

PDB's Accumulated Problems

Power plants in the country, according to the Power Development Board's (PDB) own admission, are too old to run at the capacity rate. Some have already completed their economic life span, others are just going to follow suit soon and still others are no more in operation. Then there is yet another type that has never even come to see the light of the day beyond the approval they duly received for implementation. Not surprisingly, the total established capacity of 2398 megawatts of the country's power plants has now come down to only 1565 megawatts. That the half as much of the present capacity has to be dispensed with is due to a number of the plants' untimely closure thanks to the lack of timely repairs and rehabilitation.

This is important because the indifference shown to maintenance of all conceivable machines has been pervasive enough to afflict an outfit of the PDB's size and nature. The establishment that generates power is different from others not only because its expanse is large but also because its entire operation is highly delicate involving risks and other factors related to national growth. Costly machines and even a whole plant can be imported but the hardest part concerns the effort to keep them in order. On this count, our record—dismal as it is—needs to be improved.

The PDB has of late started to beat its own record of disservice to the consumers as if that would be a recompensation for its own failure to make a forward-looking plan and also to get the maximum from the existing facilities. One explanation for the untenable system loss, which is responsible for so much of public woes and the PDB coming under scathing remarks both from the World Bank and domestic consumers, is that the plants are very poorly maintained and thus are forced to run under capacity. It is again significant that even the creation of a separate organ for the Dhaka metropolis in the shape of Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) could not salvage the situation.

According to a report by the PDB itself, the hope for giving the establishment a new lease of life is bleak. Not only is the money in short supply but there are other complications. Even if the PDB now wishes to roll back its earlier plans into ones where pragmatism is expected to be in fashion, it will end up doing none of it. Simply because, its master plan is tagged with the energy master plan. Without separating it from the energy plan, a decision on the review of the plan that has by and large proved insufficient to deal with the present problems, is not even possible. The PDB has moreover accumulated its own problems by sitting on a number of projects that could be of help in time of crisis.

Then of course the most outstanding problem issues from the shortage of fund. Of the targeted Taka 6,492.2 crore required for a major revamping of the sector, there is no provision for mobilising internal resources. Nothing can be a more glaring example of the lack of planning consistent with the future requirement. The little planning and implementation so far have been done are on the basis of the so called 'short-term rolling plan'. This was again to abide by the instructions of 'priority investment programme' of the World Bank.

Evidently, much of its problem is created by the PDB itself but it did not take note of it earlier. Today, it has come to detect the problems at a time when it or anyone else can do little to solve them. But solve it must and as much as possible in the shortest possible time.

The Erratic Ashadh

Pahela Ashadh — the celebrated 'Ashadhasya prathama divasey' — this year went without as much as a drop of rain. There was not even low lugubrious clouds to dim the glare of a blistering sun. It was as dry and hot as a tandoor with its charcoals hardly cooled. The most irrepressible of all of Bengal's six seasons thus set out on a jocular note, with no one knowing if that would not take on a crueler turn at the same go — the rains have it in them to play such unkindly tricks.

Has nature missed on its appointment? One could always point out that nature kept her diary according to the old 'ponjika' calendar, and not the new tangled one which is out of step with the traditional thing by a day or two. However, here on the 'ponjika' Pahela Ashadh too there is yet no sign of the sky coming bursting down. Something wrong?

It is a perennial game we love to play with the seasons. Giving the six of them equal tenures of two months — which is neither here nor there scientifically or otherwise. But if this is patently a harmless and hilarious game, it can hardly be used to hide the fact that seasons have for sometime been growingly erratic in their movement and overall conduct. Big changes in the biosphere caused mainly through the progressive depletion of green life on the surface and the ozone layer in the atmosphere and pollution of both surface and atmosphere through combustion related activity and industrial effluents are working vigorously to turn the blessing that was weather into the curse that it is going to be. The erratic ways of the seasons are but early yet sure signs of the approaching doom. It is for all mankind to read the signs and act wisely and effectively to offset the terrible toll. The Rio Earth Summit is a reassuring gesture that man is taking the signs seriously and yet the same is a disquieting proof that the species responsible for fouling up the planet is not, till now, quite up to mending its mindlessly suicidal ways.

