

Gigantic Spurt in Water Price

The government has increased water tariff by 10 per cent "in the interest of overall improvement of water supply system in the capital". This, as it is, is very plainly unacceptable to the consumers who are being charged in advance for some future and uncertain improvement in the water services. The consumer was buying a commodity with cash. And suddenly he is asked to contribute capital leading to an expected betterment of production and distribution of the commodity. In a market-economy horizon this is inconceivable. Please go and improve your material and service and then ask for a better price. The principle behind the given rationale of the tariff hike is terribly flawed.

And who said the capital city water situation was stuck up only because of funds constraint? We have no reason to believe that as soon as more money will be forthcoming all its problems will heal overnight. If the basket is already leaking badly, even an interminable flow of cash into it would not show any change in the state of things.

On its own admission WASA supplies the city population slightly more than half of what they need, computing the demand on the basis of seven million residents. Tremendous and unchecked wastage of supply-water pulls down the 54 per cent need fulfillment to a matter of less than 40 per cent. More water must be produced and supplied and wastage reduced radically. How is WASA going about these tasks in tandem? If the government wants the consumers to finance the 'improvements', the latter must be told at length about the programme.

And how about the so-called 'systems loss' which has been plaguing the power sector so doggedly? Doesn't the water sector have its own 'systems loss' to mind and mend? The electricity consumers are paying one of the highest rates in the world, mostly because of power pilferage. The imposition of the 10 per cent hike in water rates will no doubt raise this too to be one of the highest in the world. Why so? Only to finance wastage and pilferage? The authority should have thought about one thing before raising the rate. Higher price of water would not necessarily mean more revenue to government. Are we in here for repeating the Railway foolishness? Even a three-fold increase in fares in only two decades' time has failed to rake in more earning for the Railway and the organisation's health is all the worse for the easy short-cuts to viability and prosperity it adopted. Higher price for water may lead to the prosperity of some meter readers and their superiors with some consumers welcoming an arrangement rather than paying so much money.

And why this gigantic out-of-the-budget hike? Why not a more tolerable three or four per cent? What are they indeed going to do with all this tens of crores of additional money? Are they going to build a treatment plant that can take on the job of substantially helping the need of producing about 1.5 billion litres of water daily for the capital city? No such talk has been heard and the history of WASA has ever been one of stalled treatment plants.

So they are going to deep-pump some 700 million litre more water from the bowels of earth. We have already warned the authorities of its dangerous consequences. Are the buyers of water now being asked to fund their own doom?

At least for the sake of transparency the government badly needs to brief the people in detail about the necessity of the hike in water price before deciding on it. We expect the hike to be scaled down to some reasonable and bearable figure and government to go out on a campaign to convince people about the logic of the action. And we would hope this water-price decision would not set off a chain of such others; for that would hurt the governance and society equally.

Is Canada's Crisis Over?

Paradoxically, the outcome of the Canadian general election has been true to predictions and at the same time surprising. Predictably, the Liberal Party of Jean Chretien has scored a victory; but the re-election of Kim Campbell, who took over the prime minister's office as the most popular leader ever from the Progressive Conservative Party (PCP), into oblivion has confounded political analysts. The depth of the PCP's fall — particularly the incumbent premier's slide from the crest of popularity she was riding when Brian Mulroney had to make way for the bright, witty lawyer from British Columbia — is simply unfathomable.

It is perhaps ironic that Kim Campbell, only after a four-month stint at the premiership as the first woman in Canada's history to hold the post, lost her own seat in Vancouver and thus made her unceremonious exit complete. But anyone who has followed political developments in Canada knows that the precipitous fall from grace has been maneuvered more by her own policies and programmes than by any extraneous cause. Particularly the PCP's failure to address the economic woes of the Canadian people smarting under a three year recession appears to have decided the fate of the ruling Conservatives. Its election campaign has never even enunciated how it proposes to lessen the tax burden and lower the soaring unemployment.

