

## Power minister explains

It is a disaster

**A**FTER four years of dishing out various prescriptions, the state minister for power has finally come out with the statement in parliament on Thursday that the problem of load-shedding will not end even after implementation of all the power projects in hand during the tenure of the present government. And at the end of the term he presented a list of 13 long-term power projects to meet the demand. He further said that one term in office is not enough for the development of the power sector. The question that comes to mind is what then has his ministry been doing for the last four and a half years?

This time around lawmakers of BNP and Jamaat also came down strongly on the state minister for failing to improve the power situation. This again, we find, a belated reaction of the comrades-in-arms. Where were these alliance government lawmakers all these years when media headlines screamed loudly about the crisis giving details of how frequent power outage was causing irreparable damage to the industrial production, especially in garment factories, and to the agriculture, health and education sectors? Is it because of the ire of the public in their own areas that they are now asking him openly in parliament? And are they ready to ask the state minister for answers regarding the allegation that huge sums have been spent in the last four and a half years but not a single megawatt of power has been added to the national grid?

Power crisis has been stalking this nation for many years now. True, it was also there during the tenure of the immediate past government but most are of the opinion that never before the problem looked so ominous as it does today. Now that the state minister has come out with his own statement, we wonder, why has he been giving all sorts of incredible arguments and counter arguments for the last four plus years to justify the abysmal mismanagement of his ministry beating all previous records?

## Indiscriminate filling of water bodies

Serious threat to our vulnerable environment

**F**ILLING up of the city's lakes and water bodies including even the river tributaries encircling the city has been going on for years. We have recently come across yet another such filling of lakes in the area covering Khilgaon and Sabuj Bagh. The media on several earlier occasions have reported of similar crime involving the Gulshan/Baridhara Lake. The filling up of the lake in the Khilgaon/Sabuj Bagh area, however, seems to bear different dimension and special significance. Apparently in this specific instance the filling is being carried out under the supervision and initiative of the Public Works Directorate (PWD), despite the fact that a Wetland Preservation Act made effective in 2000 forbids any such claiming of land and construction thereupon.

Due to such indiscriminate and senseless filling of water bodies that also served as rain water storage we are already facing acute water logging in various parts of the city. Filling of lakes and water bodies are also gradually clogging the city's storm water drainage network since these happen to be connected to the system. Knowledgeable sources after due inspection of the entire area in question have confirmed that the lake and the various water bodies covering Khilgaon and Sabujbagh are also linked to the DCC's surface and Dhaka WASA's underground drainage systems. One also has to take into account that the filling of lakes is one of the major causes aggravating the already existing poor state of our environment and hygiene.

We are extremely concerned with continuous deteriorating state of our neighbourhoods due to this criminal business of filling up lakes and water bodies. Each of these violations seems to take place under the very nose of the authorities concerned and often with their tacit support and involvement. We urge the Administration to issue an immediate statement on the matter in the greater public interest. It is a serious issue of public concern and thus they have a right to know.

# Creating a community flood management programme



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

**I** was reading an interesting article the other day about the possible future effects of global warming and climate change. Analysts were in agreement that many regions of the world would suffer severe reversals as a consequence of unpredictable weather patterns. It was especially suggested that countries in South Asia would suffer from prolonged droughts as well as severe flooding. Scientists also indicated that climate differences would affect wind pattern and that heavy rainfall would trigger regular flooding of low-lying areas, specially the marginal territory associated with rivers and deltas.

Very soon afterwards, I had the privilege to attend a regional workshop convened in Dhaka jointly by the Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad and the World Meteorological Organisation. There were representatives also from the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Japan, China, Nepal, India, Pakistan and Myanmar.

Participants presented their conclusions on the basis of pilot studies carried out by different teams in different parts of South Asia. Apparently, these were carried out in Jamalpur-Nayannagar, Palalanda and in Nawabganj Sadar in Bangladesh; in Saptari and Rautahat districts in Nepal and in

Dakhin Mohanpur, Bihar and West Bengal in India.

These projects were carried out within the context of identifying and designing methods for enhancing the latent capacity within communities at the grass-roots level, in being able to provide more effective responses towards the reduction of flood vulnerability.

I must admit that I was surprised with the detailed approach

household diet and also adds to its meagre income) and for standing crops including space for their storage. We also have to anticipate how to combat possible suffering from water borne diseases, snake bites and loss of lives through drowning.

It was evident from the discussion that the studies has been carried out in rural areas and had not focused on the urban poor

needs as opposed to their capabilities, some were not properly equipped in this respect. It also emerged that preparedness required a planning interface with government agencies particularly in the creation of provisions for emergency situations. There was also the question of managing information for future reference. It was also revealed that during nor-

have tackled cyclones and floods and survived because of our inner strength. However, we need to be more organised and more systematic. This will greatly improve effectiveness.