Let us turn off the nightmare scenario and tune in Tagore to celebrate the Bengal rains — a beauty if there was in God's creation. It is not without reason that Tagore fashioned melodies galore and wove miles of words into soulful prose to touch the heart of the rains. Tagore was equally in empathy with the ecstatic spring. The brimming over up of life's vernal joy was as much his and he captured the passion and rhythm of the thing in his songs with so much colour and verve.

We shudder to imagine what will happen to the wonderful creations of our poets and musical maestros if some day — the eventuality seems to be knocking at the door — the rains and the spring cease to be what they said they were. We do not propose to rewrite Tagore if that comes to pass. We shall keep Tagore and make nature abide by him.

If a mere meeting between the prime ministers of India and Pakistan could solve Kashmir, the problem would have been settled long ago. The meeting between Narasimha Rao and Nawaz Sharif at Rio De Janeiro was probably the 25th round at the summit since the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir joined India in 1947. But New Delhi and Islamabad, have remained as distant as they were at the first meeting. Their problem is that they have not even tried to understand each other's perception, much less appreciate it.

Islamabad's perception is that by stoking fires in Kashmir it would one day force India as well as international opinion accept Kashmir minus Jammu and Ladakh as part of Pakistan. New Delhi's perception is that once the Kashmiris realise that they cannot secede from India, they would come to terms with the 'reality'.

This has made the rulers on both sides play to the gallery in their respective country, without caring how their action or remark would affect Kashmir. Take the speech that Nawaz Sharif made at Islamabad at the residence of the Azad Kashmir prime minister, Abdul Qayyum Khan, a few days before the meeting at Rio. The Pakistan prime minister said he would offer shukrana nauqfil (prayer of thanks) at the Jamia Masjid in Srinagar as he did at the Jamia Masjid in Kabul during his recent visit of Afghanistan. The shukrana nauqfil has a religious connotation of the Hindu majority in India. It brings to their mind the 'Jehad', a holy war against 'non-believers'; it gives another coat of communal colouring to the entire problem.

True, Nawaz Sharif is in an unenviable position. He has been pilloried for inducting the army into Sind for curbing

Kashmir: Back to Square One

The history of Indo-Pakistan relations is replace with instances where hawks parading as doves have destroyed even the semblance of effort towards sanity.

'anti-social elements' in the state. His equation with President Ghulam Ishaq Khan is not too good and he fears he would meet the same fate Benazir Bhutto met when she was dismissed from the prime ministership in 1990. Perforce, he has to use the populist card of Kashmir to relieve the pressure on him. But by doing so, he has sent wrong signals to India where the anti-Pakistan opinion has got strengthened further.

Likewise, angry reaction has followed Narasimha Rao's press interview on the eve of the Rio meeting. His remark that Kashmir is an 'internal question' of India negates the very purpose of talks with Pakistan, which considers Kashmir the most important question. His stand runs counter to the Shimla declaration by which New Delhi swears.

The declaration recognises the existence of a dispute when it says that 'in Jammu and Kashmir the line of control... shall be respected by both sides without prejudice to the recognised positions of each other.' The difference in the two points of view is further emphasised by the underlining that 'neither side shall seek to alter it (the line of control) unilaterally, irrespective of mutual differences and legal interpretations.'

Narasimha Rao cannot now turn back and efface the entire history. Jawaharlal Nehru accepted the fact of dispute when he designated Swaran Singh, his cabinet minister, to talk to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then

Pakistan's foreign minister. True, nothing came out of six rounds of talks spread over two months in 1962-63. But a serious attempt was made to settle the Kashmir issue; New Delhi even proposed to handover Poonch town to Pakistan in addition to the territory it already held.