In fact, where Campbell asked for more sacrifices and patience from the Canadians, the Liberal Party offered them a package programme — well worked out — aimed to bring a relief from the continued pains of the economic crunch. A six-billion dollar public works job-creation has been specially tempting for the ordinary Canadians. Even Chretien's tough talk on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has helped carry the day for his party. However, it is yet unclear how he will do the job; for the agreement was ratified by parliament in May. Even the well worked out job-creation scheme may not ultimately prove as sound as the Liberals claim it to be.

While the Canadians will be eagerly waiting to see how soon the economic programme lifts off the ground and with what results, the Liberals have to prove that the reversal of the policy is worth the salt. Then, of course, the prospect of facing the Bloc Quebecois as the opposition in Parliament is not so encouraging. The end of nine years' Conservative rule has set into motion the forces that will demand newer political equations. The Bloc Quebecois, dedicated to break up Canada, has set the deadline for moving with independence for Quebec in Parliament in 1995. On both these counts, Chretien — notwithstanding his nice records as a minister in the Pierre Trudeau cabinet — will have a tough time. We wish the next prime minister of Canada luck.

F AISALABAD, once called Laisalpur, is Pakistan's typical mid-west town, affluent, disorderly and noisy. Bazars are unending streams of people, peddlers and yellow clubs that flow late in the night. The clock tower, which was distinct before the partition, looks hidden in the confusion of tall buildings, unwieldy hoardings and luminous advertisements.

As a SAARC observer, I reached the city on the eve of the National Assembly polling. Hundreds of people were on the streets, dancing to the beat of drums or just clapping. Once in a while, some one would fire in the air. The scene was boisterous and showy but somewhat taut with tension.

The city was divided in two camps, one belonging to Benazir Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the other to Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML). Small disputes or altercations would break out, never taking a serious shape. Each mind has its own area. They were at pains not to clash because both expected to win.

This has turned out to be the pattern throughout Pakistan. The polls have been peaceful. But the division I saw at Faisalabad has got entrenched so deep all over that it threatens to polarise the country. It can be characterised as rural (where Benazir won) versus urban (where Nawaz Sharif won) or as land versus capital. It is ironic that Benazir has been shunned by the liberals, who once were her backbone. Her participation in the interim government, before the National Assembly was revived by the Pakistan Supreme Court, cost her their vote.

The assembly elections have only sharpened the rural and urban divide, although not ethnic. Nawaz Sharif raised the slogan *Jag Punjab Jag* (Wake up Punjab), after being second to Benazir in the National Assembly. In fact, he was responsible for sabotaging the proposal of holding simultaneous elections for provincial and national assemblies. His thinking was that he would be able to cash in on the Punjab sentiments if and when he lost to Benazir, a Sindh. But the surmise went wrong and he did not get a majority in Punjab (only 106 out of 240 seats).

TWO decades of almost constant warfare and genocide have significantly altered Cambodian society.

With almost all of its intellectuals and professionals either dead or exiled, the country's present population of almost 9 million consists largely of people with a rural upbringing. Even the capital, Phnom Penh, is now mainly inhabited by former villagers.

The interminable fighting of the 1970s and 1980s, and countless land mines scattered throughout the countryside, have killed and maimed thousands of Cambodians, especially men. As a result, women now make up at least 60 per cent of the adult population and they head about 35 per cent of households, thus giving Cambodian society a distinct matriarchal character.

Cambodia is primarily an agrarian society. About 85 per cent of the people still live in the countryside, much of which lacks modern communications or even surfaced roads.

Most working women are engaged in farming. This places a very heavy burden on the already large number of vulnerable families, especially those headed by women, families with many young children or those caring for relatives disabled by the war.

Food security remains a serious problem in this poverty-ridden country where the annual per capita income of US\$150 is among the lowest in

the world. Meanwhile, the birth rate stands at 4 per cent and the average life expectancy at birth remains 49.7 years.

The emergency brought on by the severe 1985 drought first focused attention on the critical food shortage. This, in turn, led to the launching of the Family Food Production (FFP) project for severely disadvantaged and vulnerable families in rural Cambodia. FFP, a project of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has since become one of the largest decentralised development assistance programmes in Cambodia.

Implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1986, and tailored to help a population left reeling from the aftershocks of war, the pilot phase in Kandal province culminated in a full-scale programme in 1987.

