

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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Rice price goes up!

Identify and punish those responsible

WE are pleased that the government has clarified the confusion regarding a fake letter which said that India had stopped exporting rice to Bangladesh. But at the same time, it is a reality that the price of rice has increased significantly in the recent past, creating much suffering for ordinary citizens. What then is causing this?

According to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh, the retail price of coarse rice rose by Tk 1 a kg every day from September 11 to September 13, and then by Tk 2 on September 14. The government has said that this hike is not due to any shortage of rice in stock, but has rather been driven by a conspiracy hatched by a certain quarter that is aiming to destabilise the rice market. This is indeed a serious allegation and, if true, demands careful investigation.

It has also been alleged by the government and other stakeholders that a section of traders had also made a hefty profit in the last few days, having spread the fake information. This too, we believe, requires thorough investigation. However, what we do find inexcusable is the ministry's inability to foresee and stymie the sudden and sharp increase in the price of the staple, especially at a time when the country is already facing a number of crises, including the devastations caused by floods.

Under the circumstances, we are pleased that the government plans on distributing rice to the ultra-poor at a low price, but must also stress the need for vigilance against any corrupt practices. Moreover, it needs to address the reasons for the price hike and hold those responsible to account.

DPRK's missile tests

Rhetoric will not reset the minds

THE war cry from the North Korean leader is very disconcerting. It is regrettable that Kim Jong-un chooses to up the ante with every passing week by missile tests, 13 in all so far this year, in what could best be described as thumbing his nose to the rest of the world. The two recent tests have seen the missiles traverse the skies of Japan. And although Trump has toned down a bit from his "fire and fury" position, talks of military option add to the worry.

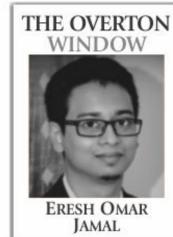
While the North Korean potential for precipitated action poses an existential threat to Japan and South Korea, the ratcheted up tension and rhetoric have the potential to engulf the entire region and indeed the world into a wider conflagration.

While hoping that saner counsel would prevail, we insist that the parties dedicate all efforts to reduce the tension and eliminate the prospect of a future conflict through a cool-headed approach. The reality has to be acknowledged. Much as one might resent the fact, North Korea has acquired nuclear weapons, and there are perhaps very limited options for the rest of the world to attenuate the threat potentials of North Korea. Certainly, a war should not be on the list. The crux of the matter is how to deal with a North Korea that has developed nuclear warheads and is on the way to perfecting the delivery system.

Nuclear weapons are the greatest threat to humanity. And whatever may be the compulsion or motivation for a country to acquire the weapon, these countries should recognise that nuclear clouds are no respecter of international borders. Now is as important a time as any to work towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons from the face of the earth.

A disaster we made worse

"Bangladesh is a disaster-prone country due to its geographical location. So, we've to live with the phenomenon with necessary plans to keep the extent of damages and loss of lives to a minimum during any disaster."
—Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

BA NGLADESH is indeed a disaster-prone country, especially when it comes to floods. An article published by *The Daily Star* revealed that at least 142 people died from this year's flood impacting over 8.5 million people and their lives and their livelihoods ("The way forward as floodwater recedes", September 8). According to government estimates, at least 61,877 hectares of cropland, mostly for growing rice, have been "completely damaged" and another 531 million hectares "partially damaged" by floods.

In Tangail and Gaibandha alone, Aman paddy on over 20,000 hectares of land and worth around Tk 14 crore were damaged, respectively, leaving thousands of farmers and their families completely helpless and wondering when and how it is that they would regain some sense of stability into their lives—or whatever is left of it.

Eighty eight primary schools, madrasahs and high-schools have remained suspended in Moulvibazar, while thousands more across the country have been forced to shut down because of flash floods and the onrush of water from the hills. Additionally, massive numbers of school children could not attend their classes in the haor areas of Sunamganj, having joined different types of works to support their families, who had, reportedly, had their Boro paddy (the main crop of the area) washed away by floodwater, leaving them on the cusp of financial ruin.

