

What drives productivity?



AMITAVA KAR

WHAT exactly are we asked to do when we are told to be more productive? Are we asked to merely produce more? What if we are producing lousy stuff? The question suggests that productivity cannot and should not be measured in terms of output alone.

What then is productivity?

I think the most complete definition was given by Asian Productivity Organization (APO): "Productivity is an attitude of mind. It seeks to continually improve what already exists. It is the belief that one can do things better today than yesterday and better tomorrow than today. Productivity can be a common object of everybody. It aims to make life better for all." The Tokyo-based APO, an inter-governmental body for the Asia Pacific region, has 20 members among them Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Japan and Singapore.

How can the attitude of people be changed? Well, Japan did it through a productivity movement back in 1955 with three guiding principles: job security and expansion of employment, cooperation of labour and management through joint consultation, and fair distribution of the fruits of productivity. The third principle forms the foundation of any productivity movement particularly in overcoming and resolving the various contradictions inevitable in market economies.

Following Japan's example, Singapore started taking interest in productivity in its early days of independence in the 1960s. In the early 80s, the government launched a productivity movement, aiming at mindset change in all sectors of the economy. Factors that led to its huge success were: commitment of top leadership, a country-wide campaign combined with company-based consultancy, tripartite cooperation among the

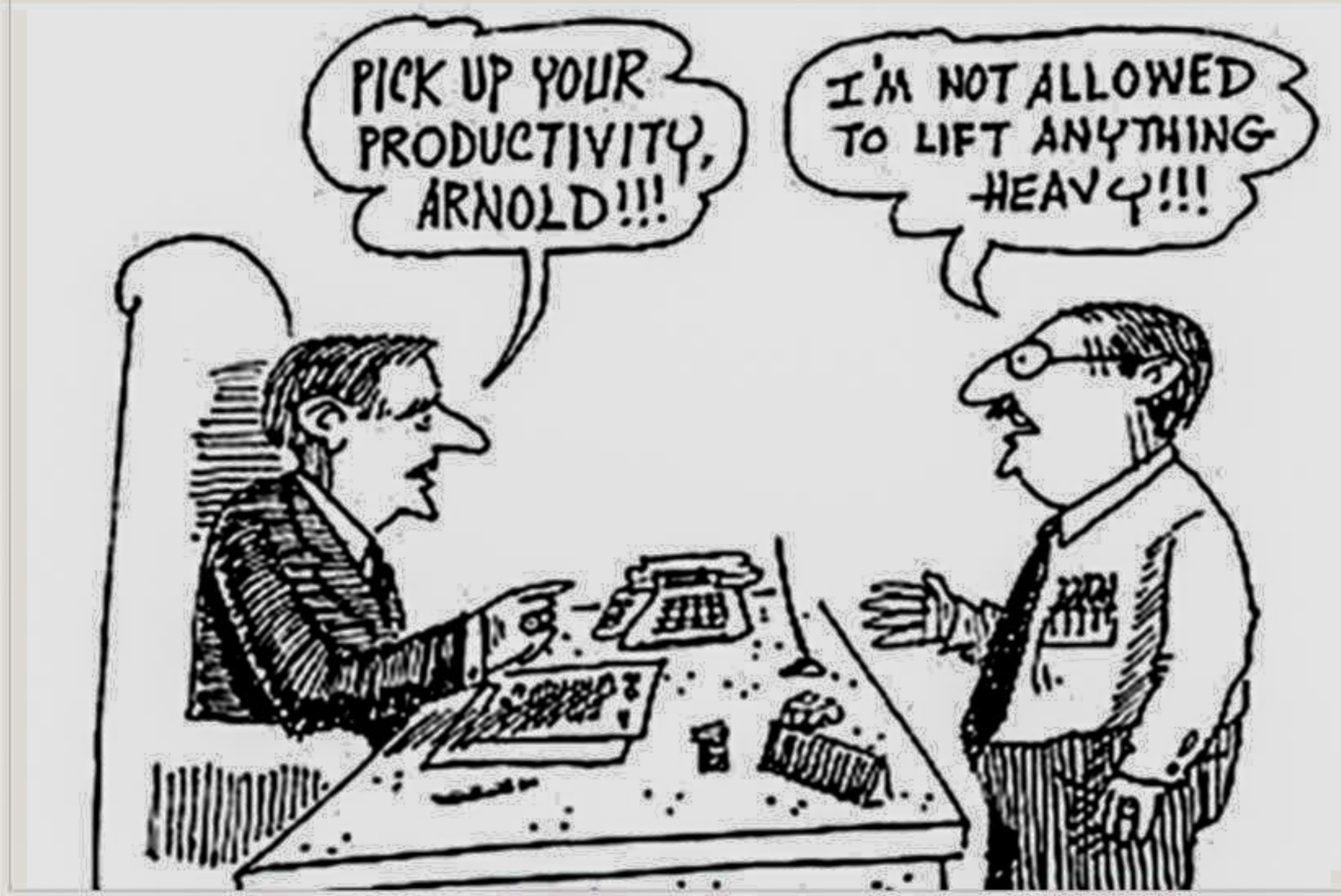


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government, industry and labour unions; and developing management consultancy capability in the private sector by designing systems and incentives for trained human resources.

And more recently, the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council of Mauritius launched the first phase of a campaign in 2001, focusing on making Mauritius Muda-free. Muda is a Japanese word for waste, idleness or uselessness. The Muda-free Mauritius campaign was launched for the education sector promoting tools such as 5S, Gemba Kaizen, CATs or Civic Action Teams modeled after Quality Circles, knowledge centres and computer proficiency. In 2012, another campaign was launched by the NPCC to focus on the term productivity itself, to demystify the concept by popularising different perspectives of

productivity as experienced by people in different sectors of the Mauritian economy, ranging from agriculture to manufacturing, from corporate bodies to citizens at grassroots level and from potential entrepreneurs to NGOs.

