

Enhance CMCH burn unit capabilities

Demand far outstrips supply

BURN victims belonging to the Chittagong division, which includes the districts of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Rangamati, Khagrachhari, Bandarban, Feni, Noakhali and Lakkhipur, have only one destination for treatment, i.e. the Chittagong Medical College Hospital's (CMCH) Burn Unit. So when this vital medical unit is understaffed and lacking in facilities to properly treat patients, it is the public who must suffer. Burn victims require specialised care and care that cannot be put off. Now the CMCH unit is a 26-bed facility, which on average gets around 60 patients a day seeking treatment. Hence, we have patients who are admitted to the facility but are not given beds and thus we have patients camped on the floors of the unit, which is a direct violation of the guidelines that govern how a burn patient is to be treated.

We fail to see why such an emergency unit is being deprived of manpower and logistics support, why basic facilities like changing and dressing of babies and children are missing, and why there is only one operating theatre for those needing surgery! Unfortunately, it would appear that public hospitals make no distinction between emergency units and the general wards and the natural state of rundown services, which is now fast becoming synonymous with government-run medical institutions, is also applicable at the CMCH. We are informed that the government intends to build an independent hospital for burn victims under the CMCH. Given our slow rate of construction and commissioning of such institutions, we can only appeal to the ministry to transform the burn unit into a functional unit while such construction is underway.

Purchase of new buses

What about the many lying in the BRTC depot?

THE road transport minister has said that the BRTC will purchase 600 new buses. He has also said that this year the BRTC will run 900 additional buses across the country to ensure smooth journeys during the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr.

While it is a good idea to put on road almost double the number of BRTC buses currently operating for a specific occasion like Eid, which is still nearly four weeks away, what about ameliorating the present situation when the number of buses on the roads in the capital cannot serve the great rush for home for Iftar? Those two hours before Iftar is the most critical which the administration should address.

Secondly, where will the 900 additional buses come from? Are they available with BRTC? If so then why not run them during the peak period of the Ramadan month? If not, can the new deal be done and dusted and the 900 buses put on road before the impending Eid? And this leads one to ask what the administration is doing about the nearly 500 buses lying in various degree of disrepair in the 19 BRTC depots all over the country, as has been reported in a leading Bangla daily. It is pertinent to ask as to how many of these buses are beyond economic repair. And why they have not been repaired and put into operation.

While there is need for more public transport, and the government should take the lead in this regard, the despicable condition of the BRTC buses makes one wonder if there is any practice at all of maintenance and repair? Purchasing new buses is a convenient way to meet shortfalls. But this could be avoided and public money saved if the fleet of buses was looked after properly.

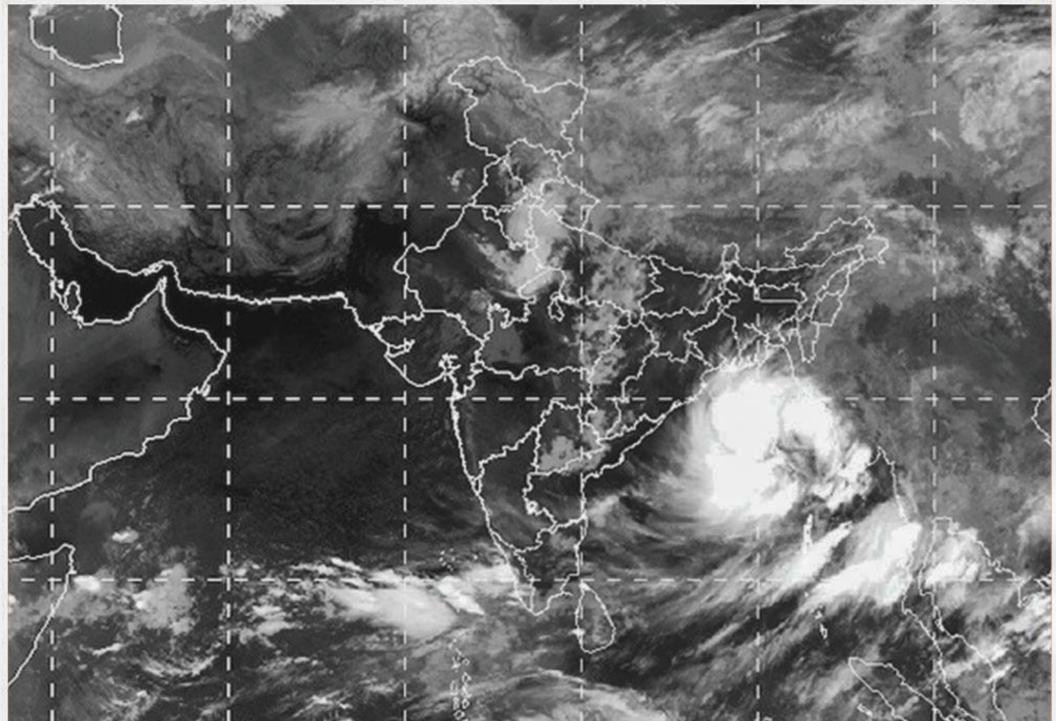
How we can prepare ourselves for cyclones

