

DOWN TO EARTH

Electricity Bill Payment Complexities

By A S M Nurumabi

It is learnt that the Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (DESA) has lately undertaken a drive to recover arrear bills by disconnecting power lines of defaulters. It is not clear how far the objective of recovering arrears will be realised by this extreme step. In some cases, besides disconnection of lines, court cases will be filed in a situation where disconnection is effected, a penalty charge is realised as per rules on restoration of power. In some cases, there may be delay in getting re-connection causing harassment and suffering to consumers. This may create scope for corruption on the part of some workers of the electricity authority.

In the view of some, the practice of realization of arrears through disconnection may not be a justified step in some cases. There is always some reason for non-payment of bills. It is, therefore, a matter for consideration whether in suitable cases the reason for non-payment should be looked into and appropriate remedial measure taken before deciding on the final step of disconnection.

There is no end to the nature of complaints. At different times, complaints are received from consumers that they do not get bills in time. Sometimes bills are not received for even six to nine months. On account of defects in metres, inflated bills are received. Sometimes even when bills are paid at prescribed banks, such payments are not duly posted in the relevant ledgers of the concerned accounts offices. When complaints of this nature sometimes take time for redress, arrears pile up. Needless to say that consumers are largely to blame for this kind of

lapse. In a national daily recently, an irregularity of this nature was ventilated by a correspondent from Goran area. When a squad from the DESA came to disconnect his power line for default of payment of arrear bills they were shown copies of paid-up bills for the last six or seven years. When DESA accounts office at Malibag was contacted the concerned ledgers showed non-posting of such payments. The correspondent was fortunate that he had retained copies of paid up bills for such a long time.

In this connection it may be mentioned that DESA has requested consumers to retain copies of paid up bills for a period of 12 years. Such a request seems to be unrealistic inasmuch as it is practically impossible by and large. By this it means that in cases of non-retention of copies of paid-up bills, one has to pay 12 years' dues again. What kind of principle or justice is this? It may be possible to retain copies for one or two years. But to ask to retain copies for 12 years is an impossible proposition. The consumer's obligation is to pay the bill and once this has been done, the rest lies with the electricity authority. The consumer cannot be made liable for the lapses, irregularities or corruption of the employees of the electricity department.

It is reported that the provision of waiving interest, penalty and surcharge which was previously allowed in the cases of repayment of dues in three instalments is not allowed this time. What can be the justification for re-introducing interest, penal interest and surcharge this time? Is it possible to make payment of a large amount, where due, at a

time? Many regard this as an act of injustice.

Power Development Board has lately dismissed and sent into retirement 24 officers and 57 employees. These people are among a lot of 283 officers and employees variously punished for failing to reduce systems loss and meet revenue collection targets. In the last financial year, out of 176 supply units, 81 officials and staff of 81 supply units were dismissed. In the remaining 153 supply units, explanations have been asked for from 695 officers and staff for examining whether they call for any penal action.

We may term the above actions as supremely courageous. In the opinion of many, if this kind of pressure by the PDB can be kept up, this may set up an example and every individual officer employee of the government set-up will be mindful of accountability.

The systems loss of the PDB has proved a great headache, sending such loss to dizzy heights of three or four times the normal physical loss. The long-standing practice involved in lining the pockets of PDB men and benefiting the unscrupulous consumers has been pushing the price of power of our poor country to world beating levels. And foreign donors supporting the numerous projects of our nation have been unwilling to fund corruption instead of development.

The penal actions adopted by the ADP lately is a definite indication that the authority, if it has the will and determination, can cut loose the vicious circle involved in the electricity mismanagement.



President Abdur Rahman Biswas (L) exchanging pleasantries with Awami League leader Tofael Ahmed (3rd L) as AL chief Sheikh Hasina looks on at the wedding ceremony of Tofael's daughter in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Strike paralyses Kashmir

JAMMU Jan 27: Shops, offices and schools remained shut in Jammu and adjoining towns Friday in response to a strike called to protest a bomb attack on Jammu-Kashmir's governor, reports AP.

Three bombs exploded in a sports stadium about 60 feet from Governor K V Krishna Rao as he made a speech at the annual Republic Day parade on Thursday in Jammu, the state's winter capital. Two more bombs exploded within five minutes.

The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party called the strike to protest the attack and focus attention on what they called a "complete collapse of the administration."

Rao was unhurt in the explosions, but eight other people, including a bodyguard

were killed. On Friday, the government ordered the Central Bureau of Investigation, India's top federal detective agency, to probe the attack.

