

Taking moral responsibility for Tufan's misdeeds

Every deluge inundates Dhaka No central body to look after drainage

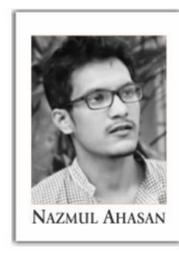
THE record rainfall of 121mm in Dhaka on Thursday effectively put all major and minor roads and by lanes in Dhaka city under water. The residents of Dhaka city, rich and poor alike, bore the brunt of water logging that ensued and traffic crawled to a snail's pace. We have been complacent over the years about the seriousness of the situation. We have let petty greed take over and let realtors and land grabbers have their day and we stood by to let the ponds and culverts be filled up. Successive governments have come and gone and done little to take on these powerful interest groups, many of whom were deemed to be too close to the ruling house. We were told that the division of the city into two city corporations was necessary to better handle the megacity Dhaka had become. Yet, the truth of the matter is that the Dhaka Area Plan (DAP) which was supposed to be the blueprint for the expansion of the city with ample water bodies has been discarded and tampered with by successive administrations. We have two city mayors who have little sway over the multiple agencies that govern our sewerage and drainage system. Policymakers fail to comprehend that Dhaka is not just a city but a major hub for economic activity. This is the most important industrial and commercial centre and when Dhaka goes under water, we suffer major economic losses. Is it not time to put together one central agency that will oversee all other utility companies and coordinate construction and maintenance of the drainage system? We can ill afford to stray from the DAP map if we want to get out of this mess. Such a body has to be given the political patronage from the top to take on powerful groups who have for too long held Dhaka hostage.

Job offer for Siddiquir Give him justice too

HEALTH and Family Welfare Minister Mohammad Nasim has promised to give Siddiquir Rahman a job in his ministry. This is the latest in a series of ministerial pronouncements made since Siddiquir, a third-year student at the Government Titumir College, was injured during a demonstration last month. While we think that the minister's gesture is well-meaning, and thank him for it, it is clearly not enough for the grievous bodily harm that Siddiquir has suffered. The minister's offer skirts the real issue, that of giving justice to Siddiquir by bringing those that are responsible for his condition to account for their action.

Siddiquir deserves justice for what happened to him. He risks losing both his eyes because of one careless act by an ill-trained policeman. Justice at this stage will mean, first of all, bringing those responsible to book and made examples of to his colleagues. And the police leadership, on the other hand, should also take steps to improve the crowd control capacity of its officers.

In the event that a permanent vision loss cannot be avoided, Siddiquir is going to need proper training and education to help him through a lifetime of blindness, without being made an object of pity. His family, who had all their hopes pinned on the prospects of the youngest of the five siblings, will need to readjust to the new situation. And they are going to need support for that. Thus, last but not the least, the government must adequately compensate him and his family monetarily.



FIRST, the daughter – a student – was kidnapped, and then raped. As if that was not enough, she and her mother were then tortured, mentally and physically, for hours, and their heads shaven in an attempt to humiliate and hush them up. In the end, they were asked to leave the town and never come back. Bogra town Sramik League convenor, Tufan Sarkar, was the culprit. His cohorts abducted the girl, and he raped her. Then his wife, Asha Sarkar, and her sister Marzia Akter, who is a local ward councillor, tortured the girl and her mother. They had the duo's heads shaven.

The picture of the barbaric scene went viral on social media, and outrage followed. To everyone's relief, however, the local police arrested Tufan and his associates on the night of July 28. Police detectives later arrested his wife and relatives involved in torturing and humiliating the girl and her mother.

True, the case broke the pattern of turning a blind eye to crimes committed by those belonging to the powerful quarters. Local law enforcers were quick to arrest the perpetrators. Md Asaduzzaman, the police superintendent of Bogra, said, "How the girl and her mother were tortured was worse than medieval brutality. It's an absolute violation of human rights. Whoever was behind this will not be spared." He made good on his promise.

What was unexceptional, however, was the reaction from the ruling party. The AL general secretary Obaidul Quader made an attempt to shirk responsibility, arguing Tufan was not "directly" involved with the ruling party. While what Tufan did may not reflect a party as large as the Awami League, resorting to such a way to deflect blame is absurd. For the sake of argument, even if Tufan were "directly" involved with the Awami League, would Mr Quader's reaction have been any different? And what does "directly" mean when Tufan is the convenor of Sramik League? What can be more direct involvement?

