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. However, the decision to set up DESA, taken by the previous government in March, 1990, was also the result of a serious malaise affecting the power industry. With pillerage of electricity running at a level higher than any other country - 42 per cent - Bangladesh could ill-afford to remain complacent.

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. To put it in even better perspective, compare Dhaka's 52 per cent loss to the 15 per cent systems loss incurred annually by the Rural Electricity Board (REB). DESA, therefore, has now become a test case, not only for the power sector, but for all other big, nationalised corporations which suffer from similar kinds of disease.

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. It is this kind of words which the power consumers of Dhaka — who pay higher rate for electricity than anywhere else in the world - long to hear. But the time for talking is now well past.

With the launching of DESA, the government's intension to combat inefficiency, corruption and theft in the power sector has been established. The question confronting us now is whether the government and the DESA management possess the determination and capability to implement all the action-programmes that will make the new body a worthwhile exercise. What we do not need is a miniature version of the PDB, which means DESA's working practice will have to be radically different from its erstwhile parent company.

At the lower level, reading of meters needs to be rationalised and corrupt employees punished in order to deter future wrongdoings. Households found to be bribing meter-readers or pilfering electricity in other, more ingenious ways, have to be dealt with according to the law, whether they are residents of Gulshan or wherever. But more importantly, DESA will have to crack down hard on large consumers of High Tension (HT) supply who have been identified as a major source of power pillerage.

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 public including the media must be given free access to information concerning

operation of the body. The new authority also needs to come to terms with the cost factor. It must recognise that because of pillerage 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. There is even a vicious circle working here which makes the life of ordinary power consumers quite uncomfortable : because of the institutional inefficiency and corruption of the PDB, rates have remained high; and higher rates invariably means greater efforts to avoid payment, leading to still higher rates. DESA must now find ways to reduce cost of industrial as well as household electricity, in order to erase the financial logic behind evasion, and thus achieve an automatic decrease in systems loss. There may even be cases where large-scale industrial units simply cannot pay the high tariff and still remain in business. A reduction of cost coupled with a vigorous campaign to punish pilferers will not only lead to eventual savings, but will also provide a welcome boost for the region's fledgling industries. All that demands political will on the part of the government, and managerial skill and vision on the part of DESA.

### 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. In the high society the practice lingers not for any deterrence to considerations of eugenics but owing to cares taken for mutual prosperity of dynasties. But even at the dizzying height of royalty King Edward VIII or what he latter became - the Duke of Windsor, perhaps never cared to call for the antecedents of the divorcee Wallis Simpson.

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. But our subcontinental societies are steadily coming out of that with premarital love between sexes gradually

taking a place of honour.

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. The reason for this is the fact that Australians taking foreign wives specially in the Philippines and settling back home in Australia are showing a horrible trend to violent conjugal life ending at times in the murder of the wife. It has been found that the killer-husbands or flances or lovers usually have precedents of criminal and violent nature. Looking into the antecedents of such people who want to bring in foreign and non-white wives can help the authorities either to prevent their entry or to take cautionary measures against the relationships ending in murder.

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. At this level there is a lot of delving into the antecedents of both the parties. But that

is proving of little help. Shall we then resign ourselves to the age-old

position of accepting marriage as purely an act of providence ?

## Iraqi Nuclear Bomb on Paper!

tration official said that Mr. Saddam's "power is growing everyday and the president can not tolerate that. If he keeps solidifying this political power. and the coalition breaks up. you are back to square one before the war ..... This is exactly what Saddam is trying to do. He can be stopped through diplomacy and not by showing personal anger. However, in the process, unfortunately the Iraqi people are suffering. If this tug of war continues, despite warnings from UN agencies and representatives, Iraq would ultimately be turned

into a crippled nation.

NE gets puzzled to

see how the UN Secu-

rityCouncil has dra-

gged the UN, an organisation

of 166 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. Any way

Kuwaiti territory was liberated

and so far as the UN was con-

cerned the matter should have

ended there with completion

of normal cease-fire formalities

including exchange of prison-

ers and return of stolen assets.