Overall, according to the district's primary and secondary education offices, average attendance of students fell by about 70 percent since April among its (approximately) 350,000 and 121,000 students at the primary and secondary levels, respectively. How much of a setback thousands more will have to endure and for how long is anyone's guess.

Amidst such sufferings, some flood victims in the haor areas, having had their houses submerged underwater for four months, have erected houses on roads risking their lives and of those travelling along, alleging that the chairman and members of the Union Parishad (UP) had refused to provide them with shelter, in spite of their desperate pleas. But that's not all. They alleged that most of the villagers were

denied relief when they had gone to the flood centres and in general, completely contradicting the Deputy Commissioner who had claimed that "they [had] distributed a large quantity of relief goods" which, if true, begs the question: "to whom?"

While this is going on, people across the country are suffering miserably. In Fenchuganj upazila of Sylhet, at least 30 villages have remained under floodwater for the last three months, affecting around 60 thousand people as the Kushiara River swelled because of the onrush of water from the upstream in Assam. Business too has been suffering according to local traders, a commonality in the many places still submerged underwater and many more that lie devastated in other ways.

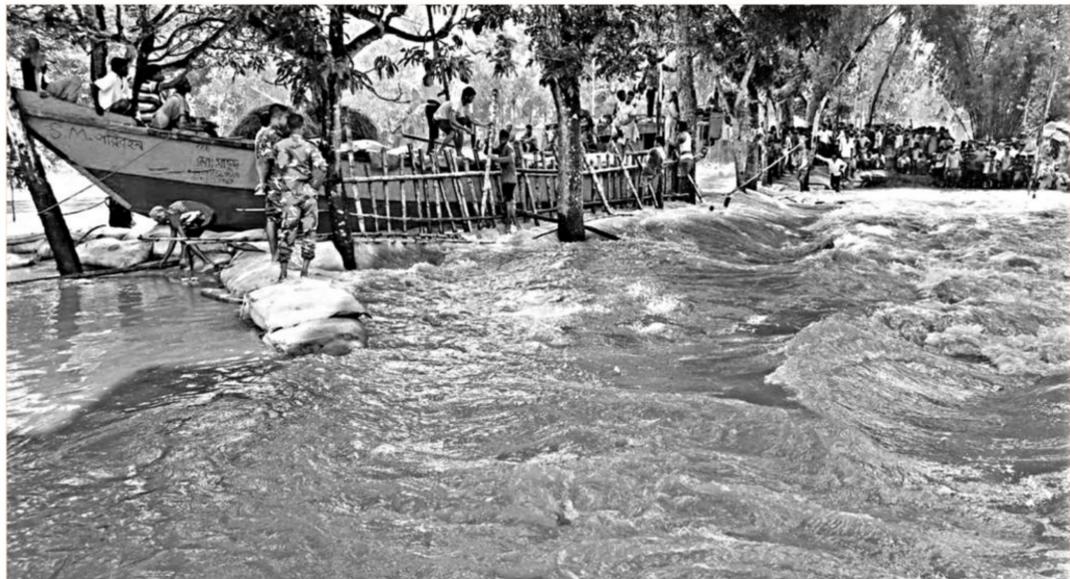
Yet, the saddest part of the situation,

that they had found a record, "which shows that 258 tonnes of rice was supplied to Dhaka district Ansar," who "received [only] 75 tonnes" ("9.5 tonnes relief rice missing!", *The Daily Star*, September 7). At a time when men, women and children in massive numbers are potentially in danger of starving to death, that some people are willing to deprive them of what is possibly life saving relief to make a profit is, perhaps, indicative of how exactly it is that we have failed on our part, "to keep the extent of damages and loss of lives to a minimum," as the Prime Minister had suggested.

And the same applies to our flood preparedness as, for example, according to flood victims in 15 villages at Kulaghat union in Sadar upazila, it was the Water Development Board (WDB)

kilometres-long embankment was completely washed away by floods and 60 percent severely damaged, while in total, 280 kilometres of embankment were damaged and 35 kilometres wiped out by the recent floods in the rest of the northern districts. According to locals, the main reason for this was the lack of maintenance work done by the WDB, which the Executive Engineer of WDB stationed in Kurigram had himself admitted.

