Dhaka, Saturday, November 6, 1993

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

PDB Crisis

A total of Tk 568 crore unrealised revenue for as ailing a body as the Power Development Board (PDB) is like adding insult to injury. And so injured this utility service is, thanks to the strict conditionalities the World Bank has imposed on it, that it is badly limping and the gap between the consumer satisfaction and its capacity to match that is yawning day by day. The defaulters are on both sides - public sector and the private sector. As of June 30th last, the PDB's unrealised bills with the private sector was Tk 352 crore, while the amount with public sector was Tk 216 crore. No doubt, the amounts on both heads have by now gone up.

One remarkable fact is that the big defaulters in the public sector are the ministries - 16 to be precise - and the Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) on the one hand; and industrial units and commercial enterprises on the other. Small consumers responsible for a meagre 17.8 per cent of the total power consumption, are not so much at fault. But the way the PDB's concern is aired through different media gives the impression that it is the small domestic consumers who are really letting the power generating body down. Contrarily, the truth is that the government agencies are doing incalculable harm not only in the immediate terms of non-payment of the bills due to them but also in the long-term calculation of its deleterious impacts.

When the government's most vital - and equally responsible - organs continue to fault, it loses the moral right to accuse anyone else for the same mistake or offence. This is where the non-bill paying business houses or industrial establishments feel encouraged. No wonder the major share of the unrealised PDB revenue in the private sector is owed to big industrial and commercial ventures. A government can compromise the virtue of maintaining up-to-date accounts only to its own peril. In fact, the test of a government is its clarity of accounts which is possible only when it sets the precedence by settling its own accounts in time without lapsing into arrears. Then there is no reason why the ministries and other government agencies should fail to pay their bills. It is not just in case of PDB bills alone, but the same happens in the payment of all other utility services bills. It cannot be that there are no budgetary provisions for the different ministries and agencies.

It is exactly at this point, the PDB's argument for adopting a tough measure against defaulters suffers either from double standard or is simply suspect. One even gets the impression that the fixation of the revenue rate may not be after all rational enough. Both system loss and non-realisation of revenues contribute to making electricity costly. Obviously, the small consumers who regularly pay their dues have to bear the brunt of this cover-up attempt. In short, when the inefficiency of the board should have come under scrutiny for the redress of the problem, the focus has deliberately been misplaced. There seems to be an underlying attempt to force the ordinary consumers pay for making up for the big loss.

It goes without saying that this is a wrong no tion. If illegal connections of electricity demands action against them without favour, so does any defaulter irrespective of his standing. The big consumers more so because of their huge amount of arrear bills. That the PDB cannot undertake some necessary renovating works because of fund constraints shows why the big consumers, especially the government, with outstanding bills should have been made the prime target. Read against the defaulting list, it also becomes quite clear why the utility service cannot perform better and has to neglect its most essential repair work.

The lesson therefore is that the government must first of all bring its own house in order to put pressure on others to behave. Otherwise, its credibility will be always suspect and any organisation - not just the PDB - will falter as usual.

Apathy and Narail Fishes

A report from Narail says the fish population in the various areas of Kalia thana has been attacked by a fatal disease on an epidemic scale. This is the second outbreak of the same disease in the span of only a few years and it has affected almost all the popular species like koi, shing, puti, magur, taki, baim, shol, gojar etc. People of the district have virtually stopped buying and eating fish.

This is not a news that will raise an alarm in the nation at large. Diarrhoea has been taking a regular toll of citizens' lives all around the country for months on end without disturbing a good night's sleep of anyone not affected by the disease. And unfortunately for the nation, the big body of people connected with health administration, including physicians, seem to belong to this category. So what's the chance the fish disease reports will stir the heart of someone in the capital who could have helped the Narail fishes or have caused the poor creatures to be helped? Will it be of any use to point out that no one is asking of important people to shed tears over suffering fishes and that the point is such deaths involve suffering of man too in this case the fishermen - and also of the nation's economy as a whole? And is not such fish epidemic indicative of serious ecological degenera-

Compared to the prevailing nation-sized apathy what are the Narail fishes? But helplessness is helplessness - irrespective of the size of the victim. Who will help the fishes? Who can do it? Evidently the baby belongs to the Fishery Department. The local fishery officials have admitted their inability to understand the malaise. They are expecting bigger and higher experts in Dhaka to do something.