Bangladesh joined the APO in 1982, and subsequently, the National Productivity Organization was established under the Ministry of Industries in 1989. The National Productivity Council, the highest level multidimensional body to formulate national productivity policy, plan and programmes has also been formed. Can the success of productivity campaigns in these countries be replicated here?

It certainly can with a well-designed marketing strategy. Campaigns on sanitation, family

planning, and immunisation have achieved significant success under different governments. Promoting the idea of productivity, however, is a totally different ball game. It falls under the domain of "social marketing", which aims at improving the quality of life by bringing about positive changes in the society. The primary aim of "social marketing" is "social good"; while in "commercial marketing" the aim is primarily "financial".

In 1951, the psychologist G D Wiebe asked the question, "Can brotherhood and rational thinking be sold like soap?" In his paper, 'Merchandising Commodities and Citizenship on Television', Wiebe proposed that organisations which successfully 'sell' intangible social objects - such as goodwill, respect for the environment or community development - would be more successful if they sold their social objects the way marketers sell sports cars or mouthwash. The more social campaigns resembled commercial marketing practices, the better their chance of success, he suggested. And that's exactly what Japan, Singapore and Mauritius have done.

The NPO in Bangladesh, despite having a paltry annual budget of a little over Tk 3 crore and 67 staff, is doing the best it can. Md Abdul Musabbir, Joint-Director of NPO, says, "Almost half of our budget is spent on salaries and benefits. We organise several training programmes and provide consultancy services. There is a proposal of expanding the operation of NPO at the regional level."

Bangladesh faces significant economic and social challenges as it transitions from dependence on trade preferences to open competition in the global economy. A campaign is one of many tools that can be used to promote productivity. "Productivity is a long haul, a marathon without a finish line," Lee Hsien Loong, the Prime Minister of Singapore said when his country embarked on another phase of the productivity drive in 2014.

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NATIONAL DAY OF DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Bangladesh remains a good example

JOSEPH MARTIN

LAST year, the Asia Pacific region continued to be the most disaster prone region in the world. Severe flooding affected India, Indonesia, and Japan, while the Nepal earthquake devastated Kathmandu. Experts warn that climate change will cause cyclones, epidemics, and severe flooding, which will plague the region with increasing intensity. What these disasters continue to teach us is that international partnerships and civil-military cooperation are more important than ever.

