The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Thursday, March 30, 1995

WB's Fresh Pointer

There is no sign that the World Bank will soften its attitude towards our power sector anytime soon. Much as the sector gets desperate for outside funding after some years of starvation on this score - hurting it badly - the WB has reiterated again that unless the system loss were curbed to their satisfaction, money won't flow in for our power sector. Not all the recipes the World Bank puts across to us are good for the country, but here is something on which it deserves to be heard.

It all started brewing three years ago with the system loss in the power sector running as high 40 per cent. The WB stopped any lending at that point in time and warned that unless this gets improved considerably, the bank will withhold loans. The Bangladesh Government however complied with the suggestion of creating the Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (DESA). This brought no notable improvement either in power generation or supply. The system loss recorded only a marginal fall. Not enough to tell the WB to change its attitude. The problem lies within the PDB. As everyone knows, the technical system loss should be within the range of 20 to 25 per cent at the maximum. The rest of the unaccounted for percentage is attributed to theft and all kinds of manipulation.

With time the PDB's problems have only mounted. Its aging power generators are increasingly running the risk of massive break-downs. Already we have experienced a few of them. Patch-works for such generators can be highly dangerous and are no long-term solution to the problem. This can also account for more than the normal rate of system loss. But all this is peanut compared to the mishandling and manipulation by the PDB employees themselves. Without their active collusion it is simply impossible for the public to steal electricity. Then the meter readers are a class by themselves who bring the whole edifice of the PDB to disrepute without any qualm whatsoever. Much of the unaccounted for electricity or miscalculation of its bills owes to their awful ingenuity.

The fact that the rural electrification has virtually no system loss is a strong case in favour of getting the PDB rid of this malaise. It is the vested interest groups who are scuttling any-serious effort to streamline this utility service. An unholy alliance is not only forcing the PDB to serve below capacity but also dangerously slowing down the pace of our development.

Death in the Southern **Districts**

In greater Barisal, following a vicious outbreak of diarrhoeal epidemic, well over 2000 people have in a week been attacked, 37 of them already dead. And the scourge is spreading like fire. This has been attributed directly to the groundwater fall. Pirojpur is so far the worst affected but people in Barguna, Bhola, Patuakhali and Jhalakathi are also being mauled badly enough. This gastro-

intestinal affliction resulting in radical dehydration of the body is in the news round the year. The nominal changeover from a fearsome - panicky to be precise - cholera to diarrhoea has proved a positive soother in that hardly anyone is discomfitted by the diarrhoeal toll that is reported in the press with nagging persistence. But has not the soothing at the same time lowered public awareness and gravely compromised the sense of concern that cholera used to invoke in all of us?

And haven't these names of the new districts in Barisal been for years on end a happy hunting ground of cholera or diarrhoea or whatever you will? This perhaps has something to do with the increasing encroachment of safine sea water. Coupled with the dropping groundwater level the phenomenon pushes society into a carnage mounted by waterborne diseases.

Tubewells have always been the best bet against this fatal epidemic, why should tubewells be failing specially in this diarrhoea-prone zone? Or in spite of the great UNICEF good turn to Bangladesh with regard to covering Bangladesh with tubewells - has this zone been less than well-covered? Or as so often happens, are most of these tubewells out of commission?

Potable water is necessity number one for sustaining our big population in health. Tubewells can ensure that only if they are maintained properly with due monitoring and supervision — all of which are not strong points with Bangladesh.

Sweet Oscar

For Tom Hanks it has been a success story all the way sweetly told. Indeed, immediately after his appearance in the world's most famous stardom, the Hollywood, he has taken it by storm. So it is not surprising that he would be the lucky man to collect his second successive award for best actor. This handsome and powerful actor has equalled the feat of legendary Spencer Tracy who made it in 1937 and 1938. With this achievement Hanks is sure to be placed in the Hollywood's hall of fame.

Now 38, Hanks seems to have a long way to go. The question is how will the future rate him as an actor if he collects more laurels. Winning Oscars back-to-back is a recognition of a person's acting talent that is too consistent to be ignored. And then imagine the tough contests one faces these days. Some of the popularity of a film or an actor or actress may be media-blown up, but unless one can sustain the popular demand, there is no chance for one to hit the Oscars twice in a row On that count Tom Hanks appears to have accomplished a superb feat, thanks also to a stroke of luck other than his genius.

"Forrest Gump," the film in which he acted, collected six Oscars out of 13 categories it received nominations for. Jessica Lange who has been a long time in the profession has been rewarded with the best actress award. Unlike last year's competition, where Clint East Wood clinched Oscars for depicting violence, this time it was tougher and the theme that dominated was human psyche dipped, for Forrest Gump's case, in social satire. In this film Hanks with some twists of fate meets three presidents and becomes a millionaire. Hanks is doubly lucky as he is in his film. We on our part feel assured that the Oscar is living upto our expectation.