Again Lal Bahadur Shastri, then India's prime minister, discussed Kashmir with Ayub Khan, then Pakistan's chief

Pakistan to say that Kashmir is no more a disputed territory. There was a time when New Delhi could have sorted out the problem with Srinagar when protest in the valley was limited. But now the association of Islamabad appears inevitable for a settlement.

Perhaps if the prime ministers on both sides were to face the realities on the ground, they would be less impetuous in their remarks. The mil-

Being a secular state, India cannot afford to let Kashmir go to Pakistan on the ground that it has a Muslim majority. At the same time, it cannot continue to be an occupation force. Sooner or later, a formula will have to be devised whereby the populations in Pakistan and India, including Kashmir, feel that each one of them has got something.

It is unfortunate that the unofficial efforts made towards this purpose are being attacked in both countries, more so in Pakistan. Once again they are suspect and the people engaged in them are being dubbed as foreign agents, paid intellectuals and unpatriotic elements. This is nothing new; the history of Indo-Pakistan relations is replace with instances where hawks parading as doves have destroyed even the semblance of effort towards sanity.

Take S K Singh, India's former foreign secretary and ambassador to Islamabad. He has gone to the extent of recalling India's envoy to Islamabad over the Manchanda incident (an Indian diplomat was beaten and ousted from Islamabad recently). The way out is to discuss ways and means whereby such incidents do not take place. How does withdrawal of an ambassador help?

I was surprised to see the irresponsible statements by the two ousted Pakistani diplomats. They said in Lahore that 'the drama was played to cancel the talks' between the foreign secretaries of the two countries and that 'there was

some ulterior motives behind their expulsion as it was made at a time when India-US naval exercises were going on.' How do these statements, apparently approved by the Pakistan government, help towards the future exercise when it is resumed again? Momentary anger should not be allowed to tell upon the prospects of permanent peace.

Let there be not an ambitious scheme to solve Kashmir when the thread is picked up again. Many years ago, there was a Harvard University exercise. It suggested the reopening of the road between Rawalpindi and Srinagar through Baramulla, Uri and Murree and the resumption of trade and tourist traffic. But India's military rights in the vale of Kashmir were to remain intact.

This was more or less the same proposal that Sheikh Abdullah, former chief Minister of J and K discussed with me in 1969. His argument was that the border should be 'soft' so that Pakistanis had an easy access to the valley. Strangely enough, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto repeated the same thing during an interview with me in March 1972: 'We can make the ceasefire line a line of peace and let people come and go between the two Kashmiris. After all, why should they suffer? Let there be some free movement between them. Then one thing can lead to another. After all, simultaneously we hope that there will be exchanges, of visits, of officials and non-officials.'

Such a beginning may use in a new chapter of beneficial cooperation between the two countries. Otherwise they will go on harming each other and spending all their resources on the weapons and tools which they may even be tempted to use. After all, they have fought three wars.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

martial law administrator, at Tashkent in 1966. Rajiv Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto promised to solve the problem when they met as prime ministers. Narasimha Rao has himself talked on Kashmir with Nawaz Sharif more than once. How does Pakistan suddenly become an intruder? If India had regarded Kashmir as an 'internal question', it should have never discussed the matter with Pakistan or any foreign from the beginning.

One thought that the two sides should have made some progress in the exercise they have been conducting for years. But we are back to square one: Nawaz Sharif awaiting 'liberation' and Narasimha Rao declaring that Pakistan has no locus standi. The two positions are irreconcilable. Pakistan can neither 'liberate' Kashmir, nor can India expect

lancy in Kashmir, if it was ever a threat, has lessened to only a minor resistance. This does not mean that the people in the valley less alienated than before. Far from it, but they are nowhere near pushing India over the precipice, a solution which Islamabad fancies. They are disillusioned with Pakistan as well because they realise that it cannot oust India from Kashmir by force.

New Delhi is also oblivious of the strong sentiment in Pakistan in favour of liberating Kashmir. The sentiment can be whipped into a 'Jehad' and things can go out of hands. It nearly happened so in 1990 when Shahebaz Qayyum Khan, then Pakistan's foreign minister, told his counterpart in India, Inder Gujral, that 'the Muslim umma in Pakistan was restive.'