Will the Narail fishes get some meaningful attention in the end? This is not a question of Ershad going to the interior and coddling some poor ailing girl - or some 'democratic' follow up of those putup tele-acts. Minding those poor fishes would mean that there is a government and that there are people who care. In the absence of such it is not those fishes but the nation in its whole will prove hopelessly diseased.

HE Commonwealth has Leaders Tighten up on Democracy set itself here a politically tricky and somewhat unfashionable target: to capture the international high moral ground. In five days of

talking at their summit meeting

the leaders of 47 countries did

They tightened the rules of

the club and started lecturing

each other about raising the

quality of their democracy.

Their communique was pep-

pered with references to human

rights and Cameroon, in reap-

plying to join the Common-

wealth (it had been rebuffed in

1991) was told it must wait

another two years until it had

completed its democratic

Commonwealth developing the

new role that it began to define

for itself in the Harare

Declaration in 1991. President

Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe

emerged as the guardian of the

rules set down under his

chairmanship. He bluntly told

Nigerian leader Ernest Shone-

kan and Sierra Leonean military

ruler Valentine Strasser that

their countries were setting bad

idation for a Commonwealth

that was more at one with itself

than at any time since it took

on its modern form in 1949.

The programme of democratisa-

tion and better human rights

will involve the Commonwealth

next year in the transition in

South Africa, the end of one-

party rule in Malawi, and prob-

This was a summit of consol-

examples to Africa.

Limassol showed the

reforms.

an extraordinary thing.

Derek Ingram writes from Limassol, Cyprus

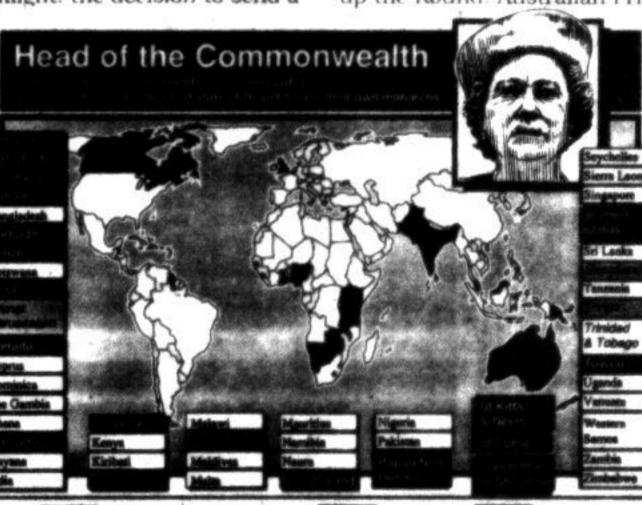
The leaders of the 47 Commonwealth countries have just ended their summit with calls for strengthening democracy in the developing world. Finding a successful conclusion to the Gatt world trade talks also dominated the agenda. The vexed question of Cyprus received some thoughtful attention as well.

ably in the new elections in

South Africa is invited to return to the Commonwealth. Tanzania will continue its moves towards multi-partyism and the pressure will be kept up on Sierra Leone to switch from military to civilian rule.

This was a quietly constructive Commonwealth summit that had only one dramatic highlight: the decision to send a global ministerial mission to press governments to meet the December 15 deadline for the completion of the Gatt Uruguay

Ministers from Barbados. Canada, Ghana, Malaysia and Mauritius will go to Paris, Washington, Geneva and Brussels in an exercise that is really aimed at shifting the rigid French position that is holding up the Round. Australian Prime



Minister Paul Keating was said to have suggested the mission. but the British claim it was their idea. They may well have let Keating take the lead so that they were not seen overtly to be ganging up the Commonwealth

against the French. If the mission does succeed in breaking the deadlock it will be a good example of the use to which the Commonwealth can be put in tackling a major global issue.

The Cypriots should be pleased with the summit. They have persuaded the Commonwealth to take a stronger stand on their problem against Turkey, despite the reluctance of the Muslim members such as Pakistan, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Brunei.

