

DOWN TO EARTH City's Water Crisis

By ASM Nurunnabi

Dhaka city suffers from serious water shortage. For a city of eight million people, having a demand of about 140 crore litres of water per day, WASA is at present capable of supplying only half the requirement. The present supply is derived from 91 active deep tubewells in Dhaka and Narayanganj region.

In some quarters it is feared that the city may be condemned to prolonged water scarcity as the city's runaway growth may never allow the WASA to come up to the desired level of supply position. There are, however, some others who think that the supply shortfall can be met to a large extent if there was satisfactory answer to the current system loss of 40-45 per cent.

It is felt that the shortfall is nearly equal to the system loss through pipeline leaks, open nozzled hydrants and unauthorised connections. Citing a source of system loss as an example, some observers point out that the street hydrants in the old city areas are the outlet for constant drainage of water as most of do not have their taps. Reportedly a survey found a large number of them without taps for the last 50 years discharging valuable water day and night.

The water supply situation in the city has worsened in the current dry season due to over-exploitation of sub-soil water reserves which continue to decrease alarmingly. To meet the rising demand for water, WASA has taken up some projects such as aug-

menting the capacity of Chadnighat surface water treatment plant by way of balancing, modernisation, and rehabilitation. Besides, 20 more deep tubewells will be sunk against our best judgement, since we all know well that sub-soil water sources have dried out due to their over-exploitation. The experts, however, say that surface water-based plants could help solve the water crisis and reduce the pressure on sub-soil reserves.

In this context, all hope is pinned on the French-aided Syedabad Water Treatment Plant. WASA sources are of the view that water crisis will continue till this plant is completed. It is scheduled to be completed in three phases by 2010 with water supplied from the Sitalakhya river.

On completion of the first phase of the project at a cost of Tk. 708 crore in four years, the plant will be able to supply 50 Imperial Metric Gallons (IMGD) per day through, the existing 1294 kilometres of distribution channels of the WASA. The next phase will also take four years and the plant will then supply another 50 IMGD. When the last phase is completed by 2010, the plant will supply 200 IMGD against the present requirement of 128 IMGD. WASA presently supplies around 70 IMGD.

The Syedabad Water Treatment Plant is estimated to cost Tk. 3000 crore. Misgiving is expressed that since not a single brick has been laid on the proposed site

as yet, there is likelihood of a natural cost escalation over the next sixteen years by which time the project is expected to be completed. Observers feel that the over-long time-frame looks variable if we fail to begin early enough.

Containing the system loss is a much debated issue. It is felt in some quarters that it holds the key to a sizeable easing of the water scarcity if success can be achieved in arresting the system loss through sheer efficiency. Controlling the systemic waste of water in the first place has assumed importance, pending completion of the contemplated projects for additional sources of water.

On account of our failure to timely put a new water treatment plant in place, we have reached a situation in which the Dhaka city which has an abundant supply of surface water around its perimeter should be practically starving of it.

Experts feel that there is no likelihood of any dramatic improvement of the situation as almost the entire water requirement in the city is met by a battery of deep tubewells.

Hence, according to experts and WASA sources, the water crisis in the capital is likely to continue in the near future.

In consideration of the overall water situation, the need is paramount and urgent that we must use water with utmost economy and save the last drops.



WHAT NEXT Harvesting of potatoes at Baligaon in Tongibari thana of Munshiganj. — Star photo

Azeri troops crush coup bid, kill rebel leader

MOSCOW, Mar 17: Azerbaijani government troops crushed a coup attempt by rebel police and killed their leader in a bloody gun-battle today in the Caucasus republic's capital Baku. President Geidar Aliyev said, reports AFP.

Before dawn today, government soldiers stormed the compound where members of the elite Opon unit were holed up since Tuesday.

A fierce fire fight ensued, with exchanges of mortar, grenade and machinegun fire, Russian news agencies said.

The news agency Interfax put the casualty toll at 8 people killed and 40 wounded during the fighting at the police compound, in a residential suburb of Baku, about 8 kilometres (5 miles) from the centre.

It was not clear how many of the casualties were combatants and how many civilians. The shooting damaged buildings around the base and residents fled into hiding.

Quoted by Interfax, Aliyev said the mutinous police had been planning to overthrow the government and that their rebellion was finally put down by government troops late this morning.

The leader of the rebels, Rovshan Javadov, was killed in the fighting along with four government soldiers and an unknown number of civilians and mutineers, Aliyev said.

The president added that the mutineers had been planning to seize the parliament, Interior Ministry, presidency and the national television station later today.