FARID HASAN AHMED

CYCLONE Mora, as of yesterday, started showing signs of weakening in Chittagong and is expected to reduce to a depression as it moves in a northerly direction. It began crossing Chittagong-Cox's Bazar coast yesterday at 6 am. Maritime ports of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar have been advised to hoist danger signal number ten while Mongla and Payra ports have been advised to hoist signal number eight. At least five people died as Cyclone Mora crossed the coast of Chittagong.

The Bay of Bengal, unfortunately, is a focal point of cyclone generation. About 40 percent of the overall global storm surges are recorded in Bangladesh. Tropical cyclones from the Bay of Bengal accompanied by storm surges are one of the major hazards in Bangladesh. They occur mainly in April/May and October/November. The country is one of the worst sufferers of all cyclonic casualties in the world.

Rendering to the Coastal Zone policy (2005) of the Government of Bangladesh, 19 districts, out of a total of 64, covering a total of 147 upazilas, are in the "coastal zone". Cyclones and storm surges are a continuous threat for the coastal population. Most of these



SOURCE: TIMES24.NET

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cyclones strike land on the Bangladesh coast or the coast of Myanmar and India.

In 1970, the Cyclone Bhola caused about 500,000 deaths in Bangladesh's coastline. On April 29, 1991, a powerful cyclone struck the coastal area of Bangladesh with wind speed of around 250 km/h. The storm killed at least 138,000 people leaving as many as 10 million homeless.

On November 15, 2007, Cyclone Sidr

hit the coastal area of the country, affecting approximately 8.5 million women, men and children and killing around 4,000 people. One and a half million homes were partially or completely destroyed, around 1.2 million livestock were killed and 2.4 million acres of crops were ruined. The overall economic losses amounted to USD 1.7 billion.

On May 25, 2009, the cyclonic storm, Aila, hit the southwestern part (Khulna Division), killing approximately 190 people. Several hundred thousand homes were washed away when wind-driven tidal surges up to 3 metres devastated the coastal belt. Cyclone Aila hit 14 districts in the south, affecting a population of around 3.7 million people. The cultivated land damaged in the area was around 96,617 hectares and the loss in the production amounted to around 482,144 megatonnes worth Tk 6,776 million (around USD 99 million).

Over the last three decades, particularly under the democratic governments, Bangladesh has invested in disaster management and gained some capabilities to manage cyclones. However, the people inhabiting hazardous coastal areas, particularly the poor, still live with extreme uncertainties, risk and vulnerabilities. Considering our history, capacity, risk and vulnerability to

cyclones, concerned organisations and authorities need to come up with appropriate strategies and emergency actions to be taken when and if Cyclone Mora intensifies.

An effective emergency management encompasses measures—taken before a disaster—aimed at minimising loss of life, interference of critical services, and harm when the disaster occurs. Prior to a cyclone, a contingency plan provides the basis for identifying and further developing response capacity. It is important to prepare/revise contingency plans in all the administrative layers of a coastal area, keeping in mind the provision of necessary resources and its effective management. Strengthening emergency medical facilities across the vulnerable locations of the coastal belt to treat fatalities in time is an important area of intervention.

The nets of embankments in some areas are vulnerable to cyclones and storms. The current embankments, dams, dikes and other infrastructures have to be critically reviewed and special steps taken to rescue the most vulnerable and protect their assets.

The early warning system provided by the government in advance of recent cyclones facilitated the successful evacuation of coastal communities

resulting in fewer than expected deaths. Though there have been improvements in warning systems, some gaps in pre-cyclone evacuation still remain. Instead of moving to cyclone shelters, some people in coastal areas still follow a wait-and-see approach due to various reasons. Prompt action is needed by respective authorities and duty bearers to shift vulnerable people to safer places of the coastal region. Appropriate allocation, rapid flow of funds, technical support, effective monitoring and supervision of activities should be ensured by authorities responsible at each stage. The role of local governments and communities at the different stages of the disaster management plan needs to be emphasised, supported and ensured by authorities.