Jammu-Kashmir's biggest guerrilla group, the pro-Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen, has assumed responsibility for the assault.

The attack demonstrated the guerrillas' capacity to strike at will even in high security areas. Bharatiya Janata Party's state chief, Chaman Lal Gupta, told reporters.

He demanded that Governor Rao be sacked for his failure to bring peace to the state, where fighting between Indian troops and separatist Muslim guerrillas, since 1989 has killed more than 11,000 people.

Tragic!

FARIDPUR, Jan 27: The courage and instant action of a minor girl saved two lives from fire, but she lost her own, reports UNB.

Shahida, 12, succeeded in rescuing her younger brother and sister from the fire which engulfed their house at village Bagat in Modhukhali thana in the small hours today. The fire was believed to have originated from a 'kupi' lamp, police said.

Waking up from sleep, Shahida found their hut on fire and left it in panic. But remembering her sleeping brother and sister, she rushed back into the burning hut.

The brave girl managed to rescue both with minor burn injuries but the fire engulfed her. Later, Shahida was rushed to the local health complex where she succumbed to her injuries.

Shahida's parents were not at home. They had gone to meet her maternal grand parents at a nearby village.

The Midnight File

US to open political liaison offices with Vietnam

WASHINGTON, Jan 27: The United States announced plans today to finally open political liaison offices with Vietnam on Saturday and to sign two agreements settling property and other claims left over from the Indochina war. On January 28, 1995, the United States will therefore open its liaison office in Hanoi (and) a reciprocal Vietnamese liaison office will open in Washington, DC. State Department spokesman Christine Shelly told reporters, says Reuter.

Saudi troops still massing near border, says Yemen

SANAA, Jan 27: Senior Yemeni officials said today that Saudi troops were still massing near the disputed border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. The officials, who asked not to be named, said that in some areas Saudi troops were being deployed 10 to 15km (6 to 9 miles) from the border, reports Reuter.

Filmdom needs creativity

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ing and literature-based creative films generated in the 1960s, the Prime Minister regretted that there has been a lot of deviation.

Besides exception of a few films, we have been daunted by the attraction of making unhealthy films and copying," she remarked. Referring to the worldwide celebration of the 100 years of films, the Prime Minister mentioned the development of films after 1895. "In its long march of more than 100 years, film has earned reputation as an industry throughout the world," she said.

Reminding the film-makers of the worldwide challenges faced by the films due to the wave of television culture in the 60s, domination of video in the 70s, the Prime Minister warned that the spread of cable television of the present decade has put the industry into a new challenge. Today you have to survive

Recipients

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lam (Trash), best cameraman (colour) — Anwarul Islam Baby (Dinkal), best script writer — Kazi Hayat (Trash), best lyricist — Gazi Mazharul Anwar (Uchit Shikkha), best art director — Bijoy Sen (Andha Biswas), best Singer — Syed Abdul Hadi (Khoma), best singer — Sabina Yeasmin (Radha Krishna), best dance director — Amir Hossain Babu (Beporol), best make-up man — Dipak Kumar Sur (Matir Kasham), best sound recorder — M A Majid (Shankhanil Karagar), best child artist — Baby Sena (Uchit Shikkha), special award in child group — Baby Tania (Uchit Shikkha), best short film — Dhushar Jatra, and special award — late Abdul Jabbar Khan.

The recipients for 1993 are: Best film — Padma Nadir Majhi (producer Habibur Rahman Khan), best script — Kazi Hayat (Chandabaj), best director — A J Mintu (Banglar Badhu), best actor — Raisul Islam Asad (Padma Nadir Majhi), best actress — Gulshan Ara Champa (Padma Nadir Majhi), best side actor — Abul Khair (Padma Nadir Majhi), best khair actress — Anwara (Banglar Badhu), best music director — Azad Rahman (Chandabaj), best picture editor — Mujibur Rahman Dulu (Banglar Badhu), best cameraman (colour) — A R Jahangir (Moushami), best script writer — A J Mintu (Banglar Badhu), best lyricist — Hasan Fakhr (Chandabaj), best art director — Mohiuddin Faruq (Padma Nadir Majhi), best singer — Azad Rahman (Chandabaj), best singer — Faizda Parveen (Andha Prem), best dialogue writer — Selim Al Din (Ekatturer Jishu), best sound recorder — Montajuddin Bhuiya (Abuj Santan), best child artist — Master Anik (Abuj Santan), special award in child group — Popy (Taag), best dance director — Masum Babul (Dola), best make-up man — Mohammad Alauddin (Padma Nadir Majhi) and special award — late Nazir Ahmed.