Azerbaijan's Security Minister, Namik Abbasov, claimed that ex-president Ayaz Mutalibov and ex-prime minister Suret Guseinov were linked to the coup attempt and had planned to fly to Baku from exile in Moscow, Interfax said.

Aliyev, a 71-year-old hard-line communist and former member of the Soviet Union's politburo, said that following the abortive coup, "the state of Azerbaijan has strengthened."

Azerbaijan, an oil-rich country bordering the Caspian Sea at the southern end of the Caucasus mountain range, was plunged into isolation today. Its airport was closed and telephone links were cut.

Government forces stormed the headquarters after the police rebels ignored Aliyev's offer of amnesty

Potato

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and purchase of potatoes for even throw away prices. Reports reaching the District Agriculture Office, Munshiganj, say that in the remote areas of the district many farmers have become bewildered at the current situation in this cash crop market.

The farmers in this area depend mainly on potato crop," said Md. Latifat Hossain, agriculture officer of Tongibari thana. "This year the buyers are absent, and the existing storage facilities are inadequate," he said.

Sources in the district agriculture office at Munshiganj said that at the beginning of the season it was forecast that some 2.2 lakh tonnes of potatoes would be produced in approximately 20,000 hectares of land in the district. In fact, 27,755 hectares of land were used this year and it is an unprecedented bumper crop. The production may run into 3.5 lakh tonnes, they said.

When asked if they have taken any measure to improve the marketing system, the sources said that the agriculture department is not concerned with it.

"All we have to do is to give advice to the farmers on production and the department has nothing to do with marketing or storing," one official said.

According to the district agriculture office, there are 50 cold storages in the district having a total capacity of storing only 55,000 tonnes.

The farmers' desperation can be witnessed on the main roads from Munshiganj towards the dry Padma-Taltala canal in the district, locally known as the 'Suez Canal' for its strategic situation. Thousands of sacks of potatoes lie along the roads and just on approach farmers from the nearby fields rush in expecting that buyers have come.

Munshiganj district is the highest potato producing area in the country. The agriculture office sources at Tongibari said the actual problem lie in the marketing system of the crop. The authorities only encourage production but as soon as the harvest is over, the farmers are left out isolated.

"The change has to come from the national level," said an officer at the Tongibari Agriculture Office.

College student beaten to death

SYLHET, Mar 17: A college student was beaten to death by the owner and employees of a furniture shop in Sylhet town yesterday. The deceased, Harun-or-Rashid, 18, a student of the Sylhet Government Degree College asked for a screw driver from the workshop, but he was refused. An exchange of hot words started and at one stage, they beat him up. He succumbed to his injuries at the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College hospital yesterday afternoon. A case was registered, but no arrest was made.

Kremlin running out of money to fund Chechen war

MOSCOW, Mar 17: Defence Minister Pavel Grachev warned today that the Kremlin was running out of money to finance the war in Chechnya but added that "military methods" to settle the war were not exhausted, reports AFP.

Speaking in an interview with the news agency Interfax, he said: "Unfortunately the government's pocket is empty although the executive branch is trying to raise money to finance our efforts."

Grachev, addressing journalists at the Russian military base of Mozdok near Chechnya,

The Midnight File

Afghan troops capture 3 Taliban positions

ISLAMABAD, Mar 17: Afghan government forces ousted the Taliban student militia from several strategic positions around Kabul and killed more than 100 of them, official Kabul radio said today. The operations took place on Thursday night and today according to the broadcast which was monitored in Islamabad, it said government forces captured three positions from Taliban south of Kabul today, killing 41 of its fighters whose bodies were lying on the frontline, reports Reuter.

Blast kills 7 in Muzaffarabad

ISLAMABAD, Mar 17: Seven people were killed and one seriously wounded when a bomb exploded at the office of a Kashmiri militant organisation in Pakistan-administrated Kashmir today, a report said. The official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) said that the explosion was occurred in the office of Hizab-ul-Morimeen, a Kashmiri Shiite organisation in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Kashmir, reports AFP.

Kashmiris begin march toward Charisharief

SRINAGAR (India), Mar 17: Kashmiri Muslim leaders began a march to an Islamic shrine town from here today, carrying medicines and food for people they claim are besieged by Indian troops, police and witnesses said, reports AFP.

Top leaders of the All Party Freedom Conference, encompassing 27 Muslim political and militant groups, led 30 vehicles loaded with 'Essential commodities' for the 37-kilometres journey to Charisharief town, they said.

