

Dhaka, Friday, October 4, 1991

Can DESA Deliver?

The long-awaited launching of the Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (DESA) on October 1 certainly had a good deal to do with pressure from foreign donors, particularly the World Bank.

Quite apart from the need to streamline the operations of the Power Development Board (PDB), the decision to set up DESA had an extra logic: power pilferage, euphemistically known as "systems loss," in Dhaka metropolitan area is currently running at 10 per cent higher than the national average.

In an interview given to this paper yesterday, Energy Minister Dr. Khandker Mosharraf Hossain said that launching of DESA would substantially reduce systems loss and provide a better service to the consumers.

With the launching of DESA, the government's intention to combat inefficiency, corruption and theft in the power sector has been established.

At the lower level, reading of meters needs to be rationalised and corrupt employees punished in order to deter future wrongdoings.

The new authority will have to become accountable for conduct of its business, not only by stopping to be a drain on national resources like the PDB, but also by making its administration transparent.

The new authority also needs to come to terms with the cost factor. It must recognise that because of pilferage by large business concerns and some well-placed households, the majority of Dhaka's population are having to bear an intolerable cost for power supply.

As a result, he argues, the law and order situation is "very bad." The government is not getting the support of the civil servants who have been agitating for the past two months for pay increases.

An Act of Providence

How some old things tend to come back quite forcefully. In most of the industrialised West calling for a pre-nuptial consultation of the pedigree of the parties involved has been relegated to the position of barbaric vestiges.

It is quite a different story in the subcontinent or possibly the orient as a whole. If eugenic considerations worked behind the first rigorous implementations of the ideal endogamy-exogamy combination of the Indian caste system at its higher perches — more down-to-earth compulsions for the need to be circumspect in matrimonial matters led the societies at large to stick to the practice of looking for the antecedents of both the bride and the groom.

Now for a development in the opposite direction. Right thinking citizens and even the government in Australia are considering seriously to call for a study of the antecedents of couples involved in cross-cultural intimacy, leading or not leading to marriage.

Talking of wife-bashing there is something to be said about a late Bangladeshi development. There have been quite sensational cases of murdering husbands coming one after the other here in Bangladesh — all of them in the upper crust of the society.

Shall we then resign ourselves to the age-old position of accepting marriage as purely an act of providence?

ONE gets puzzled to see how the UN Security Council has dragged the UN, an organisation of 106 countries, so much to go after one country that was already ravaged by the recent UN authorised US-led Desert Storm.

The UN has allowed itself to be used by some members for waging a war against Iraq. Understandable. Saddam's occupation of Kuwait had to be overturned though given the time and patience it needed, the job could be done without bloodshed.

Quite apart from the need to streamline the operations of the Power Development Board (PDB), the decision to set up DESA had an extra logic: power pilferage, euphemistically known as "systems loss," in Dhaka metropolitan area is currently running at 10 per cent higher than the national average.

In an interview given to this paper yesterday, Energy Minister Dr. Khandker Mosharraf Hossain said that launching of DESA would substantially reduce systems loss and provide a better service to the consumers.

With the launching of DESA, the government's intention to combat inefficiency, corruption and theft in the power sector has been established.

At the lower level, reading of meters needs to be rationalised and corrupt employees punished in order to deter future wrongdoings.

The new authority will have to become accountable for conduct of its business, not only by stopping to be a drain on national resources like the PDB, but also by making its administration transparent.

The new authority also needs to come to terms with the cost factor. It must recognise that because of pilferage by large business concerns and some well-placed households, the majority of Dhaka's population are having to bear an intolerable cost for power supply.

As a result, he argues, the law and order situation is "very bad." The government is not getting the support of the civil servants who have been agitating for the past two months for pay increases.

Iraqi Nuclear Bomb on Paper!

by Muzlehuiddin Ahmad

from those which have formidable quantities of nuclear weapons, are engaged in similar exercises. Research is research. All the nuclear powers have extensive nuclear research programmes and capabilities.