They called for the speedy withdrawal of all Turkish forces and settlers, the return of refugees to their homes and the accounting for of those missing. They said nothing should be done which would result in the changed demographic structure of Cyprus. President Glafkos Clerides, who chaired the summit, said that on the withdrawal of Turkish forces his

government would assume the added cost of a UN force until the Cyprus question was resolved.

At the final press conference Clerides repeated an apology made long ago for the deaths of 200 Turkish Cypriots during communal clashes in 1963. But he pointed out that 1,700 Greek Cypriots had died and that the Turkish side had never apologised for that.

Although the Cyprus question did not "hi-jack" the conference, as some reports had suggested, it did make a profound effect on a number of the participants. When the delegates drove to Nicosia from Limassol for the opening, thousands of women lined the route peacefully demonstrating against the Turkish occupation.

At the opening, huge screens in the conference hall shots of the suffering during the 1974 invasion together with film of other international violence reaching right back to Hitler and Buchenwald. It was a controversial way to start a Commonwealth conference and some said it was rather over the

Others argued that it was salutary for presidents and prime ministers to be confronted with such realities. Mugabe was moved by the demonstrating women and broke away from the text of his speech to appeal for action by the Commonwealth to end the Turkish invasion.

Of other subjects, the meeting was much exercised by money laundering which if saw as a serious threat to financial systems worldwide. Commonwealth law ministers and finance ministers are to be asked to work out how their countries can best work collectively to combat the laundering of proceeds of all types of serious crime

This was a Commonwealth summit with a new generation of leaders but fewer stars than of old reflecting perhaps the lack of charismatic leaders, around the world. At Limassol the most active leaders were Prime Ministers Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia. Robert Mugabe. Paul Keating and John

Some said they missed the Kaundas, Nvereres, and Lee Kuan Yews - even the histrionics of Margaret Thatcher. It is a different Commonwealth in 1993, though not a less active nor less influential one. The next summit stop is New Zealand in 1995.

- GEMINI NEWS DEREK INGRAM is Editor of Gemini News Service.

Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge is Beneficial to the Whole Economy

HE development of physical infrastructure like L transport and communication is a pre-condition for accelerating economic development of a country. But the Jamuna and the Padma form a system of rivers which physically divide Bangladesh into east and west zones and again the west into northern and southern parts. This physical barrier stands as an impediment to economic development and social unity of the country. The proposed Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge to be constructed over the mighty river Jamuna, will be a fixed transportation link between the bifurcated zones of the country. It admits of no leisure that improvement in the transport system by removing this barrier and reducing the cost of access to markets will strengthen those activities which have a natural comparative advantage. According to the final feasibility report of Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge project furnished by international consulting firms. RPT/NEDECO/BCL, there is forecast that if Jamuna Bridge could be constructed by 1998 the passengers/freight across the Jamuna bridge would be as

Year Passenger/ Freight (Ton/year)

9.7 " 2020 3,66,600 The consultants have also

opined that there will likely be some production costs and revenues resulting from the changed transport situation in the porth-west. These will effect in estimated 8,200 tons of agricultural products in 1998, increasing it to 18,500 tons in 2020. The net effect of the bridge on agriculture will be towards increase in the annual production, which is assumed to replace imports.

An estimated quantity of 9,36,000 and 3,12,000 tons of consumer products in the respective years of 1998 and 2020 will be transported across the Jamuna. Producers of these commodities will also be benefited from the reduction in transport costs and be stimulated to increase investments and production. Thus the fixed transport link resulting from the construction of the Jamuna Bridge, between the eastern and the north western parts of the country, will help gear up industrialization in the relatively backward region.

The Jamuna bridge will have a significant effect by saving travel time which can contribute in human resources development. The travel time saving has been estimated to be 200 million hours a year by

by Abdur Rahman Khan 2000. The country's balance of

trade is normally negative with a gap of some 30 to 35 billion Taka per year and it is likely that imports and exports will be effected equally by improved working efficiency. The fiscal impact of travel time saving is estimated to be more significant and the additional fiscal revenues due to this would be some US \$ 1.2 million per year.

