Besides casualties, disasters physically disable many people. But disability receives too little attention in DRR.

Disaster management vision of the government is 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. Specific laws, apart from the disaster management related policies, laws and plans, have been passed to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities (PWD), such as Disability Welfare Act 2001; National Policy on Disability 1995, National Action Plan on Disability 2006, etc., in which the rights of person with disabilities are protected.

However, PWDs are still facing serious difficulties in getting the necessary access and participation opportunities in disaster risk management (DRM) decision-making processes. The lack of inclusion and participation in DRR processes means that the needs and possible contributions of persons living with disabilities are often overlooked by planners and decision makers. They are very frequently excluded from the humanitarian aid they need during and after disasters and also from the recovery

programme in the long-term.

People living with disabilities are vulnerable to disasters in many ways. Due to their disabilities they have limited movement and access to communication, education, health care, shelter, food and work. Family members try to hide disabled persons from the society, as a result they become invisible and in most cases their names never get included in the government data base. Handicap International estimates that in the districts of Gaibandha and Sirajganj approximately 60% of PWDs were overlooked in flood emergency programme in 2007. PWDs are often part of the poorest groups of people. And the most alarming thing is that the disasters create new impairments and new disabilities. In the recent incidence of Rana Plaza, about 2,500 people were injured and many of them have been disabled permanently.

Without including everyone at all levels of the disaster management cycle, it is not possible to build maximum resilience for all communities. Therefore, active and meaningful participation of PWDs in the planning process, implementation and monitoring of DRR actions must be ensured by enhancing the capacity building programmes at grass root levels. All risk assessment and planning process should be disability inclusive and the data base of persons with disabilities should be available at upazila and district levels so that they do not become invisible or get excluded during an emergency.

Access to information is vital to reduce disaster risks and vulnerability of PWDs. Early warning signals need to be designed and disseminated consistent with the needs and capacities of different disability groups. PWDs, along with all vulnerable groups, should get added attention during search, rescue and evacuation work, and volunteers must be trained and oriented adequately in this regard.

Safety and security of PWDs in the shelters during emergency need to be assured. Comprehensive accessibility and universal design are important concepts that should be incorporated in all DRR and humanitarian action policies, making sure relief operations and structures are fully accessible for all, including persons with disabilities. Accessibility options at existing and new shelters and structures, including reaching the structure, installation of ramps, disability-friendly latrines, and safe drinking water should be guaranteed.

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By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 42 Apartment sign
- 1 Rude look
- 10 Explorer
- 11 Kitchen come-on
- 12 Rust, for one
- 13 Caravan creature
- 14 Cloth letters
- 15 Impair
- 16 Magic org.
- 17 Pool unit
- 18 Dissent-er's vote
- 19 Divvied
- 22 Exile isle
- 23 Washer unit
- 26 Added excitement to
- 29 Cork sound
- 32 To's opposite
- 33 Singer Torro
- 34 Asylum seeker
- 36 Opera set in Egypt
- 37 Math comparison
- 38 Showed over
- 39 Skimp swimwear
- 40 Make a speech
- 41 Painter Holbein

DOWN

- 1 Derides
- 2 Like luxury goods
- 3 John Adams's wife
- 4 Reactor parts
- 5 Summer on the Seine
- 6 Tot
- 7 Eternal City
- 8 Last resident
- 9 Big name in Chicago
- 11 Mexican resort
- 15 June honoree
- 17 Vaulting game
- 20 "Survivor" network
- 21 "The Bells" writer
- 24 Fleet leader
- 25 Obstructionist's calculation
- 27 Hot blood
- 28 Sun circler
- 29 Australia city
- 30 Nebraska city
- 31 Climber's spike
- 35 Cotton seeders
- 36 Stream-lined prefix
- 38 Go bad

Yesterday's answer

15 June honoree
17 Vaulting game
20 "Survivor" network
21 "The Bells" writer
24 Fleet leader
25 Obstructionist's calculation
27 Hot blood
28 Sun circler
29 Australia city
30 Nebraska city
31 Climber's spike
35 Cotton seeders
36 Stream-lined prefix
38 Go bad

Yesterday's Cryptoquip:
THE MOST BEAUTIFUL ADVENTURES ARE NOT THOSE WE GO TO SEEK.
-- ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

On letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

9-17 CRYPTOQUOTE

LIA T ATWL OLPO CPQUTQM
AIXBM OPUZ OLZ WXQGTWZ KIG
OLZTG WBIDPQ PQM BZPEZ OLZ
WLPMAW IK OLZ WXQWZO
SZLTQM OLZC.-LZBZQ UZBBZG

BEETLE BAILY

by Mort Walker

I'M READY TO GIVE BEETLE A REAL CHEWING OUT, JUST LIKE YOU SHOWED ME

YOU NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR BREATH FIRST

DOES IT SMELL BAD?

NO, BUT IT WILL AFTER YOU TAKE A BITE OF THIS ONION!

HENRY

by Don Trachte

3-5

QUOTABLE Quotes

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

Albert Einstein