There nuclear countries insist on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. But they themselves are engaged in vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons through upgrading the quality and adding new nuclear weapons.

The Iraqi documents reportedly contains data that could be interpreted by different experts in a different way. The interested party would always try to depict their finds as "Gold Mine" — data with all potentials for producing nuclear bombs and Iraqis would continue to deny them.

purpose of the entire exercise. Under the circumstances, it would be extremely difficult to have a doubt-free opinion on the "gold mine".

All the nuclear powers have extensive nuclear research programmes and capabilities. These are said to be all for defensive and peaceful purposes. In that sense, nuclear bombs are also for peaceful purposes as these form "deterrence" against the nuclear weapons of the enemies. At least this is how the nuclear powers explain their possessions of nuclear arsenals.

The cease-fire resolutions contained a provision for destruction of all weapons of mass destruction and the delivery system. Obviously these refer to the actual weapons and the delivery systems and not about any paper and documents related to nuclear research which Iraqis say are for peaceful purposes though the UN inspectors suspect these are for nuclear weapons programmes.

These nuclear countries insist on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. But they themselves are engaged in vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons through upgrading the quality and adding new nuclear weapons.

The Iraqi documents reportedly contains data that could be interpreted by different experts in a different way. The interested party would always try to depict their finds as "Gold Mine" — data with all potentials for producing nuclear bombs and Iraqis would continue to deny them.

member countries. These matters are creating serious concerns would wide. Let the UN General Assembly, now in session, examine seriously the Iraqi episode and set strict guidelines for future actions in similar cases.

FORMER prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai says Nepal is now threatened by simultaneous moves — amounting almost to a conspiracy — to discredit the country's recently revived multi-party parliamentary democracy.

Mr. Bhattarai said that although he would term such efforts a "fight of ideas" rather than a "conspiracy," various elements in big business, big finance, in the high echelons of the civil service, in the army and in the police are working very hard to discredit democracy.

"Everybody is conspiring to discredit the government. Within a fortnight of the government being formed, the challenge of civil servants came and they started their agitation which still continues," he said in an interview.

As a result, he argues, the law and order situation is "very bad." The government is not getting the support of the civil servants who have been agitating for the past two months for pay increases.

Mr Bhattarai, 67, presided over the government in one of the most crucial periods of contemporary Nepali history. Beneath a casual appearance is a politician of exceptional qual-

Democracy 'Under Threat' in Nepal

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

An astute Nepali politician, remarkably philosophical about his own recent electoral defeat, believes that the country's newly revived democratic institutions are at risk

particular, he took meticulous care to play the role of a constitutional monarch. There were aberrations sometimes, but they were quickly spotted and eradicated because of goodwill on both sides — more on the side of the King, to be fair.

He denies that the ruling Nepali Congress party, of which he is president, is riddled with infighting and that he personally is not getting along well with his successor, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

He recalls that he was the one who proposed Mr Koirala at the parliamentary party meeting. There is absolutely no difference between himself and the government, he insists.

"I am only interested in the implementation of the party policies on which the elections were contested. My job is only

to see how they are implemented and bring about improvement, wherever necessary," he says.

Mr Bhattarai's priority now is to revamp the party organisation both at the central and district levels. He has named Mahendra Narayan Nidhi as the party's secretary general, a post held by Mr Koirala until he resigned from the job after being elected prime minister.

"Expectations are too high," says Mr Bhattarai. "Most of our best workers are here in parliament. They cannot go out (to the districts) because the House is in session. There is a bit of confusion and it will take time to settle down. But, all said and done, I think we are doing well."

The Nepali Congress working committee has decided to hold the first party conference for 30 years in January. To elect the delegates. Local party

conferences will be held in advance in all the 75 districts.

The national conference is expected to elect a new leadership to face the challenge of the rise of the Communists as a result of the general elections. Mr Bhattarai, who was named the party president in 1967, is expected to retain this post.