"If the government does not lift the siege and allow people to live normally, we will be forced to take drastic steps," Kashmiri leader Shabir Shah said, before starting the march.

"Our journey might be followed by mass protests if the troops do not withdraw," added Abdul Ghani Lone, a senior politician.

State officials, however, say the northern town, which houses a holy mausoleum, has not been cordoned off despite the deployment of some 5,000 troops around its fringes to flush out Muslim militants holed up inside the shrine.

The rebels deny occupying the 18th-century shrine and say they frequent it only for daily prayers.

Meanwhile, conference chairman and Kashmir's head Muslim cleric, Umer Farooq urged worshippers offering weekly prayers in the state's largest mosque here today to step up protests if the army siege was not lifted, witnesses said.

Similar messages of support were broadcast over loudspeakers in other city mosques

PM in UK

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vestment the present government is presently offering. The government, she said, will extend them all out cooperation to help them invest in Bangladesh. She asked them to invest their hard earned money for the establishment of standard private schools, colleges and hospitals in the private sectors.

The Bangladeshis, Begum Zia said, could also go for joint ventures with the foreign investors.

Giving a brief resume of the country's socio-economic development activities, the Prime Minister said present Bangladesh is now rid of the stigma of bottomless basket, a country of famine and a country solely dependent on foreign assistance.

"Bangladesh has to go ahead keeping pace with the other countries of the world, she said.

Apprising the Bangladeshis of the contributions made by her four-year long government in the development of the country, the Prime Minister said, you could easily see how the BNP government is carrying out development programmes as per its pre-election pledges from the country's own resources.

The Prime Minister appreciated the Bangladeshis caterers for their good services here. She also referred to the creation of Sylhet division, expansion of Sylhet airport and stopping of harassment of the country-bound passengers in the airports.

President of Bangladesh Caterers' Association M A Rahim and president of Greater Sylhet Development Council Dr Hasanat Hossain addressed the receptions, welcoming Begum Zia here.

Deportees

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declared one lakh foreigners, including 20,000 Bangladeshis as illegal. The rest of the Bangladeshis deportees will be sent back in phases, officials said.

When ship reached the port Jetty, the deportees on board demonstrated and chanted slogans, demanding trial of the captain for, what they said, ill treatment meted out to them during the voyage.

Beijing's choice

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that Jiang Chunyun was an unknown to them. President Jiang reportedly lobbied strongly for his Shanghai colleague, Wu, 53. As a result, he had a better showing: 2,366 in favour, 210 against, 161 abstaining and 15 not voting.

Both men face enormous challenges when they take up their new duties.

One-third of China's 100,000 state-owned enterprises were losing money at the end of last year, according to government statistics. The drain on state coffers has contributed to more than 20 per cent inflation.

In agriculture, development is rapidly using up farmland and farmers have tended to turn away from staples like grain and cotton and look for other ways of making more money. Rising food costs have been a major factor in inflation.



Chinese President Jiang Zemin drops his yellow ballot sheet into the voting box to cast his ballot in the election of two vice-premiers at the plenary session of the Eighth National People's Congress yesterday in Beijing. — AFP photo

Azam asks govt to quit for fresh polls

FARIDPUR, Mar 17: Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Golam Azam today renewed the demand for immediate resignation of the government to pave the way for 'fresh' elections under a caretaker administration, reports UNB.

"During its four-year in power, the present government has failed to prove its efficiency in running the country," he told a public meeting at Faridpur High School ground in the afternoon.

The Jamaat chief said this is the first time after 1970 that he is addressing a meeting in Faridpur.

Criticising the BNP government for clinging to power, he said: "Quit the obstinacy that you have to remain in power during the election."

Azam also criticised the government for its 'failure to check the abnormal price-hike of rice, fertilizer and paper' and expressed deep concern about the deteriorating law and order situation in the country.

CPA body

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volume of traffic and containerised cargo at the port has prompted the authorities to plan for expansion of its infrastructure with modern equipment and facilities to match other Asian ports, official sources said.

Though the installed handling capacity of the port stands at 6 million metric tons, its traffic in the '93-94 fiscal rose to 7.9 million MT, up from 7.6 million MT in '92-93.

Containers handled in '93-94 recorded at 175,000 TEUs, and increase of 25,000 TEUs over the previous year.

Bangabandhu's birthday

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lent while the whole nation is celebrating the birthday of the great national leader," she said.

Referring to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's recent visit to the grave of Bangabandhu, the AL chief said, "It is not clear why or for what purpose the PM visited Bangabandhu's mazar since she (the PM) never recognised the contributions of the great leader."