But the UN got involved in a

victous victor-vanguished rela-

tionship. The UN was again

used — a series of resolutions

under cease-fire, peace etc

were passed in the Security

Council, some of which im-

posed severe conditions that

not only undermined Iraqi

sovereignty but also brought

economic disaster on Iraq. The

economic sanctions imposed

before the war to force Iraqi

withdrawal should have been

withdrawn after Iraq was

driven out as these sanctions

cause hardship to the Iraqi

people and not to Saddam and

his associates. But sanctions

remain in place and the new

condition, apart from the Iraqi

compliance of the imposed

cease-fire resolutions, was im-

posed - Saddam must go -

which was not even the war

objective of the US. One does

not know how long this tug of

war - one suspects it has

reached a personal level -

would continue 'The show-

down in a Baghdad parking lot

is less a struggle over a batch

of documents than over who is

calling the shots in Iraq in

Gulf's unstable peace. Andrew

Rosenthal of New York Times

service writes - an adminis-

ORMER prime minister

threatened by simultaneous

moves - amounting almost to a

conspiracy — to discredit the

country's recently revived

multi-party parliamentary

and in the police are working

very hard to discredit democ-

discredit the government.

Within a fortnight of the gov-

ernment being formed, the

challenge of civil servants

came and they started their

agitation which still

continues," he said in an

law and order situation is "very

bad." The government is not

getting the support of the civil

servants who have been agitat-

ing for the past two months for

pay increases. The agitation

has been politicised by the

over the government in one of

the most crucial periods of

contemporary Nepali history.

Beneath a casual appearance is

a politician of exceptional qual-

Pakistanis part with their

illegal arms.

EITHER tough tactics

nor sweet talk has

succeeded in making

Mr Bhattarai, 67, presided

Communists, he adds.

As a result, he argues, the

"Everybody is conspiring to

democracy.

Krishna Prasad Bhatta-

rai says Nepal is now

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

be nothing judicious in the use of the weapons of such total destruction and in ant case only the nuclear countries can not claim exclusive monopoly

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 Iragis would continue to deny them. Iraqi authorities have already com-

plained that 44 member UN

Inspection team has 27

Americans and it is headed by

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

From the war down to the UN Nuclear Inspection team the UN went on conferring leadership to the US. For the war it was understandable and inevitable, but must it find an American even to lead the UN Inspection team and more than fifty percent American nationals to form the team ? America being leader of the alliance is party to the conflict. One is sure, there are dozens of such experts from neutral

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

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. How could Israel make or acquire 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 interna-

by Muslehuddin Ahmad

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. David Kyd of International Atomic Energy Agency said, "We have no cvidence they were working on a delivery system. We don't even know they started working on a detonator. We only know they had design for a detonator. Even if the inspectors are assumed right, Iraq has only a primitive type of an administrative structure of nuclear research. It has nothing concrete yet. It is known that despite

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. If the argument of "deterrence" is valid, then all countries which want to have nuclear weapons for defensive purposes should be allowed to have them. If Kuwait had nuclear weapons, Saddam, even possessing nuclear weapons, would have never dared to attack Kuwait for the fear of retaliation. If he had done so, he would also have finished himself along with the rest and saved the US of the present botheration.

However, the nuclear countries raise the question of judicious use of the nuclear weapons. Such weapons were used only once and nobody expects their use ever in this "civilised world". There could

an American. Iraqis also reportedly complained that the leader of the team, who happens to be an American, was a CIA agent and he was passing information to Israeli Intelligence. There is vet nothing to prove that the information was being passed on to the Israelis, but some reports say the leader of the UN team was directly reporting to the US authorities'. As back as on September 26, General Colin Powell, chairman of the joint chicis of staff reportedly said, UN weapons inspectors had discovered 'gold mines' of data on Iraq's effort to build atomic weapons...... One does not know how he could come to that sort of conclusions so early. If the report of 'direct reporting is true, this will only confirm the Iraqi allegation and throw doubt on the

cerns would wide. Let the UN General Assembly, now in session, examine scriously the Iraqi episode and set strict guidelines for future actions in similar cases. This is extremely important if the UN wants to give leadership on such world events and also keep its neutrality beyond

member countries. These mat-

ters are creating serious con-

If the interpretation of "destruction of weapons....." is extended to research documents, then the next step could be to seize the scientists and experts and incapacitate them so that they can never carry out any form of nuclear research work. Iraq already complained that the documents contained the personal history of the scientists and experts and their lives would be in danger as the information is likely to passed to the Israclis. Iragis may not be

tional issues.