He has maintained that, wherever possible, the Nepali Congress and the Communists should "work together." But he adds quickly that he will not oblige the Communists by sharing power with them.

"We are not going to surrender our right to run the government. The people have given us the right. It is a slender majority, but we are not going to give it up in any circumstances."

Some analysts hold Mr Bhattarai responsible for the rise of the Communists in Nepal. Some even say he engineered his own electoral defeat.

"I wish I were great enough to engineer my own defeat," he comments. "I was, however, too believing. I did not believe they would use all the tricks they did. I would not want to divulge the details. Perhaps in

right in their assessment but it is also true that there is not end to such things and this should not be the right approach to confront even a sworn enemy.

The only substantive thing that can emerge from this exercise is the list of foreign suppliers. But undoubtedly most of them would be from the countries of the west this would only embarrass those countries. Any way, this would not achieve any tangible results as such suppliers supported by many in the Third World countries are many and only too eager to supply if correct prices are paid. They hardly abide by the government control orders.

Saddam or no Saddam, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons apart, if Iraq wants to make a bomb, it will take all possible steps to do it; the cause is Israel. One should also understand the compulsion of Iraq and for that matter of any country in the region to have a "deterrence" and be equipped with weapons and materials to defend or even oppose their adversary — Israel which already has the nuclear weapons.

Unfortunately, the nuclear weapons of Israel cause no concern to anyone, but bundles of papers — probably rubbish compared to modern technology for nuclear weapons, shakes the UN Security Council and its permanent members all of which have tons of nuclear weapons that can destroy not only themselves but also the entire world many times over. This is an unjust world. Here the so called peace is only temporary and sure to be disturbed when peace becomes too burdensome to someone.

The author, a former Secretary and Ambassador writes on national and international issues.

The former prime minister, who lost his fight in the Kathmandu constituency in May (and who had lost similarly in the Gorkha district way back in 1959) says he has no plans to contest any more elections.

"I am fed up with elections. That does not mean I do not like elections as such. It (the parliamentary form) is the best system of government invented by man so far."

On ties with Nepal's immediate neighbours, he says: "We are friendly with both India and China. Both of them are absolutely necessary to us. But, culturally and also on account of the political system and the long tradition of a large volume of trade, we are nearer to India."

— Depthnews Asia

Pakistan

Bristling with Unlicensed Arms

Confronted by a gun culture that has turned large parts of the country into a battleground, Pakistan has launched an ambitious million-dollar drive to flush out illegal arms. Khalid Akhtar of IPS reports, from Islamabad.

"How can we abandon our weapons and leave ourselves to the mercy of dacoits and adventurers who are operating freely, and in most cases in collaboration with security agencies?" asks a Sindh resident.

The country's Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Western Baluchistan are bristling with arms as the over three million refugees from Afghanistan living in the area are equipped with sophisticated weapons.

rarely risked disarming the gun-toting refugees who are beyond the purview of local laws. The Afghan refugee camps in the two provinces have become arms bazaars where everything from Stinger missiles to rocket launchers can be bought.

The chief ministers of NWFP and Baluchistan have told President Ishaq Khan and Sharif that they cannot implement the government's "illicit arms surrender ordinance". Besides, in Baluchistan, tribespeople believe a rifle is

NEITHER tough tactics nor sweet talk has succeeded in making Pakistanis part with their illegal arms.

Though the government in Islamabad has offered to compensate their owners and thrice extended the deadline for surrendering unlicensed weapons, only a few have been deposited at police stations throughout the country.

In an effort to end the wave of violence that has engulfed large parts of the country, the seven-month-old government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif launched in July a million-dollar drive to unearth illegal arms.

But the tough new measures and harsh penalties — life imprisonment for anyone with illegal arms and the death sentence for kidnapers and separatist rebels — have made little difference.