Pabna mishap

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The bodies were handed over to their relations, officials sources said. Besides, three injured passengers were shifted to the Dhaka Pangu Hospital today. They are Shamu Mia, 40; Mansur, 25, and Abed Khan, 55.

Fire Service sources said the rescue operation was being disrupted due to severe cold and also lack of experienced divers.

The disaster occurred Thursday afternoon when a Bogra-bound passenger bus plunged into the Ichhamoti breaking the-railling of a bridge on Bogra-Nagarbari highway at village Karamja in Sathia thana.

Lankan peace

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deadlock that in the context of the peace process, the LTTE is thinking tactically while the government is thinking in terms of a long term-strategy of peace without an effective armory of tactics to achieve it. There is an obvious lack of congruence between short and long term objectives of the LTTE," says Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, a political affairs lecturer at the Colombo University.

The deadlock in the peace talks has given the opponents of the peace process a new lease of life. They argue that the rebels had never been interested in serious negotiations for a political settlement but used peace talks to militarily strengthen themselves. The problems is the government does not have the capability to launch a massive propaganda campaign to sell the peace option both to the Tamils and the Sinhalese and thereby pressurize the rebels. They are working on an ad-hoc basis," says Vilur Ivan, editor of the weekly political newspaper Ravaya.

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Economy grows

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and a congenial investment climate is yet to be established," the AL leader says. The government's performance in developing infrastructure was also disappointing.

Not a single power plant was set up by the government in the last four years despite the fact that consumption of power has increased remarkably during the time, she said. The ruling party has also failed to take advantage of the situation when there were very little differences in the positions of the major political parties on economic policies despite divergence of views on political matters.

Salman F Rahman, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), says "Bangladesh now possesses all the factors needed to emerge as a regional economic power with good macro-economic fundamentals if we can take the advantage of these factors at the right time."

"The economy is now at the crossroads with a lot of opportunities as well as difficulties. It is up to us how we handle it," the FBCCI chief says. Political instability is the number one problem for the economy at the moment and it has to be improved for economic development, he said.

Bank murder

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for three days yesterday and the other — Parveen (16), a call girl, admitted the incident to police and agreed to be a witness in the incident. Parveen was engaged by the gang to cajole the security guard that night.

AL: BNP playing

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next election. The meeting condemned police action on Awami League leaders and workers during the hartals. The resolution said the government being isolated from the people for its anti-people activities, is now hatching conspiracy to stick to power.

It said the ruling party has chosen the path of atrocities to suppress the current democratic agitation. Even mothers and sisters were not spared of their atrocities, the meeting added.

The resolution said the BNP betrayed with its commitment made to the people before and after the election. There was no security in society as the law and order is deteriorating everyday.

Misery of the commonman has aggravated in the wake of unabated price-hike of the essentials, including rice, pulses and papers. The government has totally failed to control the price-hike.

The resolution said the ruling party is using the administration nakedly for its party interest. The people hoped that the government officials would act neutrally because they are neither the employees of a party, nor an individual,

Jubilant crowd greet the 'tragedy king'

Enthusiastic crowd burst into cheers and enchanting song 'dihme chupake pyar ke tufan main le chale' wafted through the national stadium at Mirpur when the living legend of the sub-continental cinema Dilip Kumar was given a rousing reception here yesterday, reports BSS.

The reception was unique as it was open to public who so far had to remain content with watching him in the media since Dilip's arrival here on a private visit. The great actor attended a series of functions here but all were for the select audience.

Crazy fans waved and danced at the stadium gallery as an usually bashful Dilip Kumar appeared much exuberant yesterday reciprocating to the people warmly, at times in his familiar film style.

In sharp contrast to earlier occasions, the "king of the heroes" was somewhat casually dressed yesterday evidently conscious of the nature of the function which was first exposure for him to the vast number of fans in the capital.

He was taken into a traditional decorated horse-carriage from a specially built red-carpet rostrum in the stadium to enable thousands of fans to

have a glimpse of him from a close proximity.

State Minister for Civil Aviation Major (Retd) Mannan accompanied him in the carriage.

"I am deeply touched by love and affection of you — I pray to Allah for the progress of Bangladesh, an emotional Dilip told the fans in a brief speech in Urdu and broken Bengali but punctuated with wit and humour.

Earlier, State Minister Mannan said the reception was meant to provide people to have sight of the great 'hero' of this part of the world.