It may be noted here that the availability of power/energy is also an essential pre-requisite for economic development. The supply of electricity to the western region of the country through the proposed 13.6 km long second electric intercon nector, which is a confirmed requirement by 1995, will be feasible through the Jamuna bridge. Taking the second power inter-connector by the bridge, instead of constructing an independent interconnector, will give Power Development Board a saving of about US \$105 million. Besides this, the bridge will also have the provision for taking natural gas to the northwest part of the country and thereby help check deforestation in the energy short region. The supply of commercial energy to the north-western part will also open the avenues for industrialisation, especially

small/cottage industries and thereby help attain a balanced economic growth.

In addition to direct benefits port/communication and power/energy sectors, the bridge will understandably provide unquantifiable benefits which may help achieve the long-term goal and will act as the catalyst in bringing about an inter-sectoral compatibility. Recently the government has taken measures for mineral resources development in the northern region of the country. The bridge will make its great contribution in facilitating transportation of coal and hard rocks from the north-western to the eastern part of the country. The possibility of fertilizer ex port to Nepal is also likely to improve the export earnings of the country. Thus the proposed Jamuna bridge project is a landmark in the socio-economic development which will user in a new era for alleviation of poverty by generating employment opportunities in various sectors of the economy.

It has earlier been mentioned that the main objectives of the construction of the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge is to stimulate the economic growth of Bangladesh by providing transport and energy connections be-

tween the north-west and eastern parts of the country Meanwhile some other additional studies have been undertaken in connection with this project which are intended to contribute to long-term objectives by ensuring the environmental soundness of the project and optimum long-term benefits from land development in the vicinity of the bridge.

Of late, a question is raised in a section of the press that Brahmaputra barrage is more beneficial than Jamuna Bridge However, there is a simple answer contradicting it. Because of the present changed global aid pattern, such a big investment for a single project like Brahmaputra barrage seems to be quite impracticable. According to a prima facie estimate the cost of Brahmaputra barrage (which is now suggested by so called economists and experts) stood at around US \$ 7 billion in mid eighties. On the other hand, the Jamuna bridge will cost merely over half a billion dollar and will also serve the 'multipurpose' need of the country and which can easily be affordable within the budgetary provision of the government.

it has also been revealed from the Task force report of February, 1991, that the experts have reviewed a large number of studies made by various consultants and they have firmly expressed their views that Jamuna bridge is viable both technically and economically. At the same time they have also admitted the affordability of the project which will not hamper implementation

of any higher priority project within the plan of the government. As such, justification of implementation of Jamuna Bridge project has been established by a number of local and foreign experts. Further, during appraisal, from 6-20 September, 1993, the co-financiers like IDA, ADB/OECF (Japan) have reviewed the project. After threadbare discussion with the authority and other government agencies they have submitted an aid-memoire on September 20, 1993. It appears from the aid-memoire that the ERR of the project is 15 per cent and the co-financiers have firmly confirmed that Jamuna Bridge project is technically feasible and economically viable.

Moreover, the proposed Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge will be a 4-lane road-cum-power bridge with the provision to accommodate metre gauge rail, gas pipe line and telecommunication facilities. The project will undoubtedly serve the multipurpose need purposes in a very cost effective fashion. Thus it is envisaged that to develop the transportation network and to attain maximum benefits, the country feels it necessary to implement the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Project at the earliest possible.

that the construction of the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge at 9 km south of Straigoni will also be a boon to the Asian Highway which will usher in a new era not only for the transportation network of Bangladesh, but also for that of the South East Asian

It is noteworthy to remember

Unthe Uniter

Operation clean-up

Sir, Why the operation cleanup of the govt and semi-govt agencies is being delayed, and top-most priority is not being accorded? Only recently the probing of PWD and Telecom have been taken up, with other utility services in the waiting