After Cyclone Marian swept across Bangladesh in 1991, the United States proudly assisted the Bangladeshi government-led response effort. Never before had the world seen such a swift and inclusive civil-military response to a disaster as Operation Sea Angel, which to this day remains one of the world's largest civil-military disaster relief efforts.

As Operation Sea Angel's US commander Lt. Gen. Henry Stackpole stated in 1991, the Bangladeshi government had ample supplies stockpiled in preparation for the disaster; the challenge was distributing them to isolated areas and islands cut off from the mainland. With the aid of Bangladeshi military and civilian agencies, non-governmental organisations, and military forces from the United States and other partner nations, relief supplies reached the most vulnerable populations in a timely and efficient manner.

Additionally, organisations like the US Agency for International Development, Feed the Children, UNICEF, and countless others remained in Bangladesh to aid recovery long after the military departed.

In fact, the efficiency and synchronisation of the civil-military cooperation during Operation Sea Angel was so groundbreaking that in 2011, William Milam, U.S. Ambassador

to Bangladesh from 1990-1993, said, "The cooperative model we put together for Sea Angel is a model that the military and the civilian side of our government have been using ever since."

Bangladesh remains a model for many other reasons. Despite the vulnerability of Bangladesh to cyclones

These ties were again tested in 2007 when Cyclone Sidr ravished Bangladesh. However, this time, the capacity and capabilities built within government agencies since 1991 dramatically reduced the devastation and loss of life.

It is with these ever-present disasters in mind that my staff and I strive to

bilateral US-Bangladesh military exercises bring the unique skills and expertise of each of these organisations to the table and help promote vital coordination needed in the aftermath of a disaster.

Close coordination between civilian and military communities is essential for numerous reasons. First, it speeds

waste of life-saving time and money. Finally, it promotes the timely flow of information from the host nation government down to assisting state units and agencies and ultimately, to the people in the different communities.

