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DOWN TO EARTH

Bothersome Practices by Public Utility Services

By A S M Nurunnabi

Public Utility Services like Dhaka Electric Supply, Dhaka WASA and Titas Gas have lately been taking recourse to certain practices which reportedly cause extreme harassment to their consumers. The practices relate to the manner adopted by them for the realisation of arrears dues from the defaulting consumers. Nobody disputes their right to take necessary steps in this behalf. But it is widely felt that such steps should not be taken in a manner considered unreasonable by and large.

It is seen that the previous practice of serving prior notice to the defaulting consumers is no longer in vogue. That practice perhaps had some merit. It gave the defaulters a warning of their default and made them alert to clear arrears by a definite deadline. It is not clear why such a system is not being followed by any of these bodies. If the plea is staff shortage, it does not seem to be a very tenable ground. Payment of dues of these bodies through different nationalised banks leaves much to be desired. It has been seen that payments made by the consumers are not regularly posted by the concerned staff of these bodies in the relevant records. This has thrown the burden on the consumers themselves to get their payments duly recorded at the respective offices. This tends to create an uncertain situation. Only those consumers who are alive to the caprice of the sys-

tem take the trouble of getting their payments recorded at the respective offices.

A system cannot run in such an indifferent manner. The staff of these bodies cannot be made to issue prior default notice or make regular posting of payments made by consumers in their records. Are they really overburdened with their existing work? From the side of the consumers, the activity that is visible is that these bodies periodically issue notices in newspapers and on TV and radio calling upon defaulters to make payment of their dues on pain of disconnection. They seem to play a more active part when they undertake disconnection drives from time to time without setting their own houses in order.

The unreasonable aspect of the disconnection drives seems to be their timing. It is normally found that such drives are launched at a time when in most cases the male members of the households covered in a particular zone of operation are out attending office or other outdoor business. In such circumstances, what can the female members do? They find themselves in an embarrassing situation. In some cases, the inevitable happens; the line is disconnected; while in others, through amicable arrangement reached through payment of some tips, some time is gained to make payment. The insinuation regarding tips may not apply in all cases, but in fact

such things happen. Some observers, disgusted with the wrong timing of such operations, have been heard to comment that the ulterior motive for such actions may be some gains from households thrown into such awkward situations.

Cannot these bodies choose a sensible timing for their drives? If they really mean business without allowing any of their staff to reap any unfair gains, they may select for their drives Friday or any other public holiday, when in most cases the male members of households are expected home. But before resorting to the extreme step for disconnection, it is felt to be fair and reasonable to give the alleged defaulters a prior notice of their default. There will be no cause for complaint if after such notice the arrears remain unpaid.

There is also an urgent need for simplifying the procedure for payment through banks. The existing system is cumbersome and time consuming. It is inherent in following a double formality: first to collect the scroll number by forming one queue and then to form another queue to make payment. The whole exercise is exasperating and exhausting, and normally takes one hour to one and a half hours to complete one's business. The remedy lies in introducing one queue system at all receiving banks, as followed at present at some small branches of such banks.



IDB raises fund

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Rahman who is also a Governor of the IDB, piloted the Bangladesh candidature and made consultations at various levels and forums of the OIC and IDB.

Expressing his reaction, ERD Secretary Enam Ahmed Chowdhury who accompanied the Finance Minister, that he would try to uphold the prestige of both Bangladesh and the IDB during his three-year tenure as its Vice-President.

Chowdhury also thanked all the members of the Board of Executive Directors of the IDB for the unanimous decision to appoint him as Vice-President. He is expected to take over the new assignment in January 1993.

Rahman met IDB President Dr. Ahmad Mohammad Ali and discussed matters of mutual interests. The Finance Minister requested the IDB President to increase the volume of IDB assistance in socio-economic uplift process of Bangladesh.

Finance Minister said in the just concluded meeting of the Board of Executive Directors of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), decision had been taken unanimously to appoint Bangladesh nominee ERD Secretary Enam Ahmed Chowdhury as the IDB Vice-President.

Prejudices

From Page 1 Col 5

The ideas and activities in the family planning programme are not new in the country. On this soil, the activities began as early as 1953.

Since the establishment of the Family Planning Association in 1953, family planning activities in the country have been carried out in five distinct phases.

From 1953 to 1955, voluntary activities in the field of family planning got started without government support.

Voluntary activities with limited government support started in 1955 and continued until 1960.

The government announced its first national family planning programme in 1960 which continued till 1965 and the government expanded FP programme from 1965 and began field-based counselling during 1965 and it continued until 1975.