Since 1988, continuous active support has been provided by the Women's Association of Cambodia. Headed by the Ministry of Education, a sub-project has extended the FFP principles to about 200 secondary schools and teachers' colleges.

Now in its sixth year, the

Stability Still Eludes Pakistan

The two-party system, which has emerged in Pakistan, could have been a blessing if there had been a consensus on some basic points between the PPP and the PML. When Benazir and Nawaz Sharif are not even on speaking terms, the two-party system may prove to be the two twins that never meet.

This has only angered Nawaz Sharif and spelt even the remotest chance for conciliation, which may have been possible if he had won Punjab to counter Benazir's power at the Centre. Now the confrontation is inevitable and it may not allow Pakistan to settle down.

"We will be a strong opposition in the National Assembly," some top leaders in the Nawaz Sharif camp told me in Lahore. "We shall keep the pressure on and force fresh polls in a year's time." If the PPP were to field Ghulam Ishaq Khan, the former president, as its presidential candidate in the contest in December, Nawaz Sharif's fight against Benazir would be to the finish. (The PPP is mentioning Ishaq's name privately).

Another time bomb, which is ticking, is the preliminary autopsy report by foreign experts, who have reportedly said that General Asif Nawaz, the late chief of the army staff, was poisoned. This information may have even swung some votes in favour of PPP because the report was leaked out to some papers on the eve of the assembly elections. There is, however, no doubting that some action will have to be taken on the First Information Report (FIR) filed by the wife of Asif Nawaz. She has alleged the complicity of Nawaz Sharif. A few PPP leaders I met in Lahore said that they would "pursue the matter to the hilt," hinting at starting an inquiry against Nawaz Sharif.

This will only aggravate the situation because Nawaz Sharif cannot be treated lightly. He has emerged as a leader in his own right, with his distinct vote bank and base. He has made for the first time inroads in Sindh, hitherto considered Benazir's preserve. His Muslim League is now an all-Pakistan party. And his 72 out of the 201 contested seats in the 217-member National Assembly against Benazir's 86 is by no standard a small number, particularly when many among those who have supported her to give a majority have been in touch with Nawaz

Sharif. The situation is, of course, tailor-made for the army. It may not become a court of appeal but it will ensure that the matters do not reach a point of no return. Significantly, both Benazir and Nawaz Sharif want the president to retain the power to appoint the three chiefs of staff even when the eighth amendment is revised. Benazir made it clear publicly even before the polling, while Nawaz Sharif let it be known privately. "We cannot change things about the army in the eighth amendment," one top Nawaz Sharif's colleague told me.

That the army calls the shots in Pakistan is taken for granted by its people. But they are equally sure that it does not want to take over. Indeed, this is true. Had it some different ideas it would have

crossed the floor. But there are several one or two-member parties that Benazir or Nawaz Sharif can always mop up. Even others can change loyalty in the name of alliance.

In an interview to BBC, Benazir has said that Pakistan has had so many unstable governments that she did not mind heading another one. But then how does she solve the manifold problems facing the country and improve the plight of the people in the countryside, who have put their faith in her? If she fails or falls, does it mean another election? In this kind of scenario, a third force comes in handy. But the polls in Pakistan have practically eliminated all political parties except the PPP and the PML. Therefore, no other option is available. The two-party system, which has emerged in Pakistan, could

strength. As a separate party they have been exposed this time because they have secured only two per cent of the votes polled. Even their leader, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, lost from both the seats he contested.

This is one lesson which

India can learn from Pakistan. Many Pakistanis point out how the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in India is gaining ground and how fundamentalists in Pakistan are being vanquished. Unfortunately, this is true. Secularism which was at its peak in India has slid down while fundamentalism, which once attracted the Pakistanis, has little appeal left. One only hopes that the enmity between Benazir and Nawaz Sharif will not politicise the battle against *hadood* laws and come in the way of their abolition.