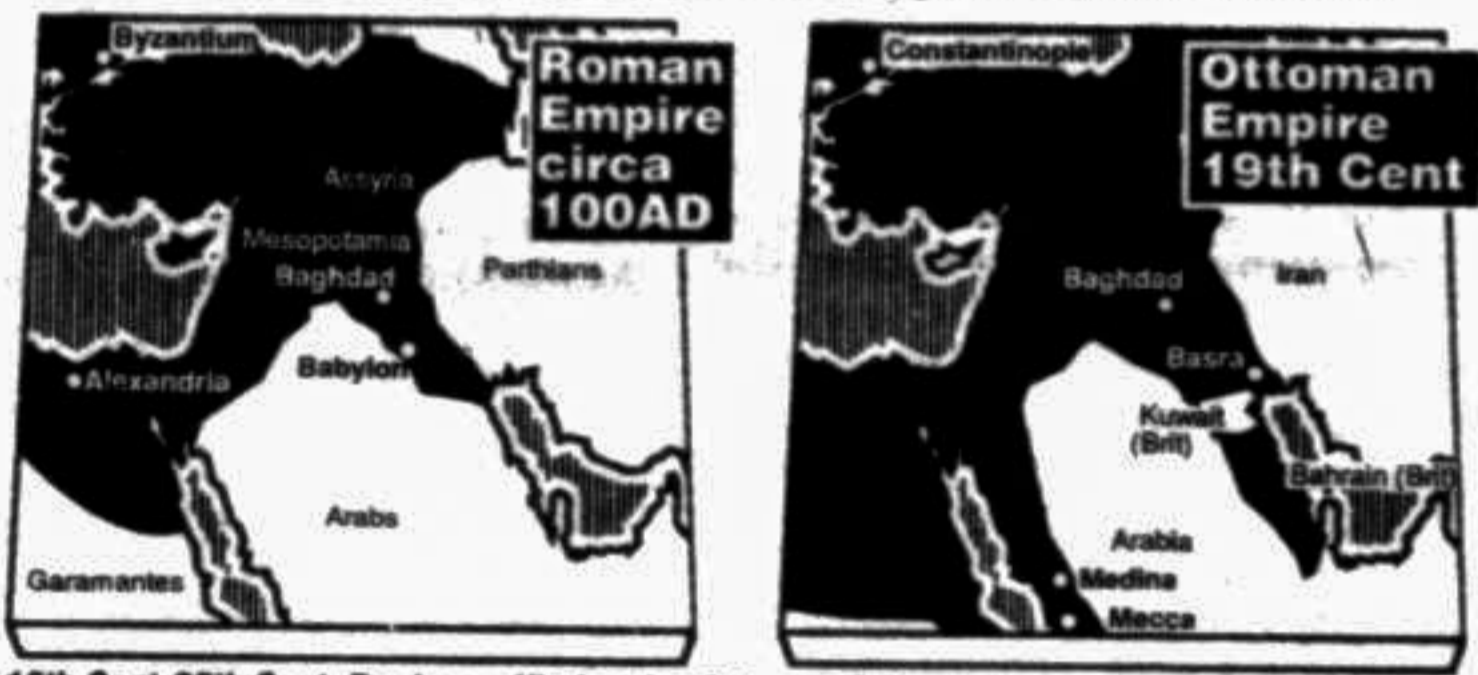
Iraqis Rebuild their Country as Embargo Bites