After this workshop I am convinced that we should, in Bangladesh, create Community Flood Management Committees (CFMCs). They could be the basis for an institutional response

additional resources so that there can be appropriate coordination and proper flood management activities.

Another important function for the CFMC will have to be the preparation and identification of flood-free shelters with facilities of both clean drinking water and proper sanitation. CFMCs will also have to be made responsible for arranging not only flood evacuation drills but also for storing sufficient quantities (on a demographic basis) of water purification tablets, oral-saline sachets, anti-venom vaccines, bandages and emergency basic foodstuffs.

They can also subsequently help the government agencies during the post-flood rehabilitation period. Plan of action pertaining to flood affected people would definitely profit from such an association.

We have a high population density and scarce resources. Having CFMCs will enhance target communities' ability to help each other to survive and cope during and after disasters. It will require micro-management, but the potential for good is immense.

In China, they have shifted from flood control to scientific flood management. By building dikes, levees and by strengthening flood embankments, they have embarked on the path of reducing susceptibility to damage and mitigating the impact of floods. This course of action has been possible because they are relatively more prosperous. In Bangladesh, our option has to be less capital intensive. CFMCs will strengthen our structural measures and optimise flood control.

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**POST BREAKFAST**

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to this issue. I have always maintained that any form of disaster management within Bangladesh requires a community-based approach. This is particularly true with regard to containing the pernicious effects of regular flooding in communities residing near wetlands and riverbanks. Prior planning, raising the awareness threshold and greater inter-activity will reduce risk-taking and also potential loss. It will also enhance resilience building. Capacity building will also facilitate organised services. These are critical factors for the fragile Bangladesh economy with a preponderant rural sector.

We need to plan ahead so that necessary steps can be taken to protect the exposed aspects of rural community life. This includes damage potential for fragile household units (mostly built out of mud and bamboo topped with reed), for poultry and livestock, for the courtyard vegetable garden (which greatly supplements the rural

living in slums and 'bastees' in marginal, low-lying fringe urban areas (normally the first to be inundated in case of flooding). When questioned, field workers indicated that rural areas had been the focal points as the large majority of the population in South Asia live in rural conditions. True. Nevertheless, it would be, I am sure, of great interest to carry out such surveys in the urban context. We could then identify common factors and try to strengthen the institutional approach.

The pilot studies process with regard to the Community Flood Management Programme (CFMP) involved determining the needs and expectations of each community vis-a-vis flood mitigation and loss minimisation. It also included the assessment of the levels of flood preparedness within different communities.

Some important elements were highlighted during the survey. Group discussions revealed that while some community organisa-

mal flood situations, communities could cope by themselves. This was however not possible during major floods which required reconstruction and rehabilitation in the post-flood period. In some areas it was also discovered that flood forecasting information was not always available on time. This affected the response scenario.

Discussion during the workshop also pointed out the need for prioritising in the rehabilitation activities -- in matters of housing, of agricultural production and revitalisation of economic activities. It would also be pertinent to add here factors like rehabilitation of infrastructure, roads, electricity, telecommunications, educational institutions, provision of clean water and hospitals.

The possibility of flooding is something that we have to live with. Everytime we have a serious flood, we lose thousands of crores of Taka in terms of our GDP. Our expertise in disaster management has been lauded the world over. We

throughout the country. Such a format is in place in Switzerland, Germany, China, Korea and Japan to respond during times of natural disasters.

The CFMC needs to be created through discussion within the smallest administrative unit -- the Union Parishad on a non-political basis. They will work to reduce the losses sustained by flood-affected people. They will coordinate appropriate activities in pre-during and post-flood stages. The Chairman of the Union Parishad could be the Convener of the CFMC. Its limited membership (not exceeding 12 persons) could be drawn through consultation/selection/election from among local inhabitants (including teachers, medical practitioners, socially and economically disadvantaged groups and local government officials). Members of the CFMC will also be expected to mobilise local people and local resources and liaise with higher tiers of the government (thana/district level officials) for

## Sri Lanka again on the brink of civil war?



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

**O**F late, the situation in Sri Lanka has unfortunately nosedived to such an extent that hostilities have flared up between the Tamil militants and government troops leading many to believe that the fragile ceasefire has virtually broken down and the nation is reverting to civil war. This was least expected because the resumption of the dialogue in Geneva in February, after a long gap and assiduously made ground work, had gone off quite well in the given difficult conditions -- resulting in a discernible change for the better towards settlement of the complex problem. The next round of talks was scheduled in April 24, but this has not taken place much to the dismay of those who want to see lessening of the trouble and resolution of the government-Tamil crisis. But the sharp worsening of the situation has led to the postponement of the dialogue, which now hangs in the balance.