IN MEMORIAM

Our Khasru Bhai

— Professor Salma Ali



My husband was working as a land acquisition officer in Dhaka and we were living in Vitar Barhi Lane, Nawabpur, in a two storied building enriched by a hundred years of heritage. One evening, I wrote a few lines and sent them to Khasru Bhai, I was shortly surprised to see my poem on the *Morning News*.

"Write more, write always, dear sister," his constant words echoed in the air. "This instant coffee pot and these poetry books are for you, Salma dear. This warm liquid will inspire you." Of course the hot coffee was an inspiration to me in 1965-66. With six children and a household to manage, I somehow made time for writing.

S M Ali was a tower of inspiration for every one he got in touch with. My elder sister Sara Jabir lost her only child Nazim when she was only two years old. My sister was in a state of shock. Nazim's father Justice Abdullah Jabir was the silent sufferer. Who could give them company in such a God-forsaken place like Patia?

It was our Khasru Bhai. He read books and told stories and made them smile for at least one long month.

Whenever a difficult situation arose, S M Ali was always present.

His mother Zohra Ali made a wonderful tin roofed bungalow in Moulvibazar (S M Ali's birth place), and dreamed of rearing her children in that abode of peace. She placed her furniture in it, arranged separate rooms for her children, but one morning, she passed away.

Khasru Bhai inherited the love for art and an inborn prudence from his wonderful mother. He got the literary power from his paternal ancestors.

My brother Mr Solaiman Chowdhury was the guardian angel of our family, and a very strict person. But he was all smiles and soft as butter, as soon as Khasru Bhai would come before him, S M Ali was his closest friend and dearest brother.

I recall a contest for GS in the University. We were invited to a gala gathering. Candidates appeared on the stage to introduce themselves. "One, two, three —" was the announcement. Then came a tall, thin person with aristocratic features, with bushy black bunch of hair and a very soft voice. "I am Muhammad Ali, a student of English..."

He spoke for only 10 minutes, but he won our hearts. "Why?" I asked my colleague, Amina Begum, between classes, in the corridor of Eden College. "I cannot tell you what charm he has. I only can tell you that he is someone special. He knows perfectly that he can do his job. He knows what is to be done. So no other candidate can stand against him," she replied.

He had some one very special to him. This was Jahana Ali. She was a perfect elder sister to S M Ali.

When on moonlit nights, in the hilly town of Moulvibazar, she sang to her daughter and son, *Jonakis* would dance and stars and the dew drops were the only audience. I felt heaven

had come down here in that silent, rose scented garden. One night, after a few months, Jahana was in a vessel with her children, her husband and her kinsfolk. It was rough sea. The storm was violent. Khasru Bhai lost his sister and her children in the Bay of Bengal.

Was the shock a severe blow to S M Ali? Yes, but was the shock able to affect his ever-smiling personality? The answer is, no.

He had another sister named Nila who had black hair, rosy complexion and the unparalleled grace of a teenager. "Nila is a genius," was the general comment. We were all proud of her. But where is the star now? The beauty vanished into the thin air one day.

S M Ali received the second blow to his heart. Did it erase the wonderful smile of the journalist?

"No" is the answer. "I defy all the arrows, I love this world. I love my country and folks," he said.

"You know Salma, I think the 'sari' will never suit the future generation of our women-folk," he once remarked.

"Why Khasru Bhai?" — I asked. "It is not scientific, not at all," he replied. "It was 1964 — so I was a bit confused at the remark. It is 1993, I look around and see garment workers, bankers, technocrats, teachers and students, and I think, yes Khasru Bhai was right. Every day working ladies of Bangladesh are shunning this traditional dress.

We flocked around him whenever we had a chance.

One night he was telling us the story of China: "And then all people went to..." Spontaneously I uttered the name of Mao. "You know this is the first time someone pronounced the name of the Chinese leader correctly. I have never heard his name in a correct pronunciation," he said. This was his way of arousing inspiration in his audience.

On 20th October, we were all in the House No. 80, Road No. 6, Old DOHS, Banani. But, not a word was spoken. There was only the murmur of the leaves around the house by the silent rail road. Sidratul Momtaha, his nephew and Mursalat, his niece were in all tears. "Mal Chacha is dead," Mursalat's heart-breaking wailing was the only sound.