Michael Jansen writes from Baghdad

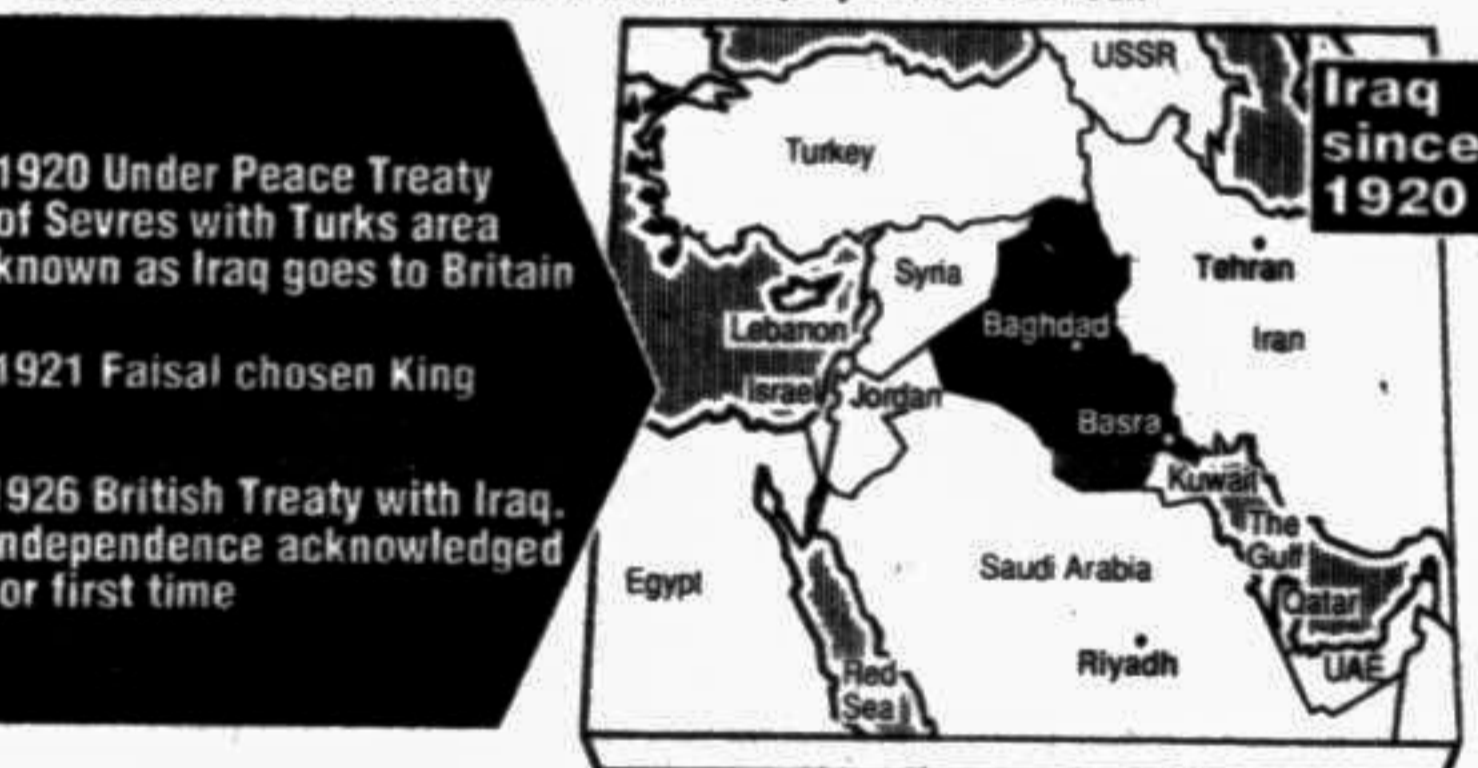
Iraq has been steadily recovering from the devastation brought to it by the Gulf war. Thanks to the grit of Iraqi people, 70 per cent of the country's civilian infrastructure and 60 per cent of its industrial infrastructure have been restored. As Iraq recovers from the trauma of war, many citizens continue to suffer because of the UN trade embargo.