The people-backed BNP government is all the time hammering at public meetings that it was pledge-bound to clean up the administration and introduce good governance, and root out malpractices against public interest. But the action is snail-paced and cannot keep pace with the pious wishes. The public is getting frustrated at the unabated pace of corruption, nepotism, indiscipline, malpractices at all levels, and

violence. What specific programmes have been drawn up to clean up the administration? The master plan and the line of action should be explained to the public, to create confidence. Slow action saps credibility. Many no-action policies are not explained, creating misunderstanding and inviting adverse criticism even from the wellwishers of BNP. Simply talking does not change a situation. The proof of the pudding lies in the eating. Where is the pud-

ding of deterrence? BNP has to explain very clearly the role of student politics, specially in regard to the campus violence. If the student front of the BNP is going to be maintained and strengthened. then other political parties would follow suit. Then it would make no sense to criticised the other parties, however indirectly or vaguely. It needs to be explained how and why the role of the BNP student politics is positive and not negative. BNPnever talks critically about JCD and its role party-wise and at national level. Other parties can apply the same objectives. Vague accusations by any side do not cut any ice. Politics is the game of concealing the hidden objectives. The elephant's tusks are only shown. Nobody is fooled.

Why the human system loss is not coming down rapidly? It does not necessarily mean wholesale sacking. The rules and regulations are adequate for detection and punishment.

Then why the go-slow policy? Unpleasant decisions have to be faced and implemented. There should be no compromise on possible loss of popularity. How BNP proposes to face this administrative challenge? Strictness is a virtue, not a vice, when applied judiciously, and is not misused.

Let us see some fast action. and periodical reporting to the suffering citizens, to whom the government is answerable.

Alif Zabr Dhaka

War against corruption

Sir, Mr Kibria's suggestion. in the light of his experience and studies as a top international civil servant executive, published in your paper (4.7.93) and some follow up suggestion of a reader (Mr Jalaluddin Iqbal) were good, no doubt. Both of them have suggested that the war against corruption should be fought by the generals holding top positions. President, PM, MP's etc. There is another side of the war and that, in my opinion, would also contribute to win it. This is the common man and the society as a whole. The weapons is 'hatred', 'negligence', and 'social boycott' for the corrupt persons. The TV drama, 'Keu Kothao Nei' of Humayun Ahmed, indicated how much worried and upset a person suspended from office on account of corruption felt at the thought of his sons and daughters being hated by their fellow students and playmates calling them 'Chorer Chheley Meye'. Psychologists will bear me out that each human being's normal instinct wants him to be praised but never likes to be hated in the society. To achieve this social hatred and negligence against corrupt people, the bribe takers, the smugglers, the black money earners, the bank defaulters and the like should be thoroughly and widely exposed to. the society through newspapers, magazines, radio and TV and other media. Their names. addresses in full, and the corrupt actions with their photographs should be printed and shown repeatedly to be familiar to the common man and the result will be that instead of respect for their ill-earned riches,

they will be hated by all including their relatives. Thus, their social standing would be very much lowered and, certainly, they would not like it.

Another weapon we may use

to combat corruption and we are sure to win the battle to a substantial extent. We may introduce the system of reporting by the citizens about persons 'living beyond their means' in different 'mahallas'. The mahalla people always know how their neighbours live and spend and their sources of income. For example, an engineer in government service, a teacher in govt institution, an officer of the govt cannot have two or three private cars and very posh house with ACs fixed in. Citizens may be given the opportunity and be invited to report such extravagance with their real name, false name and/or no name. Such reports should be honestly examined/investigated by anti-corruption personnel and their reports should also be verified by superiors secretly assigned to do it as head examiners. The address to which the reports are to be sent should be widely and frequently publicised. Every month a statement should be issued for public information about the number of reports received, number enquired into and the number which called for action and the kind of action taken against. This process will need some extra expendi ture and personnel (honest though) but will definitely reduce this number one social menace of the country - cor-

An old citizen

Administrative duties

Sir, The last three decades have seen enormous proliferation of management ideas and practices. It is the excellence of continuous education and practices, strengthened by personal integrity and discipline of the top managers, that has created the 'Asian Tigers.' None of these countries (or the city state) is rich in natural resources.