Obituary

From Page 1 Col 5

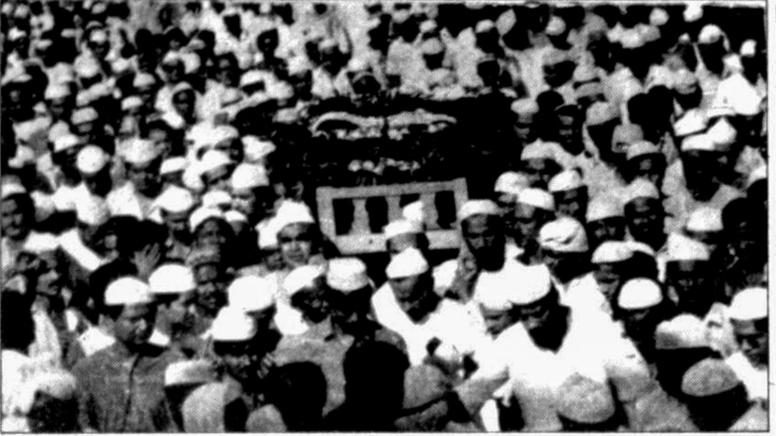
Nasiruddin Ahmad Chowdhury, a senior lawyer of the Supreme Court and an ex-minister of the United Front government of erstwhile East Pakistan died of old age complications here last night, family sources said. He was 85, reports BSS.

He left behind two sons, two daughters, grand sons and daughters and a large number of relatives, admirers and professional colleagues to mourn his death.

His eldest son Rukanuddin Ahmad Chowdhury is a General Manager in the Petrobangla and the youngest son Zaghlul Ahmad Chowdhury is the diplomatic correspondent of the national news agency, BSS.

The body of Chowdhury would be taken to his village home at Habiganj district this morning for burial at the family graveyard.

Mr Chowdhury died within hours after he fell sick while watching television programmes at his Bakshibazar residence.



Mourners carrying the body of Syed Altaf Hossain after Namaj-e-Janaza at Baitul Mukarram Mosque yesterday. Story on Page 1

Renal, dialysis units

From Page 1 Col 4

Nephrology unit in the paediatric wards of the hospitals will also be opened soon, according to the Minister. Physicians suggest that a unit should be opened at least in all district hospitals.

"Make sure that not a single patient leave hospital without treatment," a senior administrator at the IPGMR quoted the Minister as telling them during the visit. The ministerial directive came a few days after this newspaper broke the story that a large number of child patients were being denied admission and dialysis for want of beds and dialysis sets.

A child attacked with the disease requires dialysis within 24 hours of the attack, and victims in the remote areas mostly die just because their parents cannot make it to the capital, the only place that can offer some kind of treatment, in time.

According to Dr Hossain, lack of logistic support in treating the growing number of patients has been one of the impediments, but still the rate of mortality, until recently 80 to 85 per cent, he says, has been brought down to 50 to 60 per 100 patients.

Talking to The Daily Star, the Health Minister said that he was looking into the possibility of channelling more funds to deal with the mysterious disease, adding that the number of beds in the Shishu Hospital for ARF patients would be increased soon.

The International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease and Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) is also set to open a unit to treat acute renal failure that often attacks diarrhoeal child patients.

The IPGMR is at present training a number of ICDDR,B people, said Prof T A

Chowdhury, the Director of the IPGMR.

The authorities have also ordered procurement of peritoneal dialysis (PD) sets. The PD is the only treatment for renal failure.

Scarcity of these sets, mostly imported from Germany and Japan, have made things worse for the poor parents of the minor patients. The ones meant for the adults are being used for the children, making it all the more difficult for the physicians who are themselves scarce in number. The Minister has also ordered to post two more medical officers in the ARF unit at the IPGMR.

Prof T A Chowdhury said that the supplier who was awarded the contract to provide PD sets was supposed to make those available soon.

Moreover, the Glaxo Pharmaceuticals, after being approached by the government, has offered to supply enough PD sets to meet the requirement for a year "free of cost on humanitarian ground", Prof Chowdhury said.

Since the disease took an epidemic form, the prices of the sets have soared from less than Tk 300 to Tk 270 each in only one month's time, a patient's father said yesterday.

"Most sorry story is even if you can pay you may not get it in the market", he said.

Prof Chowdhury yesterday expressed doubts whether the shortage in supply was "genuine or man-made."

"The most unfortunate thing is we planned for a 'local purchase' to meet emergency situation but sets are not available in the market," Chowdhury said but noted that "the situation will ease within a month" with the arrival of supply from the contractor as well as the Glaxo.

Russian sub in Iran

From Page 1 Col 5

MANAMA, Nov 13: A submarine Tehran has bought from Russia has arrived at the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas at the mouth of the Gulf, a US naval source said today, reports Reuter.

He said the kilo-class submarine, whose sale by Moscow angered Western powers, steamed into port a few days ago after a journey through the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

Probe body

From Page 1 Col 5

Raqibul Huda of negligence to duty.

It drew the attention of concerned authorities to see that Huda does not resort to such act of negligence again in the future.