"No, dear, Chacha is living," stressed the mother.

Yes, it is true, Khasru Bhai will live in the hearts of the people he adored as long as this earth is there and as long as the people of Bangladesh fight for their right.

Zubaid Rafique Banani, Dhaka

Export FP technology

Sir, Bangladesh can tap a new export market in the six new CIS Muslim states — export Family Planning (FP) technology and goods.

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Ally Zabr Dhaka

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

stepped in when it had made Ishaq Khan and Nawaz Sharif quit. Instead, it forced elections and supervised them to ensure that there was no rigging and no violence. The polling has been free and fair. But dependence of the electoral machinery on the army can derogate from the autonomy of the electoral system.

The neutrality of the army at present is not being questioned. But what happens when Benazir and Nawaz Sharif begin to break each other's base? The latter is as determined to have power as the former is. So many members in the national and provincial assemblies are on the loose end of the horse trading that has already begun.

Members are being tempted with money and office. The structure riveted at the Centre and in Punjab, will be under constant threat. An ordinance has been issued whereby members cannot

have been a blessing if there had been a consensus on some basic points between the PPP and the PML. When Benazir and Nawaz Sharif are not even on speaking terms, the two-party system may prove to be the two twins that never meet.

The relevance of the army will only increase. Although it is determined to stay in barracks — and it has proved so by its conduct — the danger is that it may be sucked into the political vortex in which Pakistan is caught at present. True, another martial law is ruled out but the army may have to play a more active role than it had envisaged before the polls.

The best fallout of the polls has been the elimination of fundamentalists, who fought as the Pakistan Islamic Front (PIF). They were part of Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League in the last election and hence it was difficult to find out their real

Cambodia now is Rural and Matriarchal

Tony Oliver writes from Phnom Penh

With almost all of its intellectuals and professionals either dead or exiled, the country's population consists largely of people with a rural upbringing. Even the capital is mainly inhabited by former villagers

project has undergone a number of changes. From the early concept of helping families to increase agricultural production, FFP now focuses on food security and improved nutrition, as well as on refining the managerial and technical capacity of the participating institutions.

Sustainable development is now made easier with the application of new technologies, particularly in manual well-boring, vegetable and fruit-tree gardening, poultry and small animal farming, preparation of bio-intensive composts and the production of natural pesticides, aquaculture and food processing. Additional help is provided in the form of small-scale credit schemes and the donation of modern tools and implements.

In 1992 alone, the programme benefited over 9,000 families in 13 provinces, as well as 61 schools and teachers' colleges in 16 provinces. An additional 12,500 families in four northwestern provinces have received the emergency FFP package, which consists of seeds or seedlings and water jars.

In terms of development of

the world. Meanwhile, the birth rate stands at 4 per cent and the average life expectancy at birth remains 49.7 years.

The emergency brought on by the severe 1985 drought first focused attention on the critical food shortage. This, in turn, led to the launching of the Family Food Production (FFP) project for severely disadvantaged and vulnerable families in rural Cambodia. FFP, a project of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has since become one of the largest decentralised development assistance programmes in Cambodia.

Implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1986, and tailored to help a population left reeling from the aftershocks of war, the pilot phase in Kandal province culminated in a full-scale programme in 1987.

Since 1988, continuous active support has been provided by the Women's Association of Cambodia. Headed by the Ministry of Education, a sub-project has extended the FFP principles to about 200 secondary schools and teachers' colleges.

Now in its sixth year, the

rural water resources, 21 community ponds, 3,100 family ponds and 452 hand-dug wells with cement rings were constructed. During that period, FFP families also received over 6,000 water jars.

UNICEF has also been helping returnees from refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border as well as internally displaced families by providing emergency FFP packs of seeds and seedlings, along with water jars. This assistance is intended to augment the basic kit provided by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Once families are more permanently settled, they will be further cushioned by full eligibility for FFP assistance.

FFP has since become an important part of the country's agricultural development programme. Because it is highly decentralised, FFP has so far been able to organise committees in 13 provinces and 54 districts. Village groups are also being brought together and FFP provincial and district mobile teams now provide technical support to FFP families.