All of these components add up to one outcome - lives saved. That is why,

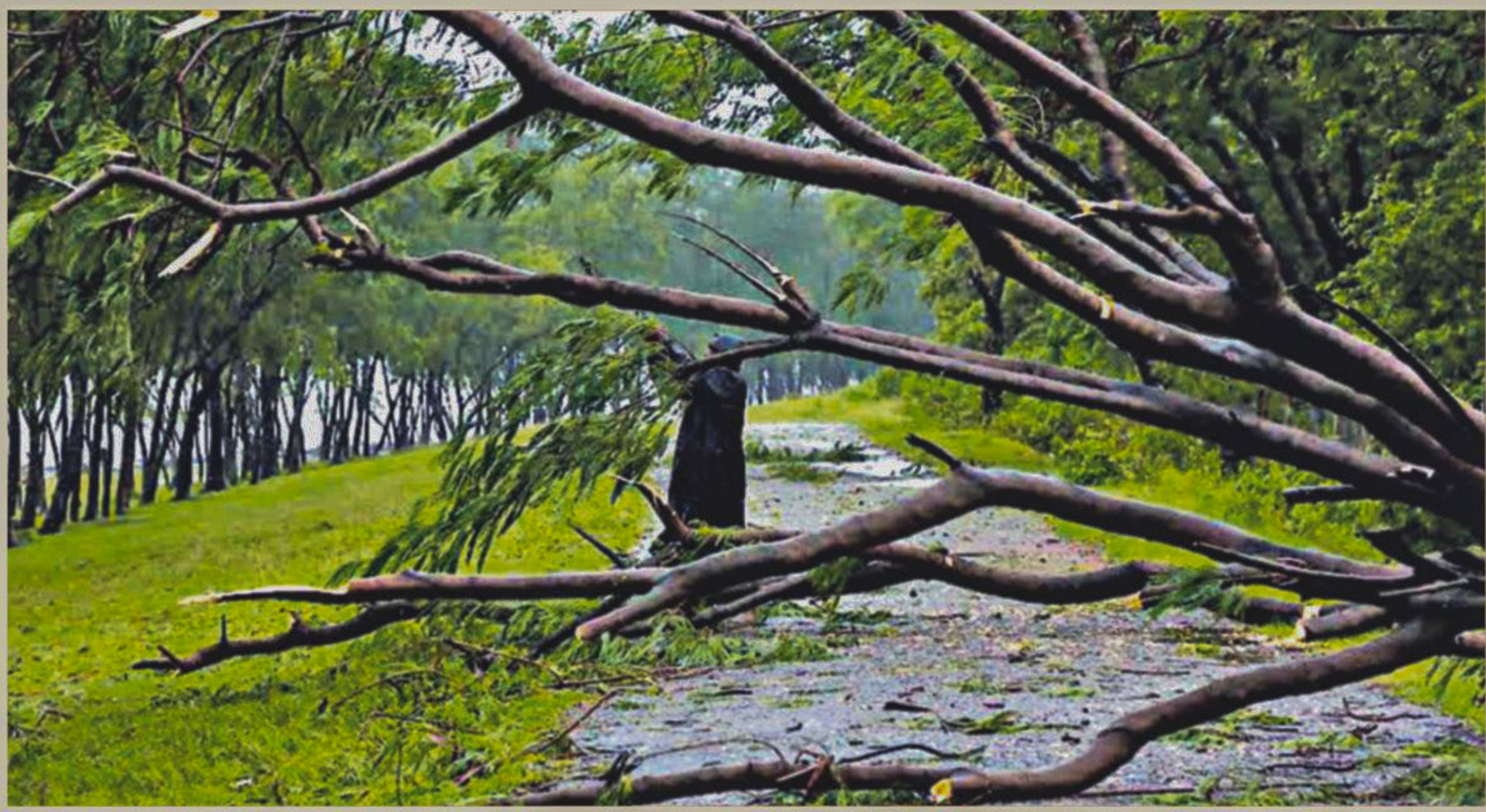


PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Close coordination between civilian and military communities is essential for numerous reasons. It speeds response and recovery by utilising the best and most appropriate assets where they will do the most good.

and other natural disasters, the country has made significant progress in improving its disaster preparedness. Moreover, the country stands as a regional example of the courageous progress that can be made by a nation, and time-tested civil-military relationships stand ready to support the government if they need assistance.

maintain our strong partnership with the civil-military community in Bangladesh. The inclusion of organisations like the US Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the World Food Programme in

response and recovery by utilising the best and most appropriate assets where they will do the most good. This allows relief personnel to reach devastated, remote locations with assets like helicopters tailored to the task, while other resources are used in more accessible areas. Coordination also prevents duplication of efforts and the

as we move into an uncertain future of stronger and more frequent disasters, civil-military coordination prior to a disaster has become ever more critical. It saves lives before, during, and after a disaster becomes a reality.

The writer is a colonel and Director of Center for Excellence-Disaster Management, USA.

QUOTABLE Quote

CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU

Be more humble than a blade of grass, more tolerant than a tree, always offering respect onto others and never expecting any in return.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Brewery sights
- Lengthy account
- Army doc
- Moves clumsily
- Old market
- "Superman" star
- Rhine siren
- Cruise setting
- Cal. abbr.
- Spring quest
- Powerful
- Makes a choice
- Liner parts
- Singer Cruz
- Spring holiday
- Chinese menu item
- Boxing great
- Palindromic nickname
- Llams' kin
- Market buy
- Ham it up
- Spinetling
- City of southern France
- Penn or Connery

DOWN

- Chillax
- Devotee
- Makeshift swing
- Triangle type
- Parsley serving
- Pub pint
- Increases
- Arrival
- Soda fountain treats
- Bus units
- Ovum
- "Bonanza" son
- Freshener target
- "House" actor
- Highstrung
- Playing marbles
- Disregard
- City near Mt. Rainier
- Click beetle
- Stands
- Like the old bucket
- Parisian girlfriend
- Spying org.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

C	A	B	S	A	B	B	A			
A	P	R	O	N	M	A	R	C	H	
S	P	I	N	E	A	N	I	T	A	
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A	S	T	A	I	S	A	Y			

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott