

Energising Power Generation

A new national energy policy in the process of getting finalised by February next is coming at a time when the whole world is concerned more than ever before not only about the depletion of various energy sources but also the environmental degradation caused by the existing pattern of natural fuel use. As a most populous nation with small energy reserves, our concern should be even greater. Mostly dependent on natural gas, the country cannot go on footing an energy bill that with time is likely to grow fatter. We understand the government's emphasis on gas, the reserve of which also has reportedly come down causing quite a headache for the administration.

There is, however, no reason for confusing the extractable stock with the projected total reserve estimated at about 12 trillion cubic feet. Only the amount ready so far for extraction has the capacity to sustain the country for another 19 years. A stock for 50 years, according to experts, is a safe bet. What led to this situation is the World Bank's conditionalities on the investment in the energy sector. Shortage of fund has constrained the gas companies from looking for new gas fields. A worried government has sought help from the gas companies which happily have responded positively to bail it out.

We can, therefore, reasonably hope that the new energy policy will have clear-cut provisions for averting future crises of such order. In an energy-starved country like ours, it is highly important that the use of our available gas were most judicious and economic. Until now, misuse of gas at household burners, could not be stopped. How about introducing the system, prevalent in the West, of ensuring the availability of gas on instant payment? No one can steal or misuse gas if such an arrangement can be put in place.

The energy crunch is felt more because of lack of attention to other sources of natural energy as well as alternative energy. Sure enough, on the immediate count the import of fuel may prove cheaper than exploration of domestic sources, but in the long term, the reverse is true. We assume the new energy policy will mark a definite tilt towards transferring the gas sector to private hands. If the government runs short of fund for investment in the sector, that is how the necessary fund must be forthcoming also for exploration of oil. It might not be quite impossible to strike a few oil wells in some parts of the country.

Then it is foolish to rely on one source of natural bounty. However big the reserve may be, it will dry up even after most economic use. Today, nations not only in the West but also in Asia are looking for pollution-free alternative energy sources. Significant progress has been made in solar-energy driven cars and expert reports are conclusive that by the beginning of the next century or within a decade or two many Asian cities will see quite a number of such solar-powered cars running in the streets. Solar power has other convenient uses — both domestic and commercial. Similarly, wind power is once again staging a comeback at least for agricultural use. Harmless and abundantly available, these two sources of energy can be harnessed for meeting a substantial portion of our demand. The energy policy should chalk out a long-term programme for better and efficient use of solar and wind power.

Bio-gas plant is yet another area, the potential of which has not been adequately explored. The establishment of a few such plants has proved houseful they can be in villages not yet covered by the Rural Electrification Board. The energy policy must take into consideration all these areas of power generation system in a comprehensive manner. Their respective share should be rational and balanced so that the overall impact on the country's environment is not deleterious. We hope the formulators of the policy would show enough consideration also to the delicate balance between resources left alone and their over-exploitation.

Not by Punishment Alone

A Ghior-bound minibus from Gabtoli plunged 25 feet from a Dhamrai bridge on Tuesday killing 16. All of the 40 surviving passengers, removed to various hospitals, are in a critical condition.

What kind of a minibus was it to have been able to accommodate close to sixty passengers and may be more? This is more than double the capacity of a minibus. The crime of overloading always comes compounded with the other, and perhaps more dangerous, crime of speeding and rash driving. According to a survivor, this present case was no exception. Some newspapers have put the death toll at 19. Some more deaths or less does not add to or detract from the cruel absurdity of such avoidable misfortune. This journal has steadfastly refused to dismiss the crime by labelling it as accident. How can Tuesday's tragedy be an accident when a minibus with some 40 people cramming its inside and another twenty-plus crowding its roof sped at least one kilometre a minute on an unlit night and down a road hardly ever maintained?

Over the last week we have been witnessing a gruesome spurt in casualty figures of road mishaps. It is true that the police organisation — responsible as they are for road-worthiness of both the vehicles and their drivers and for the conduct of both of these on road — is not up to the size of the challenge posed by the nation's traffic situation. And they are in no way to blame for the way the highway from Gabtoli to Aricha meanders or the poor shape of all the bridges on it, specially their railings. As even the most stringent forms of law prescribing very harsh punishment cannot reduce murders and other violent crimes, depending solely on making punishment for traffic crimes far harsher than at present would be patently foolish. The simple but unpalatable truth is that, not police, but the entire government establishment hasn't in its power righting the traffic crime situation.

Where then is the way out? We do not believe that they are all of them thugs among the public transport owners or the transport workers' unions. Let us try to building up moral pressure both on the owners of trucks and buses and also on the body of drivers and other transport workers to coax them into owning their part of the responsibility of ensuring travel in one-piece. We have seen driving licences put on virtual open sale and road worthy certificates given to thousands of the most unworthy death-traps. If those two quarters are allowed a kind of power-sharing by involving them in such controlling position, it is perhaps impossible for the situation to further worsen. But then there will be the chance of their sharing in the responsibility of negating road deaths.

In Bosnia, the world is witnessing not only the making of history but the careful fabrication of a myth which will eventually be passed off as a balanced and scholarly interpretation of history. The Bosnian story will be added to the vast body of Western mythology that has, at least since the 7th century AD, fed an enormous Western appetite for self-deception.

The authors of this story took as their theme "humanitarian concern" in the certain knowledge that once this banner has been seized by them it could not convincingly be used even by the dying children of their opponents, the Bosnian Muslims. The world would be made to see that while Muslims were being killed in large numbers, they were being fed and watered by Western humanitarians before being slaughtered. A considerable portion of the world might even be persuaded that the slaughter itself was being conducted in a sort of humanitarian way because nobody was dying on an empty stomach.

It was thought that the humanitarian theme could be used as an umbrella. It could cover military sanctions against both sides; and such sanctions would be made to appear fair and even-handed for the short time the Serbs and Croats would need to make their contribution to the cleansing of Europe. The West itself would not supply arms to either side. It would even appear to blockade supply routes, but without infringing the territorial sovereignty of Yugoslavia's erstwhile neighbours. Thus, while neither side could receive military supplies by sea, the inland water and land routes would be available to the Serbs and Croats. The total military rout of the already ill-equipped Bosnian Muslims was seen to be a chronological problem — a matter of a few months at most.

At the same time, it was felt that the Western leaders should be seen piously to be exerting themselves on behalf of a just peace without antagonising domestic electorates while brokering the future map of an increasingly para-

noid fortress Europe. The task was made more difficult by the necessity of including the world's only super-power, the US, in the weaving of the legend and by the understandable reluctance of the world's policeman, to be cast as the villain in a situation that was even beginning to embarrass Israel, to say nothing of the Western media. Things were starting to go seriously wrong. Overly optimistic military assessments were resulting in diplomatic failures.

The Serbs and Croats were proving embarrassingly inept in their use of greatly superior fire-power, secure supply lines, more-than-adequate supplies of men and materiel, implicit Western support and openly sympathetic neighbours. The Muslims, like the Vietnamese and the Afghans before them, had introduced the incalculable factor of the human will. The amateur conjuring duo of Vance and Owen had, to the eventual bafflement of none but the OIC, pulled a succession of dead rabbits out of a bottomless London top-hat before a bemused international audience. In these circumstances, prudence required America to distance itself from the essentially British but broadly European perception of Islam; and this America did by declaring unacceptable the use of aircraft by the Serbs and by hinting that it might use its own air power in the impossible event of Serbian non-compliance.

The European response was predictable: British and other UN troops would be endangered by American air strikes; UN aid administrators as well as the aid supply routes would come under Serbian and Croat attack. The European Unionists, led by Britain, had

done it again. A confused American administration retreated from yet another major foreign policy decision.

The recent American embroilment in the Balkans can be traced back to the Oxford-educated Rhodes Scholar who, as head of the US administration, allowed himself to be persuaded by Britain's special understanding of Balkan affairs. The British have very impressive credentials: the dismemberment of both the Islamic "Ottoman" and the Austro-Hungarian Empires; the destruction of the delicate balance of power in the Balkans; a generous hand in feeding the Serbian nationalism that resulted in "the shot heard around the world" and World War I in 1914; the Balfour Declaration of 1917; the echoes of which are being heard today around the world. The list is a long one and Clinton cannot be blamed too much for overlooking the fact that Britain also has a unique experience in the manipulation of American politics and American politicians. The events of both World Wars, documented by Western historians, bear witness to this.

Britain had decided long before 1992 that it would have to join the European Community but that it would only do so on its own terms. It would be the dominant power in Europe despite the economic strength of Germany because it would have American support. In order to gain that American support, it would provide a secure salient within fortress Europe for American interests. This inner bastion would be ringed by the present Community which, in turn, would be surrounded by an extended and enlarged Community ultimately consisting of the former communist

bloc. Since the inspiration for both the European Community and communism was economic, it was felt that the conflict between liberal democracy and communism would be economically resolved once it has been revealed to the communists that American wheat has replaced the semantics of communist philosophy.

However, three problems remained. They were, firstly, the danger of renaissance communism before the capitalist experiment has reached the point of no return; secondly, the danger of what had been a centrally controlled bloc now fragmenting and reforming into less controllable sub-blocs or even individual states; thirdly, the emergence of an ideology in Central Asia.

The first problem could be solved by supporting Yeltsin financially and politically against the go-slow moderates and the hardline party rump. The second and third problems would have to be treated in a quite different manner as they were inter-linked and contained elements that would not all be vulnerable to the material inducements offered by the West.

Central Asia not only contains important natural resources but also an Islamic population on either side of the border between the former USSR and China. The borders between this vast region and the Near East, the Middle East and parts of South Asia are political and ethnic, not ideological; whereas the borders of this region with both the former USSR and China have always been at least latently ideological. In Europe, it was felt by Unionists that the materialism upon which the Community rested would be undermined by the existence of two virtually contiguous

Muslim-majority states (Bosnia and Albania) in the heart of Europe. It was also felt that while a little xenophobia and racism could be blamed on rising unemployment, it would be awkward openly to apply "the final solution" to the Islamic problem in either Central Asia or Central Europe. A more subtle way had to be found; a way that would, at one stroke, reunify the old Soviet bloc, eradicate Islam in Central Europe and, by so doing, discourage the overly enthusiastic Muslims of Central Asia. Needless to say, the rest of the Muslim world would understand the message. It was time for the Ursa (Latin word for bear) Gambit.

The purpose of the Ursa Gambit was manifold: it should strengthen the position of Boris Yeltsin at the cost of the hardline party rump; it should assure Yeltsin of the support of the armed forces; it should unify Russian opinion; it should cast Yeltsin as the upholder of an independent Russian foreign policy; it should eradicate Islam from the map of Europe; it should confuse and intimidate the Muslim world; it should strengthen the bargaining position of Israel in its dealings with the Muslim world; it should make available the resources of Central Asia to non-Muslim markets by minimising the influence of other Muslim states; it should achieve all this without soiling the image of the West as the keeper of the universal conscience.

The execution of the gambit has been remarkably successful, considering its intricacy of purpose. Yeltsin had to agree to give military support to the Serbs and, if the occasion demanded, to the Croats, in their rebellion against the Muslim-

majority State of Bosnia. Any hesitation was dispelled by assurances that the European Community would guarantee not only its own military impotence but that of the UN, NATO, the OIC and the US.

The gambit bore the stamp of genius and Yeltsin was quick to recognise in it the many advantages for himself and, through him, for Russia. He would rally the Russian people in the name of Orthodox Christianity. He would lead them, after 70 years of godless communism, in an act of atonement. A crusade (that ritual cleansing of the lapsed Christian in the blood of others) in support of their Slavic co-religionists, the Serbs, would purge the guilty Russian soul and entrust it to him. The military, recently defeated in the field by the Muslim Mujahideen of Afghanistan, would be eager to meet the raw, untested, ill-equipped Bosnian militia. It would also like to march in step with public opinion. Parliament, recognising the importance of both public and military support, would support the crusader. He would comply. Russia needed more wheat, not the good opinion of moralists; Russia needed him and he needed more time. Here was a cheap way to achieve the Russian dream.

Events have proved Yeltsin largely correct. At the UN, a remarkably strident Russia has declared that it would not tolerate any interference with Serbian military superiority in Bosnia. By so doing, it has provoked the West with a valuable excuse for doing nothing moral as morality has no value in the Russian market-place. Russia has, in apparent defiance of so-called UN sanctions and embargoes, continued to supply arms to the Serbs and Croats in reply, the West has chosen to give precedence to the right of its man in Moscow to continued political life over the Bosnians' right to life itself. The progenitors of the Ursa Gambit, going modestly about their business in Whitehall, do not seek public recognition; but they deserve it nonetheless.

The author is a prominent businessman, and an occasional contributor to this paper.

The Ursa Gambit

by S Alam Rashid

The execution of the Ursa (Latin word for bear) gambit has been remarkably successful, considering its intricacy of purpose. Yeltsin had to agree to give military support to the Serbs and, if the occasion demanded, to the Croats, in their rebellion against the Muslim-majority State of Bosnia. Any hesitation was dispelled by assurances that the European Community would guarantee not only its own military impotence but that of the UN, NATO, the OIC and the US.

Law and Order: Preconditions for Take-off

by Suraiya Jahan Chandona

disincentive. Even domestic investors are very apprehensive to invest in a volatile atmosphere vitiated by hartal, terrorism, hijacking, murder, doctory and cheating of different brands. To invite any type of investment, domestic or foreign, satisfactory atmosphere is a must. Government should realise that there is no alternative to firm establishment of law and order not only for inviting foreign investment but also for survival of the society.

Unfortunately, the law and order situation is worsening. The October 1993 figure for campus terrorism, murder, dacoity etc is really alarming. It seems there is no non-government organisation in Bangladesh to investigate into these crimes and publish reports. This is sad that our media is also not functioning properly. BTW has by now lost almost all credibility perhaps by trying to serve the masters more than those the masters are supposed to serve. Even a plane mishap at Dhaka airport or an earthquake disaster in India did not get adequate coverage on BTW which remained busy with what they said or did, unmindful of importance. Not all the dailies and periodicals are functioning as the real 'fourth estate' vigorously investigating into acts of terrorism and crimes and

suggesting ways to tackle these situations.

In such a void people are conjecturing about how to help bring social peace. But everybody agrees that campus violence is the most threatening law and order issue. People also allege that because political parties are covertly maintaining armed cadres it is not possible to uproot campus violence without a vigorous, almost revolutionary move. It has also been alleged that groups and counter-groups within big parties are maintaining their own cadres which often spark off internecine clashes. Law and order cannot improve without destroying these roots by a very, very vigorous move.

But where would we get the Hercules to clear this Aegean stable? It is a very difficult task, but, of course, not an impossible one. Political parties and leaders should be persuaded to disband their cadres and deposit the arms, whatever. If peaceful method fails, government should not hesitate even to use its army in clearing the country of illegal arms.

The big hope in this darkness is that our people are generally law-abiding. If the government really wants to en-

sure peace and stability, the people will spontaneously come forward with extended hands of cooperation and assistance. But now the common people are very frustrated. They allege that even the police are not sincere in quickly bringing crime to punishment.

Actually our police force is not less efficient than any others'. Given the correct climate, leadership and incentives including quick punishment and reward, they can quickly bring all crimes to book and the country can be a land of peace. Really the leadership stands a very good chance to perform the gigantic job and win the hearts of the people for all time to come.

It is almost certain that if law and order improves, the economic growth will definitely take a momentum. Our estimation is that mere stabilisation of law and order situation will push the growth to

7/8 per cent. Besides, it will act as a catalyst for inviting domestic and foreign investment. Furthermore, the productivity of our labour being freed from existing 'toutism' will definitely rise. So by all calculations, law and order is the main panacea for Bangladesh, at the moment.

Here it also must be remembered that some legal and judicial reforms are necessary for achieving the desired law and order situation. Laws should be reformed to attain speed in trial. We should not forget that delay means denial. Compared to the developed world, justice moves the slowest here.

Hartal is another big problem with our economy. Our leaders express their anger through hartal-calls which cause street fighting, loss of life, loss of productivity and property — all symptoms of a medieval society. People often ask whether the leaders themselves understand that by dis-

rupting the economy by hartals and causing sufferings they really create frustration among the people about the patriotism and wisdom of leaders. One day is sure to come when people will organise against such disruptive activities. Leaders and political parties should take lessons from the market and work out formulas for expressing anger without hartals.

Recently, another menace has sprung up. Some people have started destroying private and public properties including cars and buses on even very flimsy grounds. So long government has shown passive indifference to such destruction. But these call for drastic action. Unless these rowdiness is properly checked and the criminals are given exemplary punishment, existence of a government in name only would be meaningless. Government exists to protect the country and its citizens, their property and life. If this minimum cannot be ensured it would mean we do not have a government worth the name.

OPINION

Pollution and Environment

Syed Tasleem Hussain

Pollution Free Environment — Political Slogan or a Necessity? The answer to this question is very simple in the global context. The world recently witnessed an incident which clearly proves that even the minimum of concessions is not available when 'environmental hazards' are used as political slogans. There may have been other factors also, responsible for George Bush's fate in the last American elections — but, no one can deny that his ratings drastically dropped when he called his opponents (the Democrats) 'bozones' who were advocating the dangers of the ozone layer.

But, ironically enough, if we were to discuss this global subject spotlighting Bangladesh only, one would be at pains to find similarity with world opinion. Here, the issue forces simplicity to take a walk and allows complexity to set in.

Imagine a metropolitan city having its largest concentration of tanneries amidst a densely populated residential area! Governments have come and gone and many were the slogans that each government would be tackling this issue on a priority basis. The last government even went to the extent of declaring that the entire tanneries complex at Hazaribagh would be shifted to another suitable area. The tanneries are still there where they were. Naturally, because it was an insane proposal in the first place, due to the colossal expenses that would be involved. Having tanneries in the centre is no mean feat and certainly deserves to be projected internationally for recognition like our Bangladesh boy who can do almost anything with a football on his head. The similarity between the two being the impossibility of each situation. The dis-similarity

being that, while the football case can be lauded, applauded and globally recognized as one of genius, the tanneries' environmental pollution case can only be addressed as a cruelty (to use the softest of applicable terms) of murderous proportions to the Hazaribagh adjoining areas' citizenry.

The Directorate of Environmental Pollution Control (DEPC) which incidentally still exists, classified the following categories of industries as polluting the environment, tanneries (176 units); paper and pulp (5 units); sugar mills (16 units); distilleries (3 units); iron and steel mills (57 units); textile industries (298 units); fertilizer industries (92 units); insecticide and pesticide industries (25 units); chemical industries (23 units); jute industries (92 units); cement factories (3 units); rubber and plastic industries (34 units) and pharmaceutical industries (166 units).

It is frightening to note that the above statistics are of 1986! Many more industries in these fields have come up since then, but has the ministry of industry imposed the requirement of waste treatment plants in the new industries they sanctioned? A gazette notification on June 5, 1986 by the Local Govt. Division of Ministry of LGRD clearly requested that the Ministry of Industries should (1) have those industries which pollute environment but do not have protective measures to incorporate such measures in 3 years time; and (2) not to allow new industries categorised as 'pollution prone to environment' industries to be set up without adoption of pollution control measures.

That gazette notification has

met the same fate as many others. Ecological imbalance continues to be created due to discharge of industrial wastes into air and water bodies: Diseased fish and huge wastage of agricultural lands are some of the results besides the cruel impact upon human beings and their surrounding habitats.

Some questions naturally arise, such as:

1. With a democratic government in power does this critical sector still deserve to remain a slogan only?

2. How come this government, which advocates transparency and accountability, is yet not taking measures to ask, rather demand, those industrial financing institutions including the Ministry of Industries to account for allowing pollution potential industries to be set up without proper waste treatment plants incorporated in the project feasibility profiles? With a dynamic new minister in-charge now, of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, we can only keep our fingers crossed and hope that he will do the needful. The contention that the problems are financially grotesque in size can no longer hold a candle as far as public sentiments are concerned. If we can ask for big financing from World Bank and its allied organs for other projects we can also put proper emphasis on this sector.

No doubt the task is onerous but not impossible. This government, democratically elected, must deliver. They have the great advantage that pollution-free environment is now an international concern — all it needs now are proper and, of course, dedicated fulltime hankering after the donors to come forward more positively in this sector in addition to using local funds as far as possible.

To the Editor

Kashmir crisis

Sir, Both India and Pakistan shall commit a grave mistake if they allow a third party to intervene in Kashmir. The landlocked valley of Kashmir has no viability to be an independent entity, as its dependence on mainland for passage to sea can hardly be established unless both India and Pakistan ensure her passage to sea water. The area comprising Jammu and Kashmir could either be demilitarised or could be jointly controlled by both India, Pakistan and the internal security in the hands of Kashmiris. This small buffer state could be a playground of South East Asia and could very well survive on tourist earnings.

It is high time the Subcontinent leadership faced the realities — the sub-human level and the mass poverty of the people. The united effort of the entire region must be devoted to fighting poverty, disease and malnutrition rather than allowing it to become a market for the sale of military hardware.

Al-Haj S M Khalid Chowdhury
Dharamnodi R/A, Dhaka

Sick tea industries

Sir, It was disclosed by Dr Shamsul Huda, Managing Director, Bangladesh Krishi Bank during his last visit in Srimongol that a considerable amount of loan would be provided to support 48 sick tea industries under the Interest Free Block Account for five years. It is expected that the sick tea indus-

tries will avail of the opportunity and make the best possible utilization of the fund to overcome their incurring losses.

Above 50 per cent of our country's total tea production is made by the three British tea companies quite successfully, over many decades. It would have been possibly wise if the management of the sick tea industries would have been given to those tea companies. The money in that way would be better utilized in necessary sectors, properly programmed and monitored, and ultimately made viable in course of time.

The concerned authority may think over the suggestion with due importance.

Mottus Samad Chowdhury,
Phultola Tea Estate, Sylhet

Clinton-Zemin summit

Sir, For the first time, the USA has brought giant China to the world scene after the collapse of the former Soviet Union. China is not a Panama, Iraq or Haiti. Because of its size, population, economy, and defence capability, China cannot be isolated from the world of politics, trade, commerce and armament.

After a hull due to Tenanmen Square incident in 1989, the US President Bill Clinton and the Chinese President Jiang Zemin are now playing ping-pong in Seattle in the name of APEC summit to settle their disputes. We do not know in whose court the diplomatic ball is.

O H Kabir
Dhaka

A protest

Sir, It is very painful to know that Bangladesh soldiers are going to guard Kuwait-Iraq border. I protest it vehemently. We must not forget that during the flood of 1988 in Bangladesh, Iraq not only helped us with various necessary items but also sent helicopters to carry relief materials from one place to another.

Saleha Ahmed
Baridhara, Dhaka