The Director General of WDB too did admit, to his credit, that his organisation's "efforts to control floods with embankments has proved quite ineffective in many cases due to flawed construction and lack of maintenance." Given the cost of the WDB's failure, however, mere admission is not enough. What is needed is for the government to



A joint team of army and the Water Development Board repair a flood control embankment at Bahuka in Sirajganj after a part of it was breached by the onrush of waters of the Jamuna River.

PHOTO: STAR

as the floodwater recedes, is that some of the relief gathered for today's unfortunate victims, are being diverted by a handful of shamelessly corrupt individuals, public officials and their cohorts. In one incident, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) found, for example, a huge discrepancy in rice being released for relief from Teigaon central storage depot meant for distribution among the flood affected people in the area of a Jatiya Party lawmaker. Whereas each sack was supposed to contain 30 kilogrammes of rice, Rab found some to contain only 12 kilogrammes while others had 14 or 20 kilogrammes of rice in them.

More discrepancies were detected on further inspection by Executive Magistrate of Rab, Sarwar Alam, who said

who was at fault for the collapse of a dyke along the Dharla River at Dakkhin Shiberkuti village, who alleged that the WDB did not do repair work of the dyke properly. One victim said that "The government [had] allocated money to save us from erosion by the Dharla River, but WDB officials did not use the money properly," adding that "There were a large number of bags filled with sand," which "were not dumped before the flood," leading to the dyke's collapse—an allegation the Kulaghat UP Chairman also made and that should be carefully investigated.

That, however, is not all when it comes to the allegations of corruption, mismanagement and incompetence that have been made against the WDB. In Kurigram district, 23 kilometres of a 210-

conduct proper investigations and to prosecute those found guilty of failing to perform their duties satisfactorily, so that in future, such debacles are never again repeated.

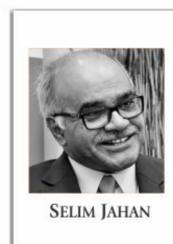
And here is where the government must fare better in future—paying attention to details that could very well decide the fate of millions of people in future and be the deciding factor when it comes to preserving the lives of our citizens. With forecasts predicting that there will be increased numbers of natural disasters in future, it is time for both the government and society in general, to pay greater attention to how we can better prepare ourselves for what is to come.

Eresh Omar Jamal is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Counting what counts in development

When statisticians compare countries, they rely on commensurable data, like life expectancy and per capita income. But such metrics, while useful, do not tell the entire story of human development, which can be revealed only by understanding how quantitative progress affects the quality of people's lives.



SELIM JAHAN

Index (HDI), a composite measure of national progress that my office at the United Nations Development Programme oversees, combines all three statistics to rank countries relative to one another.

What many do not realise, however, is that such metrics, while useful, do not tell the entire story of development. In fact, to understand how developed a country is, we must also grasp how people's lives are affected by progress. And to understand that, we must consider the *quality* of the change that is being reported.

When statisticians compare countries, they require commensurate data. To compare school attendance, for example, researchers would count the number of registered students in each country, relative to all school-age children (although even this can be a challenge in many developing countries, where record keeping is not always standardised).

But to gauge the relative quality of a country's education system, researchers would want to determine whether students are actually learning. For those numbers, statisticians would need to test students across a range of subjects, a project that is far more ambitious than simply taking attendance.

Statisticians have always recognised that comparing quantities is far easier than comparing quality. But, because existing measures are all we have, the weaknesses are often overlooked when ranking relative gains or making policies, even though "progress" according to a given indicator is not necessarily genuine.

If the world is ever to reach parity in development, we must change how we gauge and catalogue the quality of policy initiatives.

Consider the statistics measured by the HDI – life expectancy, education, and *per capita* income. Life expectancy statistics suggest that the world is getting healthier, and data show that people are living longer than ever before; since 1990, average life expectancy has increased by around six years. But the increase in quality of life has not been as dramatic.

life-quality datasets are incomplete or infrequently compiled.