He failed to acknowledge that the limitless power Tufan had enjoyed as the leader of the local branch of Sramik League, a major affiliated organisation of the ruling party, contributed to giving rise to the perpetrator's belief that he could get away with literally anything. In fact,

according to the victim, Tufan's sister-in-law and ward councillor Marzia Akter threatened her that nothing would happen to them even if they killed her.

This is evident because, according to multiple news reports, Tufan exploited his party position to accumulate big money. He has so far been accused in six cases involving murder, attempted murder, drug trade and smuggling. In 2015, RAB caught him with sacks of phensedyl and Yaba, but he, for reasons unknown, got away. He even maintains his own group of thugs known as "Tufan bahini."

His brother, Matin Sarkar, was joint secretary of Bogra branch of Jubo League

AKM Asadur Rahman, the organising secretary of Bogra district Awami League, puts it best: "These actions of a leader of an affiliated organisation undermine the party's image. But those who have bestowed top posts on such persons are not any less responsible."

In a meeting of the AL presidium committee, the party leaders decided to investigate the case separately. Faridunnahar Laili, the agricultural secretary, said at the meeting that Tufan Sarkar's recent actions tarnished the party's image. Indeed they did, but one wonders why it always takes so long for the political parties to denounce someone of their own. Why were Tufan

crimes, why do the leaders repeat the same disturbing sentence that goes "the party will not take the blame for the misdeeds of a bad apple"?

When supporters of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, the two US presidential candidates, caused violence, it was up to them to denounce it vigorously. Trump condemned the violence with reluctance, but Sanders did it wholeheartedly as would any other Western politician. If they can take moral responsibility for the deeds of their supporters, why can our parties not take that of their own activists and leaders?

If Tufan had gotten away with committing rape this time, someone on



Tufan (left), the convenor of Bogra town Shramik League, raped a girl after his cohorts had abducted her. COURTESY: PROTHOM ALO

until August 1 when he was removed from the post. Under Matin's patronage, Tufan thrived. Matin himself is extremely powerful in Bogra. A Prothom Alo report states that despite being warrant in a murder case for eight years, he wasn't arrested ever. The police reports submitted before the court have always shown him as "fugitive"—all the while he has met top ministers and attended events hosted by police as an invited guest, and has lived in his house near the local police station! The family is infamous for its involvement in drug and other illicit businesses. All this has been possible because he was a powerful ruling party leader. So now, how can the party escape from its moral responsibility?

and his brother not investigated right after they had been accused of committing such serious crimes? Why does the party have to wait until someone commits a crime as grievous as Tufan's?

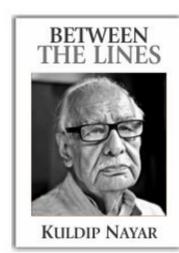
AL higher-ups should obviously be concerned as they said they were, but when Mr Quader chooses to disown Tufan instead of promising to cleanse his party of such evil elements, we are hardly convinced that their concerns are genuine.

No one is asking the party leaders to repent on behalf of Tufan. All one expects is unequivocal condemnation and resolve to not let such things happen ever again. Whenever a party man commits heinous

Facebook pointed out, he would have someday been nominated for, say, some elected post. Ironically, he then would also have given regular sermons on "morality" in random events—maybe even one about violence against women. Now that he's exposed the party leaders are ditching him. Obviously, no one in their right mind would lend Tufan any support but simply "removing" or rejecting him does not accomplish anything. The ruling party has to recognise that it is the sense of impunity one feels under its roof that creates monsters like Tufan.

Nazmul Ahasan is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

Together, we can



Whoever has done it has acted as the censor. What surprises me is the absence of protests. In my time, there would be noise or meeting to point out that the press has been muzzled or that critics have been silenced. Of course, it was a different story when the

That period surfaced once again before my eyes when Taslima Nasreen remarked the other day that "very few opposition voices are heard in the world's largest democracy." She had been confined to Aurangabad after leaving Kolkata. She is from Bangladesh and the fundamentalists there drove her out because she wrote the book, *Lajja* (Shame).

It is a slur on the Indian democracy that she cannot live in a city of her choosing. I am told that a few days ago she left Aurangabad for Delhi, but she was not allowed to land and sent back to Aurangabad. I do not want to dwell any further on this incident but what I have in mind is the danger to our democracy.