The commission remarked in its report that criminal activities have increased in the society for various reasons and suggested that measures be taken to remove causes of the increase of crime.

For this purpose, the commission stressed the need for modernising the country's police force and special training for them to combat crime.

Film policy

From Page 1 Col 5

Kanchan, Mahmud Koli, Rubel, Shabana, Anjana, Rozina, Diti and Champa.

The Prime Minister said the present government attached importance to the improvement of film industry and sought support of all concerned in this regard.

She mentioned the government steps to restrict import of foreign films that are feared to jeopardise the development of local film industry.

Information Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda announced at the meeting that Film Development Corporation (FDC) would provide logistic support to local film makers in making four films which could be sent abroad for screening.

"National Film Award, censorship laws, inadequate equipment at the FDC, taxes on films, anomalies of film import policy and issuing of CIP cards for the eminent film personalities were discussed at the meeting.

Sharif govt

From Page 1 Col 4

said it was still too close to "riba" or interest, which orthodox Muslims equate with usury and which is outlawed by Islam.

Under mark-up theory, introduced when Pakistan pioneered Islamic banking in the mid-1980s, the bank purchases whatever the lender requires. The lender then gradually buy the goods from the bank, paying mark-up charges for administration.

The Midnight File

Two Pakistanis beheaded in Saudi Arabia for smuggling

DUBAI, Nov 13: Two Pakistani men were beheaded in Saudi Arabia today for smuggling heroin into the conservative Kingdom, an Interior Ministry statement said. It said one of the men was beheaded in the city of Riyadh and the other in Jeddah. The statement warned that all smugglers would receive the same punishment and asserted the kingdom's determination to fight drug trafficking, reports Reuter.

Stoph's trial suspended as he suffers heart-attack

BERLIN, Nov 13: Justice Authorities today suspended the manslaughter trial of former East German Prime Minister Willi Stoph after he suffered a heart attack. Stoph was to have been tried together with a ex-East German communist leader Erich Honecker and three other old associates. They appeared for Thursday's start of the trial but Stoph was absent because of what his lawyer described as a heart attack the night before. The proceedings were then adjourned until Monday because of Stoph's illness, reports Reuter.

Ram-Rahim Yatra prohibited

FAIZABAD, Nov 13: The Faizabad district administration has imposed prohibitory orders here to disallow the Ram-Rahim Yatra from reaching Ayodhya. The Yatra which started from Rameshwaram on October two, is scheduled to reach Ayodhya tomorrow. It reached Faizabad this evening. Official sources said the step was taken in apprehension of breach of peace in twin cities of Ayodhya and Faizabad, reports PTI.

Coup attempt in Peru

LIMA, Nov 13: A small group of retired officers, one of whom is linked to drug trafficking, attempted to take over government palace and army headquarters and assassinate President Alberto Fujimori early on Friday, a palace statement said, reports Reuter.

Rao: SAARC Hasina

From Page 1 Col 8

the south block. The Foreign Minister handed over the formal letter of invitation to Bhatia to attend the SAARC summit in Dhaka. A copy of the draft declaration was also handed over to the Indian Foreign Secretary, by his counterpart Reaz Rahman, along with a letter of invitation.

Bhatia later hosted a luncheon in honour of the visiting Foreign Minister which was attended, among others, by the two Foreign Secretaries and the High Commissioners of Bangladesh and India.

R L Bhatia said India was looking forward to the chairmanship of SAARC under Begum Khaleda Zia and was confident of the successful outcome of the SAARC summit. He also stressed the importance of sustaining momentum imparted to Indo-Bangladesh relations as a result of the visit of Begum Khaleda Zia to India in May this year.

The Bangladesh Foreign Minister stressed the importance of the fourth coming SAARC summit and the need for further strengthening regional co-operation. He also emphasised the importance of enhancing bilateral co-operation between the two countries and also resolving outstanding bilateral problems between the two countries.

Hasina

From Page 1 Col 7

an upper hand, she observed.

"This black law (anti-terrorism) was enacted only to persecute the political opponents," she alleged.

UNB adds: Hasina alleged that BNP was harbouring terrorists to consolidate its power base. In this context, she mentioned Information Minister Nazmul Huda's "frank confession" that BNP had supplied arms to youths during the anti-autocracy movement against Eshad.

She urged the concerned administration to recover all unauthorised firearms distributed to the BNP workers during the 1990 mass upsurge as "admitted" by Minister Nazmul Huda.

The Awami League leader termed the Indo-Bangladesh joint declaration signed during Prime Minister Begum Zia's visit to India May 26-28 as against the interest of Bangladesh. "People will now judge who is selling the country's interest," she said.

Hasina said her party would continue movement to compel the government to scrap the indemnity ordinance and try the killers of '71 and '75 in the interest of rule of law.

The Awami League President expressed her support to the SKOP movement for realising their just demands.

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