Bombs and crackers exploded amidst uninterrupted melody of popular Hindi songs during the reception where speeches were kept at the minimum. Civil Aviation Secretary Nooruddin Al Masood and Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation chairman Abdus Samad Bhuiyan were present. The Parjatan Corporation organised the reception.

Later, men, women and children in thousands clogged the exit of the stadium and nearby roads to have a closer look at the 'tragedy king of Hindi cinema. Delirious fans yelled 'long live Dilip Kumar.'



Dilip Kumar, on a horse-drawn carriage, waves to fans at Mirpur Stadium in the city where he was accorded an open-air reception by the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation yesterday. — Star photo

Britons unhappy with unwritten constitution

LONDON, Jan 27: Britons are unhappy with their country's unwritten constitution, and are heavily in favour of a statutory bill of rights, an opinion poll showed today, reports Reuter.

One poll, conducted by the Mori organisation and published in The Times newspaper, indicated support for a Scottish mini-parliament and showed increasing disquiet over the workings of Britain's parliament.

Seventy-three per cent of the 1,485 people questioned backed a bill of rights against 10 per cent who opposed it. A majority of those questioned also backed a referendum on changing Britain's first-past-the-post voting system to a system of proportional representation, and ending the right of hereditary peers to sit in the unelected Upper House of Lords.

Only 37 per cent said parliament worked well, a sharp drop from the 59 per cent who expressed confidence in their members of parliament in a similar poll four years ago.

The opposition Labour Party has repeatedly accused the ruling Conservatives of sleazy politics in the past year. Several Conservative lawmakers have been accused of sexual and financial improprieties.

House gutted at Jatrabari

By Staff Correspondent
A tin-shed house and all belongings of a widow were gutted in a fire incident in the city's Jatrabari area early yesterday.

The 40-year old widow, Shahera Begum — who was living with three daughters and a son in a piece of land owned by a couple, Aminur Rasul and Rokeya Rasul, behind the Demra Police Station, found her house ablaze around 1:30 am when all were asleep. She has been living in the disputed land as a caretaker.

The five inmates escaped the fire but lost all their belongings.

Israeli troops storm WB college: 24 held

ABU DIS, (West Bank), Jan 27: In a widening crackdown on Islamic militants, Israeli troops scaling ladders broke into a West Bank college dormitory before dawn Friday and arrested two dozen students, college officials said, reports AP.

The army confirmed the raid at the Islamic Institute and said 22 suspected members of the outlawed Muslim groups Islamic Jihad and Hamas were arrested. The institute is a stronghold of Islamic fundamentalism.

Bitter experiences at city malls

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owned by the City Corporation, consumers alleged there is not a single bazar in Dhaka where there is a ladies' room.

At the Kawran Bazar wholesale market, shopkeepers are forced to opt for open-air urination and defecation near the derelict sewage lines or along the nearby rail line.

"This is both appalling and abominable," commented a Bangladeshi woman who lives in London.

There are some 29 'supermarkets' and 22 kutchas bazars in the city. Besides, there are 11 supermarket-kitchen markets and 14 road-side bazars, according to the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

Shopkeepers, however, admitted the inconveniences being caused to the shoppers but said they could do little because they were not the owners of the markets.

The bigger markets either belonged to the DCC or were privately owned, they pointed out.

DCC officials, on the other hand, pointed their fingers at those who own the leasehold of the public toilets at a few city markets.

Talking to The Daily Star, shopowners said that there were some 12,000 small and big shops alone in the new market-Gausia-Elephant Road area. Utilities maintenance of these markets is a 'nightmare', they said, mainly because of the mushroom growth of shops

or local influential goons. The demarcation between the Gausia, Chandni Chawk, Noor Market and Christia markets is virtually invisible.

The roof-tops of these markets are occupied by makeshift factories of innumerable tailoring shops located in these markets while the pavements have been grabbed by the vendors.

Even the corridors of these markets are sold out for setting up little shops or kiosks.

Car owners know that driving in the afternoon can be a real test of patience. An authoritative source said that the little chaukis on the pavements of these areas have been sold at rates ranging between Taka 10,000 and 40,000 each. The Salami on possession price is usually collected by the local police station or their hired henchman.

Nurses clash

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brought out a procession and marched towards Motijheel Ideal School where the attendant nurses sat for an examination around 10 yesterday morning. The procession was stopped by police. The processionists then returned and started holding a meeting in protest against the examinations and positions of the attendant nurses.

The attackers also ransacked the office room of the Nurses Institute.

Seven of the injured nurses were admitted to the DMCH.