In Karachi, a huge port city of five million people where according to unofficial estimates there are 40,000 AK-47s, less than 20 were deposited.

Pseudo ethnic groups armed with automatic rifles

and mortars have turned the huge southern metropolis which has earned notoriety for its "Kalashnikov culture" into a battleground.

The beleaguered government has also not been able to rein in gangs of brigandage terrorising people in western Sindh province.

In late July, newspapers reported seven incidents of banditry in Pakistan's most volatile province, in which nine people were killed, 13 kidnapped and 100 cattle burnt to death.

Hundreds of people have been abducted in Sindh over the past six years. The province's rich are always shadowed by armed guards, and bandits are regularly paid money so marriages and other family functions can be held with some degree of safety.

Most Pakistanis claim they are armed for their own safety.

Survival of poor nations

Sir, I would like to elaborate on the context of the article, "world's poor likely to be worst victims by environmental dangers" published in your issue of Sept 20.

Being a citizen of a third-world nation, one can inevitably realize the environmental changes. Incessant rains, severe cyclones and tidal surges, inundating floods, increasing heat are all symptoms of this upward change.

One tends to question, why make aware only when the loss has already been caused and

there seems to be no means of preventing it?

Why is it that, the industrialized nations, who are mostly culpable, suddenly make the world conscious of the destructive phenomena, when the whole change started occurring long ago? Is it because, they repent for their doings, or they still want to play the ultimate saviour's role and make the poor nations, their ever-grateful friends — which they already appear to be —, or is it both?

Will they compensate for the loss of life, loss of property? Even if they do, won't that be an instance of watering the leaves after ruining the

roots? They have already achieved what they needed and wanted and have acquired dominance. They have the money and technology to save themselves, and have started adopting measures to do so. But what about the third-world nations, who are certainly going to face the brunt of the catastrophe? They neither have the money, nor the technology or skill to prevent the destruction; and why should they, when they are hardly responsible for these environmental changes?

It is, however, comprehensible, that there are some means within the limits of the poor nations such as prevent-

ing deforestation associated with massive afforestation programmes and also with an increased use of a highly abundant and pollution-free energy source such as solar power. But what possibly can a meagre number of trees do, when there are tidal surges and cyclones as severe as the one, which hit on the 29th April, this year! And talking of exploitation of solar energy, that is a matter requiring both expertise and money!

Therefore, as one can foresee, the future is bleak. The industrialized nations may manifest their technological preponderance in warfare and other fields, but should they

not try to use them for saving the victim of their doing from the disaster they are facing? Presumably, they should, if not out of kindness, but for the sake of mankind.

Tasneem Zaman Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Price of newspaper

Sir, Recently the price of a single copy of daily newspaper has been raised from Tk. 3/- to Tk. 4/-. This has greatly disappointed the newspaper readers. To me, certain matters are now clear: (i) The government would never move back from its decision to implement Wage Board awards in the

observers, Sharif's ambitious drive to unearth unlicensed weapons has failed because of dissensions within the component parties of the ruling Islamic Democratic alliance (IJI).

The Lahore-based Viewpoint journal reported recently that a party supporting the Sharif government "not only made a full display of its arms at a five-star hotel in Lahore but publicly threatened violence against its opponents."

"Those towards whom such threats are directed would not find it safe to surrender arms if they have any," the magazine added.

The opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP) which demanded fresh elections in late August claims the ordinance has degenerated into a measure directed against its activists.

Provoked by strident opposition call for his resignation, Sharif threatened to destroy the PPP which he said was working against the country's interests.

newspaper. So far so good. It won't either reduce the price of newsprint or provide any subsidy for easing the financial load of the newspaper management. (ii) The newspaper owners or management is not ready to bear the huge expenditure for providing all financial benefits to their employees in exchange of their profit and by selling a copy of newspaper at Tk. 3/- only. So, let impose all the taxes on the poor newspaper readers! And it has been done!

M. Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka-1207