Turning to the Opposition agitation she said Opposition MPs were compelled to resign and take to the streets since they were not allowed to speak in Parliament on national issues. She also criticised the government for 'failing to arrest the price spiral of essentials including rice and fertilizer and called for unseating the "vote-baiter and corrupt" BNP government.

Held at the GT High School ground in the afternoon, the meeting was also addressed by AL leaders Zillur Rahman, Sajeda Choudhury, Abdur Razak, Amir Hossain Anu, Salahuddin Yusuf, Mozaffar Hossain Paltu, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Charge d'Affaires of the Russian Embassy in Dhaka Sergei Veleikin, Prof. Kabir Choudhury, Prof. Mazharul Islam, Justice KM Sobhan, Journalists Habibur Rahman Milon, Hassan Shahrier, Shafigur-Rahman and Altaf Mahmud, poet Mahadev Saha, writer Rashid Haider and others.

People from different areas of Tungipara and other parts of the country thronged the venue to participate in Mujib's birth celebration programmes.

In the capital, the Awami League and its front organisations, the Bangabandhu

Parishad and many other socio-cultural organisations laid wreaths at the portrait of Sheikh Mujib at the Bangabandhu Bhaban in the morning.

AL leaders, including Abdus Samad Azad, Dr Alauddin, To-fael Ahmed, Fazlul Haq, Prof. Abu Sayeed, Rahmat Ali, Shudhangshu Shekhar Halder, Abdul Momin Talukder, SAMS Kibria, Barrister Shawkat Ali and Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya were present during the laying of wreaths in Dhaka.

Mayor Mohammad Hanif, who is also president of the city unit of AL, also placed a wreath.

The day's programme included hoisting national and party flags atop the party central office, discussions and mid-lad mahfils.

Party sources said, similar programmes were taken throughout the country by local units of the AL.

The Bangabandhu Parishad organised a painting exhibition at the Bangabandhu Bhaban premises and a gathering of children and juveniles in the afternoon.

Hundreds of people thronged the Bangabandhu Bhaban yesterday and visited the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Memorial Museum which remained open for children.

Sheikh Rehana, the youngest daughter of Sheikh Mujib, was present at the museum throughout the day.

The organisations, which placed wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu in the city, included Jatiya Sramik League, Awami Jubo League, Mahila Awami League, Sechha Sebak League, Jagannath Hall Students Union, Sadhana Sangsad, Sonar Bangla Jubo Parishad, Joy Bangla Sangskritik Oikya Jote, Bangabandhu Samaj Kalyan Parishad, Bangabandhu Pathagar, Auto-Rickshaw Sramik League, Muktiyoddha Sanghati Parishad, Bangabandhu Prakrashaal Parishad, Bangabandhu Chikitsak Parishad, Awami Garments Sramik League and Amra Mujib Sena.

Perry assures Gulf states of security

WASHINGTON, Mar 17:

Defense Secretary William Perry is traveling to the Persian Gulf this weekend, looking to bolster US firepower in the region and assure friendly nations that America is ready to help in the face of potential threats from Iraq or Iran, reports AP.

Iraq has rebuilt much of its military despite its crushing defeat in the Gulf War and the four-year-old United Nations sanctions. Iran has recently deployed anti-aircraft missiles at a strategic point near the southern entry to the Gulf.

Perry is slated to visit Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar on his six-day tour and will meet with leaders of each nation, including Saudi Arabia's King Fahd and Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Jabir al-Ahmed al-Sabah.

A senior Pentagon official, speaking on conditions of anonymity, said Perry will discuss positioning additional stocks of US military equipment in the region and also meet with some of the 20,000 US troops and sailors, who are deployed there.

Ctg Urea Factory

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water exceeds 25 parts per million (ppm), it cannot be used for production of urea because the plant would be seriously affected. Usually in this season of the year, the salinity level rises due to poor flow of water.

Unlike previous corresponding seasons, this year the salinity level of the Karnaphuli river near Kalurghat rises to nearly 4000 ppm in high tide and 1000 ppm during ebb tide, a factory source pointed out adding, "by processing, we can handle water having 100 ppm salinity level. But we can never handle salinity level exceeding 100 ppm."

"We usually pump water from the Karnaphuli during ebb tide. When the ebb tide is in full force, the salinity level decreases proportionately. Thus, we pump water for eight to ten hours to feed the urea plant," the source said, explaining the salinity problem.

Presently, we can pump the water for not more than two hours. This water is not enough to run the plant steadily, but we are reserving it."