This has come as a big setback to

the efforts for a negotiated settlement of the civil war issue and consequently, the overall situation in Sri Lanka has much deteriorated raising the spectre of the return of full blown fighting even though mediators are making painstaking endeavour to salvage the critical situation.

The gravity of the situation can be gauged from the fact that several major incidents have taken place in the recent days highlighted by the

Two months ago in Geneva, two sides sat across the table and agreed to honour the cessation of hostilities. The much-awaited dialogue produced positive results in the given circumstances. The talks took place nearly after three years of last round of such dialogue and the Lankan situation had worsened considerably during the long interregnum. Such a deteriorating situation was salvaged by dogged mediatory efforts by

the Geneva dialogue did not cover the nitty gritty complexities of the civil war and a possible settlement since two sides rightly devoted time on maintaining the truce that had appeared on the verge of a collapse. Indeed, salvaging this situation was not an easy task. Such contentious issues like the extent of powers in the autonomy for the rebels and a timeframe for a settlement as earlier demanded by Tamil mili-

force in settling the conflict with the rebels. It was during Wickramasinghe's tenure as prime minister that the currently fragile truce was signed and several rounds of talks between the two sides took place outside the country. The dialogue made progress given the thorny nature. The militants agreed to give up the demand of a separate independent Tamil state in preference to greater autonomy. The government side

he as the president of the nation also stressed on the need for peace and this approach along with a softer stance by the rebels made the talks possible while the Norwegian government played a painstaking role in persuading the warring sides for dialogue. But, with the unfortunate occurrence of violence and postponement of the talks, the entire matter seems to getting back to "square one".

Dangerous signs are becoming clear about the resumption of fighting with little respect to the truce by either side. Some international observers blamed more the government for the violations. Mediators are clearly dismayed and trying to contain the sharp slide. Two sides need to demonstrate patience and realism since the crisis warrants restraint, more for the reason that no side can decisively win as proved before. At least the ceasefire must be observed by both sides should they want any progress. Because, return to hostilities will lead to nowhere. The government and the militants must be mindful about this for the sake of their country and people. The window of opportunity created following the Geneva talks needs to be seized. Intransigence and hardening of the positions will certainly not bring any solution to their problem.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is Foreign Editor of BSS.

## MATTERS AROUND US

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air strikes on rebel strongholds in the north-east of the country and from the militants side, daring attempt on the life of the chief of country's army by a woman suicider that left ten troops killed, many injured including the army chief himself. All these mark toughening of the stance by both parties. Even as president Mahinda Rajapakse and the Tamil rebel supreme Villupai Prabhakaran are speaking about the need of peace, both make no secrets that the policy and attitude of the "other side" may force it to a full fledged war. The truce for last more than four years has become increasingly vulnerable.

Norway, which made a fresh dialogue possible at a time when it looked remote. The two-day February 22-23 talks might not have come out with anything very remarkable, but the outcome was a great relief both nationally and internationally. For, both sides agreed to honour ceasefire and vowed to maintain the atmosphere conducive for next round of dialogue in April. But the rebels called off the talks and said they would return to negotiations only after a conducive climate is restored. Not surprisingly, they have blamed the government for queering the pitch of talks. On the other hand, the government turned the table of

tants did not figure prominently. Discussions on these vexed issues would have in probability lashed them in difficult situation at that stage. This realisation had dawned on both sides and substantive issues were to be taken up in the next round of talks. Now as the future talks are not in sight and violence is making bigger noise, the whole scenario has markedly changed.

The crisis was compounded after Mahinda Rajapakse won the presidency on a headline stance on the Tamil issue compared to his main rival and former prime minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, who preferred dialogue rather than use

also gave several concessions. This infuriated president Chandrika Kumaratunga, political rival of Wickramasinghe, and finally she sacked his government climaxing their differences on attitude towards the Tamils.

The midterm elections for parliament brought Chandrika's Freedom Party and Peoples Alliance to power and hawkish Rajapakse was made the premier and the peace process suffered severe setbacks. As Rajapakse is at the helm as two terms of Chandrika is over, the government-rebel relations appears to touch the lowest ebb. However,

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### 'How patriotic are we?'

My letter refers to Mr. Shamsheer Chowdhury's thought-provoking post editorial 'How patriotic are we?' To me, the word 'patriotism' is jargon over-used by clever politicians for mobilising common people in their favour and realising their goals. I am sorry to say that, in practice, patriotism is the least priority in my life and for that matter nobody should expect me to demonstrate patriotism the way I am taught by the politicians or in the schools. The key, which the writer has rightly pointed out, is honesty. If you are honest and sincere, you will be automatically doing things as one may expect from a patriot. However, you cannot achieve honesty by using good words only. Human beings are by nature vulnerable to vices and, in our society where values are eroding at an alarming rate, we are particularly prone to dishonesty. It is, obviously, the responsi-

bility of the state to devise a realistic mechanism so that none, from a lawmaker to a peasant, can escape the law and have no choice but being honest. How can we do that?