# Democracy 'Under Threat' in Nepal

ities. Unfazed by adversity, the Nepali Congress veteran is gifted with an ability to take things in his stride.

non-proliferation treaty, many

countries of the world, apart

He admits his "too many Mr Bhattarai said that shortcomings." With that disalthough he would term such arming confession, he comes efforts a "fight of ideas" rather across as an individual who than a "conspiracy," various knows what he is doing, what elements in big business, big his goals are, and — more finance, in the high echelons important - how to achieve of the civil service, in the army

Very few Nepalis dispute his credentials as a leader tailor-made for the job he did during the difficult transition from the old monarchical regime to a viable parliamentary democracy following the 1990 popular movement.

History, of course, will assess his role in this process. But the part he played in framing a democratic constitution and conducting generally free and fair elections in May has been widely hailed as a remarkable contribution to the nation's political development.

Mr Bhattarai, who failed to win a seat in the election. praises the role of King Birendra in the transition from

autocratic to democratic rule. "It is difficult to establish a new norm. I could do things only with the cooperation of the King. The King being very

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

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

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

"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

elections, like in love, everything is fair. The good thing that happened is that my defeat certified the fairness of the polls." Mr Bhattarai says that any

"third democratic force" advocated by some politicians as an alternative to the Nepali Congress and the Communist United Marxist Leninist Party - would be a splinter group of the former panchayat loyalists, who failed to "deliver the goods" to the people.

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

Sindh province.

burnt to death.

In late July, newspapers re-

ported seven incidents of

banditry in Pakistan's most

volatile province, in which

nine people were killed, 13

kidnapped and 100 cattle

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

are armed for their own safety.

Most Pakistanis claim they

with some degree of safety.

Hundreds of people have

### Bristling with Unlicensed Arms

Though the government in Islamabad has offered to compensate their owners and and mortars have turned the thrice extended the deadline huge southern metropolis for surrendering unlicensed which has earned notoriety for weapons, only a few have been its "Kalashnikov culture" into a deposited at police stations battleground.

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

throughout the country.

But the tough new measures and harsh penalties - life imprisonment for anyone with illegal arms and the death sentence for kidnappers 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-47's, less than 20 were deposited.

Feuding ethnic groups armed with automatic rifles

Confronted by a gun culture that has turned large parts of the country into a battleground, Pakistan has launched an ambi-The beleaguered governtious million-dollar drive to flush out illegal ment has also not been able to arms. Khalid Akhtar of IPS reports, from rein in gangs of brigands terrorising people in western

> "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 resi-

Islamabad.

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 sophisti-

cated weapons. Pakistani officials have

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

dearer than a son", a tradition that officials say people in the province will not easily aban-

Violence has escalated even in eastern Punjab. In July, the prime minister cancelled a visit to Tokyo to solicit muchneeded investment after 22 people were killed in Lahore, his hometown.

Conspiracy theories abound about who is behind the violence. In an address to the nation last month, Sharif said enemies of Pakistan and their collaborators "were out to destabilise the country when it was poised for rapid develop-

Islamabad has often accused India of fomenting trouble, a charge New Delhi denies while accusing Pakistan of doing the same in the Indian states of Punjab and Kashmir.

According to some political

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

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 oppo-

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

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

newspaper. So far so good. It

#### 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

Being, a citizen of a thirdworld nation, one can inevitably realize the environmental changes. Incessant rains, severe cyclones and tidal surges, inundating floods, increasing beat are all symptoms of this untoward change.

issue of Sept 20.

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 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

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 it 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 prepallence in warfare and other fields, but should they not try to use them for sawing the victim of their doing from the disaster they are facing? Presumable, 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 : (1) The government would never move back from its decision to implement Wage Board awards in the

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!

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tute, Dhaka-1207