An emergency-like situation can prevail without actually imposing it. The RSS has been successful in removing the liberal heads of various educational institutions. I followed the case of Nehru Memorial

The Indian nation has to be vigilant all the time because it has gone through a period of 19 months of censorship. The press over did it because as BJP leader, LK Advani, said: You were asked to bend but began to crawl. To a large extent, Advani was right. The journalists were afraid of being arraigned by the Indira Gandhi government. Even the Press Council of India, the custodian of press freedom, vied with the Gandhi's supporters to raise the flag in her favour.

Today, it is the other way round. The press has been saffronised and except the odd voices in print and electronic media, it is at beck and call of the people in power. There is very little difference between then and now because survival is the uppermost in the minds of newspapers or television channel owners and journalists.

The NDTV is under pressure because its owner Pronnyoy Roy had taken a loan. But the CBI registered a case, said to be at the behest of the government, against RRPR Holding Private Limited, Pranoy Roy, his wife Radhika and unidentified officials of ICICI Bank of criminal conspiracy, cheating and corruption.

The government may find some ways to harass Karan Thapar and Barkha Dutt because of their long association with the television channel. They have been the most vociferous anchors taking up the cause of aggrieved people. Obviously, it has not been to the liking of the establishment. The pressure must have been enormous on the channels to drop both.

How do we bring back the environment of freedom? That is the question facing the nation today. With the domicile's sword of contract hanging over their head, they are afraid to speak up lest they should annoy the owners. But then the nation is getting the news which has been sieved through because of various considerations and pressures.

In America, such a situation came up and there the journalists got together and started their own channel. It was a courage of sorts because ultimately the sacred cows became too many and the tendencies to leave out too frequent. The crunch of resources was felt very badly and freedom was compromised.

Both Karan Thapar and Barkha Dutt will have to keep in mind that their journey would be long and arduous. The establishment would tempt them all the time to lure them to its side but it is up to them to withstand the difficulties they would be facing in the wilderness. It is not easy, but they can because of their character.

My support is with them, whatever it is worth. They are the examples of courage. Now it all depends on their stamina and the support the press extends to them. Not only the media, but the entire country is looking up to them. What happened during the emergency may not happen now. Then the press failed miserably. But, together we can.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.



emergency was imposed, but before that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi would not dare move against the press. She would look for supporters—and there were quite a few—but the number of critics was also large.

I recall that after imposing censorship in 1975-77, she triumphantly said that not a dog had barked! This hurt me as much as other journalists. We gathered at the Press Club—the number was 103—and passed a resolution to criticise the censorship. Information Minister VC Shukla, who knew me well, rang up to warn that "each one of you" would be put behind bars. This actually happened and I, too, was detained for three months.

Centre and found to my horror the disappearance of familiar liberal people. True, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and the RSS are the last word but they didn't go to the people asking for votes. It was never on the latter's agenda either.

Still the case of Taslima Nasreen is there, unexplained. No Indian airport would admit her except the nearest one to Aurangabad, which is Pune. Apparently, the government must have given instructions not to let her in at other places. All these look like the fatwa against Salman Rushdie by Iran for having written the book, *Satanic Verses*, which raised questions against Islam.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Make Chittagong city habitable!

It takes two to three hours of moderate rain or a tidal flood to leave the port city of Chittagong in a mess, with the elongated water stagnation causing immense sufferings to the city dwellers. Many roads in Chittagong have become too fragile to route vehicles in the aftermath of the latest waterlogging. Accidents are very frequent, while there appears to be no one to take notice of the city dwellers' miseries.

We draw the kind attention of the authorities to take constructive steps so that the city dwellers can live comfortably. We also request the residents of the city to be more careful while dropping garbage.

Rafik Alamgir, IBBL

Food adulteration needs to be stopped

Food adulteration is a common practice in Bangladesh. Many food items that we regularly buy from the local markets contain some kinds of adulterant. Potentially harmful chemicals such as formalin are applied on fish, fruit, meat, milk and other food items. As a result, the nutritional value of these food items is reduced. It also leads to serious health hazards including chronic health problems.

We have the law that prohibits such adulteration, but it is not implemented at all. Government should take notice of this adverse phenomenon seriously.

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