As a result, many participating members of vulnerable groups in Cambodia now enjoy household food security. Malnutrition levels have decreased. Inspired by UNICEF's initial positive experiences in Cambodia, many non-governmental organisations have included similar projects in their own plans of operation.

—Depthnews Asia

Letters 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.

Ministry of Works and writ petition

Sir, First I would like to refer to the speech made by the hon'ble Minister, in charge of the Ministry of Works, on the 23rd July, 1993 at the Engineers Institute. His speech deserves praise and appreciation for expressing determination towards making the administration free from corruption.

Now, the Court of Settlement ascertained the rightful ownership of the so-called abandoned houses. It is to say, whether the judgement of this court is not correct? If it is correct, how does the Chairman of the legal cell of Works Ministry prefers writ petition against almost all the cases in which judgement goes in favour of the owners?

This Court of Settlement is the extension of the Ministry of Works and all of the staff except

the Registrar are from that Ministry. The Government cannot be the person aggrieved under the Constitution to file writ petition against the judgement and order of its own office. What strange way, apparently, to deprive the real owner! Does any law allow the Chairman to do so even after three years of the judgement of the Court of Settlement? It seems that the ministry is waiting for the demise of the owners, so that it may solve the problem automatically. The real owners have been suffering for the last 22 years without any remedy from the Government.

It is known to all that neither any organization nor any institution nor any office which acts as trustee, without any contract, can file writ petition, because of not being the owner.

But, as per law, a real owner can appeal to the higher court

for the sake of justice on the basis of fundamental right.

I appeal to the Hon'ble Minister to kindly see that this wrong practice of making delay in the process of restoration of the possession of the houses of the real owners, declared by the Court of Settlement, is stopped.

Pasha 51, BCC Road, Dhaka

"Toni Morrison ..."

Sir, I take this opportunity to congratulate Mr Azfar Hussain on having written an excellent piece "Toni Morrison: The Poetics and Politics of Remembering and Forgetting". The piece not only makes a pleasant reading, but also focuses on the spirit of the black struggle which has found a somewhat oblique expression in the novels of Toni Morrison. Mr Hussain's particular emphasis on this area is of political importance for the Third World as well. I have liked Mr Hussain's statement that there is "more American" than "Afro" in a so-called Afro-American writer like Toni Morrison.

Ahmed Zubair Department of English Dhaka University

Public meetings on roads

Sir, The government's taking measures to restrict the holding of public meetings on main roads is laudable but more stringent measures are called for. Holding meetings infringes upon our democratic right by blocking public thoroughfares and thus depriving us of our right of unhindered passage. These blockages of roads cause untold sufferings which the political leaders, for their own benefit, completely ignore; but they forget that it is we who pay their salaries to represent us and work in favour of us.

According to the new legislation, meetings on public streets are allowed if only a precise amount of charge is paid. I understand that the government by making this new law intends to lessen the number of meetings held in streets, but I think everybody should be reminded that streets are for communication and free movement of vehicles and pedestrians only, and not for meetings which block roads and only bring trouble

and do no good.

Blocking of main roads, like the one adjacent to Press Club and which leads to Motijheel causes indescribable hardship by traffic disruption throughout almost the whole city. It diverts the whole traffic to other streets, which, because of the great number of vehicles, causes major traffic jams.

These traffic jams ruin our daily schedule, and our precious time and money are lost irretrievably leading to misunderstanding, missing of important appointments and opportunities, physical suffering of patients etc, and the only reason behind these is meeting held in public streets.

We are the taxpayers and with our hard earned money the streets are made; so why should we be deprived of the use of the streets by people who promise a lot but deliver nothing?

I think the government by allowing such meetings is too lenient to political parties. Now is the time to become strict. In my opinion, meetings in streets should be completely banned so that major

traffic jams in those commercial areas do not occur and our precious time, money, and thus lives are saved. People violating the ban should be held in contempt and punished severely. In this way the sufferings of the peace-loving citizens can be reduced and the political parties will learn to respect the public.

Zubaid Rafique Banani, Dhaka

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