The making of Iraq

In 8th Cent Baghdad in Mesopotamia became Arab capital and great centre of culture After Genghis Khan, empire disintegrated in 13th Cent



16th Cent-20th Cent: Region unified under Ottoman Turks 1915-17 in World War One British land at Basra, expel Turks from Gulf



- 1932 Mandate ends. British keep some rights
1933 Faisal dies
1939 Son Ghazi dies in car crash. Boy Faisal II succeeds under Nuri-al-Said. Iraq sides with Britain in World War Two
1941 German-inspired coup. British desert column enters Baghdad. Plotters flee
1948 Anglo-Iraq treaty signed, then disowned
1958 Coup by General Abdul Qasim. Royal family executed
1959 Qasim proclaims Kuwait part of Iraq. British land there and frustrate him
1963 Qasim overthrown and shot
1968 Baath party seizes power
1979 President resigns, succeeded by Vice-President Saddam Hussein
1980-88 Iraq attacks Iran. Eight-year war follows
1990 Iraq seizes Kuwait
1991 Joint assault on Iraq, Kuwait retaken

coalition bombs, is now at 68 per cent of capacity country-wide. 90 per cent in the capital where one-quarter of Iraq's 18 million people live. The oil industry, Iraq's

cheap petrol not only produces traffic jams in central Baghdad but also is used to pay for blacklisted goods smuggled across the Syrian, Turkish and Iranian frontiers in violation of UN sanctions.

The four major cement plants, devastated during the war, were quickly rebuilt in order to produce the vast quantities of cement used in the reconstruction of 120 of the 134 bridges breached by bombs, as well as government buildings, schools, 84 hospitals and 234 clinics and other institutions targeted by the coalition in its assault on the country's highly mechanised socio-economic structures.

Baghdad's four main communications centres, totally demolished, have been elegantly rebuilt, restoring telephone and tele links with the outside world.

To demonstrate that it was prepared to reconcile with the 55 per cent of the population which is Shia, the government also repaired and refurbished the three Shia shrines in the holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala, badly damaged during the US and Iran-encouraged Shia rebellion, that followed the war.

The political dividend from this national effort to 'erase the effects of the war' is that the Baath Party government led by President Saddam Hussein retains its firm grip on power.

The regular army, which survived the coalition campaign, remains loyal, and the people, intimidated by army suppression of the Shia and Kurdish rebellions, are less willing than ever to take on the Baath Party and the military.

And because they feel they have been unjustly targeted by the coalition, the Iraqi people

are also less willing than ever to support an alternative to Saddam Hussein who would be acceptable to Washington.

The fact that the UN Security Council, under US pressure, has maintained its trade embargo against Iraq, originally designed to force the Iraqi army to withdraw from Kuwait, for 14 months after the last Iraqi soldier was driven from the emirate, has made the proud Iraqis all the more stubborn in their refusal to yield to UN demands.

As a result the government is under no popular pressure to agree to the Council proposal to sell \$1.6 billion in oil in order to earn enough revenue to buy urgently needed supplies, particularly of medicines and spare parts.

Because the Council has insisted that the UN sanctions committee should supervise the sale of this oil — fixing the price and choosing the customers — and that revenue from one-third should be set aside for reparations and disbursement of the balance be closely 'monitored,' the government has flatly rejected the proposal as an infringement of Iraqi sovereignty.

Iraq must, however, pay a high human price for insisting on its independence. The country has virtually no external assets because the bulk of its foreign holdings, in the US, remain frozen.

This lack of funds, combined with what the Iraqis see as the punitive application of the trade embargo, prevents the country from importing a wide range of medical supplies and equipment and chemicals for water purification and the treatment of sewage.

Before the war Iraq, which provided access to free health service to its population, was

classified by the World Health Organization as a 'developed' country in terms of medical services.

Today its hospitals and clinics are operating at as low as 30 per cent capacity because the country is able to import only 20 per cent of the supplies it needs.

One result is that infant mortality has tripled. There are no vaccines for polio, hepatitis or tetanus and reports of mini-epidemics of measles, mumps and whooping cough have appeared.

Only emergency operations are performed because of a shortage of anaesthetics as their chemical components are banned. Dentistry is practised without pain killers.