It's a similarly mixed picture for education. The world is no doubt making progress in extending access to schools, with more children enrolled and attending than ever before. But how do we measure the gaps in educational quality? Some 250 million children worldwide do not learn basic skills, even though half of them have spent at least four years in school. It will come as no surprise that in most countries, schools in

disparities. For example, PISA found that "socio-economically disadvantaged students across OECD countries are almost three times more likely than advantaged students not to attain the baseline level of proficiency in science."

Data on employment—critical for policymakers, as they prepare for the future—tell a similar story. The 2015 Human Development Report recognised that as the world moves toward a knowledge economy, low-skill or marginal workers are at greater risk of losing their jobs, and opportunities for exploitation of informal or unpaid workers increase.

To put this in perspective, consider employment projections for the European Union, which foresee the addition of 16 million new jobs between 2010 and 2020. But over the same period, the number of jobs available for people with the least formal education is anticipated to decline, by around 12 million.

"Not everything that can be counted counts. Not everything that counts can be counted," the sociologist William Bruce Cameron wrote in 1963. His dictum remains true today, though when it comes to measuring human development, I would suggest a slight revision: "Not everything that is counted counts for everything."

Equitable human development requires that policymakers pay more attention to the quality of outcomes, rather than focusing primarily on quantitative measures of change. Only when we know how people are being affected by development can we design policies that bring about the most valuable improvements in their lives. "The intention to live as long as possible isn't one of the mind's best intentions," the author Deepak Chopra once observed, "because quantity isn't the same as quality."

Selim Jahan is Director of the Human Development Report Office and lead author of the Human Development Report.

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Because of the dilapidated condition of Jagodishpur Primary School building in Jhalakathi sadar, a teacher is left with no choice but to give lessons to students on the verandah. How are students supposed to learn effectively without basic facilities?

Those extra years are often accompanied by illness and disability – such as dementia, which the World Health Organization now estimates affects 47.5 million people worldwide.

While life expectancy can be calculated based on birth and death records, indices that measure quality of life, like the WHO's disability-adjusted life year estimates, require considerable amounts of information on a wide range of illnesses and disabilities in every country. And, unfortunately, the difficulty of gathering such data means that many

wealthier neighbourhoods typically have better facilities, more qualified teachers, and smaller class sizes. Addressing inequality requires measuring educational outcomes, rather than school enrollment rates.

The OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which relies on tests not directly linked to curricula, is one approach to making cross-country comparisons. The results for 2015 paint a much richer picture of educational performance across participating countries, while highlighting stark

PHOTO: STAR

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Let Imrul bat at no. 1 position

It all started with the 2016 T20 World Cup when Imrul Kayes lost his place in the national cricket team to an unknown Mohammed Mithun. That "experiment" was a failure, but experiments have continued. Despite his excellent record in Tests as an opening batsman, in partnership with Tamim Iqbal, which includes a triple-century stand, Kayes was recently asked to bat at no. 3 position. He was not obviously happy about that and his subsequent performances showed just why so. This was done to establish Soumya Sarkar as Tamim's partner. Soumya as a free-flowing attacking batsman, like Sabbir Rahman, is better suited in no. 6/7 position. Mominul Haque with his outstanding average batting at no. 3 position was asked to bat at no. 4 and 8. These ad-hoc changes have sapped the confidence of the top-order batsmen.
Engr. ABM Nurul Islam
Gulshan

Tiny island in the midst of Kaptai Lake

Kattali Bil is a newly emerged part in the midst of Kaptai Lake where local fishermen have built slums and a small market. The spectacular view of this tiny island attracts the sightseers who can travel to Rangamati from Langdu or other areas by boat.

Different types of birds also have found sanctuary in the island. During the winter season, it is wonderful to watch the migratory birds. This place can be a new tourist attraction in Bangladesh, provided the government takes steps to beautify and manage it. Local businessmen can also play a vital role in the process.
Mahmudul Hasan, By mail