One of the management ideas that has been on the lead is MBWA (managing by wandering about). The Minister for Works and the Minister for

PT&T, in the recent days, by visiting and moving around their respective departments/ offices, have issued directives to their respective officers, which would help and benefit the general public. It is hoped that this is just the beginning towards public welfare. The general public do not have an easy access to our respected ministers. So public grievances can only come to the notice of our honourable ministers if they visit their subordinate offices as an important part of their ad-

ministrative duties. We would further hope that important and controversial issues are discussed in the Parliament in a constructive and thoughtful way. All controversial issues can be battled on in that august assembly through valuable debates. We would further repeat that the business of the Parliament takes precedence over all other business of the government.

Shahabuddin Mahtab Siddheswari Road, Dhaka.

An advice for Taslima Nasreen

Sir, Though I have not gone through any book by Taslima Nasreen, I have read many articles for and against her books. I have also observed many news items condemning her critical views. So far all the actions and reactions for and against her have led me to the conclusion that:

She is an extraordinary feminist leader:

She is very successful in the sale of her books, specially in She is very forceful in writing

against all the injustices done to women folk in the patriarchal society, especially ours. I have an humble advice for

this controversial writer. earnestly desire that Taslima Nasreen should pay a visit to Meghalaya of India to study the matriarchal family system of the Khasi society. I am sure she will find new thought-provoking matters from such a study which may even change the mood of her future writings, because in their society, men folk suffer the same way as women

Ahmed Kabir Choudhury Housing Estate, Sylhet

in our society.

Bosnian Reporters Journey from Hell to Heaven

Bosnian woman reporter whose most recent beat was the killing ground of Sarajevo told an admiring group of journalists October 29.

"Yesterday (November 3), 1,000 bombs hit Sarajevo," said Mirsad Sakic-Hatibovic, a radio/television journalist in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as she acknowledged the plaudits of the group, which included Katherine Graham, owner of the Washington Post newspaper, and CNN Washington Bureau Chief Peter Arnett.

She and fellow reporter Arijana Saracevic had received "Courage in Journalism" awards from the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) the week before in New York City. Three other women reporters were also honored by the foundation. Each prize included \$2,000.

Sakic-Hatibovic spoke at a luncheon in Arlington, Virginia, across the river from Washington. She said that only the deaths of 50 of her colleagues and the wounding of 200 others were "what has kept me going as a professional journalist" during the past year.

The Bosnian journalist spent almost nine months in the besieged city of Sarajevo, which is shelled almost daily by Bosnian Serb artillery ranged in the hills surrounding the city. Now she works out of Paris raising money for media operations in Bosnia. Her partner, Saracevic, has filed more than 2,000 radio/television reports from the front lines in the Bosnian con-

"Even the birds have left our city, but we have to stay," Saracevic told the audience.

She explained that what has kept her going is "the fight against fascism." She said that regardless of the deaths one sees daily, my strength grew as the Republic of Bosnia grew."

When asked what the West could do to help, both responded almost in unison: "Bomb the Serb positions."

Cecilia Valenzuela, a 29year-old journalist from Peru, was given a courage award from IWMF for the dangerous reporting she has done on drug trafficking and on the Shining Path guerilla movement. A former BBC television reporter, she is now an editor for the independent weekly magazine "Caretas."

Valenzuela, who has received numerous death threats, said: "That is why I do my work. The more they threaten me and the freedom of my people, the more courage and strength I will have to go on."

Donna Ferrato, an American freelance photographer, was recognized by the IWMF for the reporting she has done on battered and abused women. Her pictures in a book "Battered Women Who Kill" were recently featured in Time magazine.

Noting that "every 15 seconds a woman is beaten brutally by someone she loves." Ferrato said, "I get strength from the courage of the people whom I cover [and] my anger keeps me going.

Ferrato made a plea for more women entering journalism by saying: "I believe in the power of the press," and since "women are the most indomitable spirit in this country ... our stories can help things to change in society."

Veteran American journalist Nan Robertson received her courage award from IWMF for her more than 40 years of work in journalism, much of that time spent battling male domination in the media.

The Pulitzer-Prize-winning New York Times writer, who said she started out as a young reporter covering a police beat, gave as one reason for her success the ability to set her emotions aside while she worked. "If you want to get emotionally involved, you do it afterwards." she told her audience.

- USIS