Information technology can be a viable answer. Introduction of machine readable personal ID cards and establishment of central database is helping many countries in Europe to keep people away from crimes, tax evasion, illegal bank transaction etc. It's a simple solution. Money is in the heart of all crimes and the key-motivating factor for a man to be dishonest. Schools, police stations, offices, banks, telephone subscription centres, airports, trade license issuing authorities, vehicle registration authorities, hospitals and so on may store information of all their transactions with customers in the central database through compulsory use of ID cards. This way it will be possible to track

one's activities and would ultimately limit the use of illegal money. Once you know that you are being monitored it will be easy for you as well to refrain from illegal acts.

The infrastructure needed for this will, of course, call for a huge investment. Initially, the government may build the infrastructure and all the stakeholders, including customers, could share the cost later. I believe, if the government launches this project as a part of its anti-corruption campaign, many foreign countries would come forward with necessary fund and technology.

I am writing this based on my experience in Europe. I am sure there is someone among the readers of your esteemed newspaper who is more knowledgeable about the use of database and would share the technical aspects of my proposition. Jamilul Walid One-mail

### Wake up Bangladesh

I was born and raised for 15 years in U.A.E. but then unfortunately I had to come to my motherland Bangladesh. After six years in Dhaka it seems that people don't mind suffering from blackouts or load-shedding. They seem to be used to this phenomenon rather than actively protesting against it. Now people at Kamsat have woken up. What about the rest of Bangladesh? Are their spines too weak to stand up or do they prefer to be toyed with? A decent living condition is a must to indicate that the nation is progressing in the right direction. Maruf Buksh Jhikata, Dhaka

### May Day and us

The first day of May was observed as the day for upholding of the dignity of the working people or just the dignity of labour across the globe. It was the establishment of

the basic rights of the humans that was championed and pioneered by John Henry in the Chicago city that found its legal stature through a historic revolt centuries back. Working people across the world got a fixed period of work a day, after an unlimited period of time with humiliations and deprivations.

On this very day, we have to reassess our convictions towards the implementation of the right/law in all the spheres of working sectors in the society. We have been able to observe the spirit in different circumstances but looking at the working scenario and other dehumanising factors prevalent in the garment sectors we by no means can assure ourselves that we have to uphold the very spirit at all levels of the society.

Story of the inhuman plights of the garment workers mainly the women is totally different. They work for longer period of time every day with minimum pay and a

maximum of hazards in situations that do not speak of the spirit that was established on this very day; rather it speaks of the stories of manipulations/ deprivations and social injustice that these workers across the country undergo at a regular basis. Pay cuts, sexual harassments, and unlimited period of working hours, unhygienic working atmosphere and a complete lack of certainty of any sort are the predominant aspects that a garment worker encounters every day.

Our farmers are facing situations that also go against the spirit of the day. Our politicians, social scientists and the civil society have to think deep and try hard, reassessing the prevailing situations where our working people are falling mere preys to the opportunists around. Let's uphold the very basic spirit of the day through assuring the equalities for all. Rafiqul Islam Rime Agrabad, Chittagong

### Can armed uprising in Nepal lead to democracy?

In western countries like France, USA etc armed struggles by mainly their own people for abolishing monarchy or for independence ended in democracies but there is not a single instance in Asia where it has happened so.

For example in India or Pakistan there was no armed independence struggle, in China the armed struggle did not bring democracy but communism, in Bangladesh armed independence struggle was not mainly by its own people but mainly with the help of armed forces of India.

Hence it will be interesting to watch whether present turmoil in Nepal which was triggered mainly due to armed uprising of Maoists will ultimately end up in actual democracy or not? Hem Raj Jain New Delhi, India

### Quota in govt. job

Every year thousands of students secure their degrees and start looking for jobs. But it is very difficult finding a decent job now-a-days. Especially quota in the govt job is making it even worse. At the moment 55 per cent of the govt jobs are reserved on different quota. From the rest 45 per cent, a big portion is filled up by political influence. On the other hand it is hard to find a private job without some kind of influence. So life is getting miserable for general students and the govt also is losing service of the talented students. In my opinion, there is no need for quota in govt job anymore. Even if the authority thinks there is a need for quota it should not be more than 10 per cent. I hope the authorities concerned will consider this matter seriously. Mainul Quadery West Bakalia, Chittagong