Nobody can prevent cyclones but their impact can surely be reduced. The respective authorities at different levels should ensure that their initiatives are aligned with standing orders on disasters (SoD) of the government. And on a final note, inventiveness at various stages of governmental, non-governmental and community levels is the main element in reducing cyclone-related mortality and losses.

The writer is a disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation expert, and a development lawyer.

Bangladesh needs to promote climate diplomacy

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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A market without reins

The overnight increase in commodity prices has become a common phenomenon during Ramadan every year. While the government assures us of adequate stocks of essential commodities, traders insist that we have to buy them at elevated prices. But customers' incomes don't rise with the increasing price of commodities, so they are forced to limit their purchases, their spending on transportation, medication and education, and even food consumption of children and elderly people.

One kg of Rui fish would cost TK 270 just four days ago. Now, it costs TK 350 per kg. Lack of proper governance and willingness of the authorities to curb the prices, lobbying by businesses using political influence, lack of implementation of the Consumer Rights Protection Act, and the culture of impunity, all contribute in normalising this trend of charging higher prices during Ramadan. As one of the millions suffering right now, I urge the government to take proper action.

Md. Jonny Hossain

By email

Unemployment of higher degree holders

Tertiary education receivers should generally hold top posts in private and public organisations. But most top posts in private organisations are held by some 200,000 foreigners who remit about USD 5 billion. If these positions are held by our graduates, a lot of the youth unemployment would be reduced.

The UGC should form a commission that will maintain a link between universities and industries, as well as an entrepreneurial culture in tertiary teaching. One of the major flaws in the existing institutional setup is its failure to encourage creative thinking and entrepreneurial spirit within the students.

Md. Maruf Hossain

By email

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

FOR a number of years, the Bangladesh Foreign Service Academy has been inviting me as a guest lecturer on climate diplomacy for their trainee officers. I am very pleased that as of

this year they have made climate diplomacy into a two-day short course, with a number of eminent speakers from the government and academia giving lectures. The trainee officers seemed to enjoy the experience and even asked for it to be extended to five days from next year.

On that note, today, I will try to make the case why every new diplomat from Bangladesh needs to be climate literate, if not a climate expert.

Firstly, the need to tackle climate change is now a global existential threat that is recognised by all countries through both the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Climate Agreement, of which Bangladesh has been a strong supporter as part of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Group.

Within the UNFCCC realm of climate negotiations, while the Bangladesh delegation is led by the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF), Foreign Service officers are always part of the delegation as well. Hence, some of our Foreign Service officers have already gained good knowledge on climate negotiations. The new diplomats need to be trained over time.

The second major bloc of countries where Bangladesh is a prominent player is the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), which now consists of 48 countries and

is led by Ethiopia at the moment. In this forum, which Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina led for a time a few years ago, the Bangladesh Foreign Service leads the Bangladesh delegation.

A third forum that Bangladesh also is a prominent member of is the group of V20 (Vulnerable 20) Finance Ministers, where Bangladesh is represented by the Economic Resources Division (ERD) of the Ministry of Finance.

world. Hence, any Bangladeshi diplomat will be expected to be aware of the fact and also be able to talk about the issue when meeting officials from other countries.

Secondly, the topic of climate change is not just confined to the UNFCCC negotiations but is now part of the routine bilateral diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and other countries. So a diplomat posted to another country

reflected in our diplomacy as well.

The narrative of Bangladesh and climate change that our diplomats have to understand and sell to the world is that yes, we are indeed a very vulnerable country but we are not sitting idle and waiting for the world to come to our rescue. Rather, we are taking active steps to effectively adapt to climate change impacts and we are willing to share our knowledge of adaptation with all other



Bangladesh at the Climate Vulnerable Forum.

PHOTO: CLIMATE VULNERABLE FORUM

This shows that the issue of climate change at the global level is no longer just an issue for the ministries of environment, but also of diplomacy and finance as well.

So why does every new Bangladeshi diplomat need to be climate literate?

To start with, Bangladesh is one of the countries that are most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change and this fact is very well known around the

will need to discuss common strategies on climate change with their counterparts there.

Thirdly, for Bangladesh climate change is likely to be a major long term problem, which is going to be unavoidable for us to tackle and learn to deal with. The government and other actors are all taking considerable steps to learn and then practice how to tackle climate change impacts. This needs to be

countries, both developing as well as developed.

It needs to be made clear that Bangladesh is transforming itself from being one of the most vulnerable to one of the most adaptable when it comes to climate change.

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