Western pharmaceutical firms have not delivered supplies ordered and paid for before the imposition of sanctions on August 1990. The ban on chemicals for water purification means that half the potable water is contaminated — and the long hot summer is just beginning.

Nearly one-quarter of the 3.5 million Iraqi children under the age of five face moderate to severe undernourishment because, although the government supplies a basic ration of pulses, rice, flour and oil, the prices of fresh vegetables, fruit and meat have risen 22-45 times since the embargo was imposed. This puts these essentials beyond the reach of the average employee who earns 250 dinars a month.

In the opinion of a Belgian relief worker, the Iraqi people are 'prisoners of sanctions' — a fact which made an Iraqi doctor with a long historical memory remark: 'Harun al-Rashid sent his court physician to treat the French Emperor Charlemagne (in the 9th Century). This is how they repay us.' — GEMINI NEWS

Exchange rate: \$ = 0.33 Iraqi dinars

MICHAEL JANSEN was born in the US, lives in Cyprus, and has covered the Middle East for many years.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

PDB/DESA and consumers

Sir, The recent article on DESA and system loss by your guest columnist, Mr Abu Ahmed, and a follow-up letter by Mr A Mawaz are quite informative and thorough in scope. In some other paper it is disclosed that DESA was able to reduce the system loss by a little percentage at the outset but the same has now reverted back to its 'normal' level of 42 per cent. Has there been a trick?

I know of incidence where PDB (DESA in Dhaka) issues outstanding bills in cards of various colours to consumers giving a short notice for payment. It is often seen that the

outstanding is from years earlier. A private citizen, having no back-up service of a secretariat, is not expected to maintain old records for years together. Even PDB with a big building of its own and hundreds other rented offices with thousands of well paid staff and well-oiled system cannot issue or keep track of the bills!

Crop insurance

Sir, This has reference to a news item published in your esteemed daily on 10.5.92 on the above subject.

It is true that the natural disasters like flood, drought, norwester and cyclone have become regular phenomena in this country. A huge quantity of our valuable agricultural crops is damaged almost every year due to the whims of nature. Our poor farmers, having incurred the unforeseen loss of their standing crops, rush to

various commercial houses for financial help. But they are often deprived of the opportunity for a number of reasons beyond their control.

In view of this situation, a wide-scale introduction of crop insurance policy in the rural areas with a minimum rate of premium may be a guarantee for the farmers against the potential loss of their harvest.

BAI demands

Sir, Our respectable Agriculture Minister Maj Gen (Rtd) M Majid-ul-Haque is blessed with an appreciable degree of sense of humour. Recently while addressing the installation ceremony of the newly elected office-bearers of Bangladesh Agricultural Institute Central Students Union (BAICSU) as the chief guest, he said referring to one of the students' demands — 'We usu-

ally prefer to live in an open atmosphere but here the students of BAI wanted to get themselves prisoned by erecting a boundary wall.' The minister had however appreciated the necessity of constructing the concrete boundary wall of BAI. In fact, due to the lack of boundary wall, the inmates of BAI campus are facing many problems. The rate of theft cases and other criminal activities has increased alarmingly. The police personnel also face great problem during security operations as the campus has several entry and exit points. Moreover without a concrete boundary wall, their is every possibility of losing BAI's lands as a portion was taken away by the last autocratic regime for creating 'Chandrima' Uddyan.

About the pending autonomy issue of BAI, the minister assured early disposal of the case by his ministry. The students also demanded appointment of a permanent Principal, filling of the vacant teachers' posts, setting up of a medical centre, a bank and a post-office on the BAI campus.

They also requested the minister to arrange for re-introducing Master's course at BAI which the institute used to offer earlier. The students in their memorandum observed that certain departments of BAI have qualified teaching members for guiding the M Sc students. The minister categorically replied to the demands of the students and assured them that these will be fulfilled through maintaining official procedures.

We sincerely hope that the Ministry of Agriculture and other relevant concerns will take urgent measures to translate the minister's assurances and declarations into reality at the earliest.

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