Flood Action Plan and Public Participation

What is required is a major scheme to resuscitate the whole system by dredging, digging and crea-ting additional drainage capa-cities and revive an ancient system, capable of disposing of huge quantities of water from the world's highest rainfall areas into the Bay of Bengal.

flows of water and forcing rivers to maintain their courses for all times to come.

URING 1960s, a cam-

paign was launched to

popularise maize cul-

tivation in the then East Pa-

kistan (Bangladesh). It was a

fairly intensive campaign and

the Provincial Governor, in

particular, wished to see that

everywhere in the dry season

people, in right earnest, took

up cultivation of maize. When

he went on a visit to a particu-

lar district, the clever Deputy

(district) Commissioner got

the entire big field in front of

the Circuit House ploughed in

by tractors, fire brigade's

trucks irrigated the lands and

then overnight, the fields were

full of young maize plants. It

was already quite late in the

season and the Governor asked

why the plants were so small

The DC was far too clever and

immediately replied that the

land was indeed very fertile

that neither FAP nor public

participation in it meet this

fate. Of course, FAP is a seri

ous business but would tend to

become a joke, if experts feel

wish that the people should

not only living with the floods

for at least a thousand (if not

many more) years, our fertile

lands have been built by the

silt brought in by the flood ev-

ery year. Without floods, there

would not have been any

Bangladesh so far. In fact, be-

cause of the flood action plan.

with its miles of embankments

and levees, the experts are

asking people to unlearn the

thousand-year-old wisdom and

tradition to live in crisis as

well as in harmony with the

well adjusted to rising levels of

water in the months of rains

when rivers overflow their

banks. Now FAP intends to

stop all that by blocking the

of the United Nations

resolutions, in the form of

their appetite for fighting!

The only problem with this

rationale is that there are

other aggrieved parties to the

conflicts, namely the Croats

and the Muslims, who refuse

to follow the contact group in

groveling to the Serbs. They

have suffered far too much at

the hands of the Serbs to sim-

The so called "contact

group" has no common point

ply give up now.

S reports of more and

more Serbian violations

In Bangladesh, our lives are

floods.

As I wrote before, we are

that non-experts like us would

learn to live with the floods.

I fervently hope and pray

and it was the second crop.

When FAP is fully implemented, we will not be living with the floods any longer. Is it feasible - living without the floods? First, the soil would be denied the essential nutrients every year and as a result. productivity of land would go down and the process of diminishing returns from lands would set in. One crisis would lead to another. The second question is the levees and embankments failed to stop the floods in the Netherlands last year and in the Mississippi river valley the year before. Now the question is if those highly developed countries. after at least a century of efforts worth billions of dollars, failed to get rid of floods, how a poor country like Bangladesh can deal with yet more mighty rivers? Will it not be better to make our own peace with nature, same as our forefathers did, without the FAP as presently conceived; and, as we did for 1000 years, continue to live with the floods?

Changed Situation

However, things have changed from the days of our forefathers. The relentless process of siltation have considerably lowered the depths of rivers. canals and lakes. The total carrying capacity of the vast waterways has significantly gorte down. What is therefore required is a major scheme to resuscitate the whole system by dredging, digging and creating additional drainage capacities and revive an ancient system, capable of disposing of huge quantities of water from the world's highest rainfall areas into the Bay of Bengal. This in itself will be a gigantic task, to be undertaken on a continuing basis, year after year and for decades to come. In fact, I doubt if the tasks, as envisaged, could ever be completed.

The dredging and digging would automatically give rise to mountains of earth from the chocked-up, silted waterways. These should be skilfully uti-

cession - sufficient to outlast the next flood, if is comes at all. The vastly improved drainage, as suggested, would ensure that immediately with the onset of monsoon, early floods would not set in due to drainage congestions. At the same time, accumulated water would be drained out at the earliest, thus avoiding floods late in the season. Thus between October and June. a period of nine months, two crops are assured from every decimal of arable land; while,

extended and protected

WINDOW ON ASIA Shahed Latif

lized, not only to raise the levels of villages well above the flood levels, but enlarge the flood-free village homestead land areas to be used for yearround intensive growing of vegetable, fruit and animal lodder. Then let the floods come, the villages will survive much better as fresh water islands, with enough to tide over

the lean months. The proponents of the FAP would consider my suggestions inhuman; although we have been living with the floods in fresh-water islands for at least ten centuries. It is possible since floods do not last for more than three months and then the fertile, silt-laden soil can produce two crops in suc-

homestead lands would sustain a well nourished rural life in spite of floods.

Floods do not bring in only havoc. Last year, we had drought - the opposite of flood - and we all were and still are suffering because of the lack of flood and water Food shortages are everywhere and let us pray for plenty of rains and flood, so that plantings of aus can be early and we can make up for the existing shortfalls in production.

Needed: Drainage Action Plan

Not flood action but drainage action plan is what we need. It is a matter of strategy based on objective

realisation of hard practical realities of our deltaic land, its rivers and the perennial floods thereof. And here the role of public participation will indeed be critical. Under the FAP, huge demand on land for constructing embankments would drive the people out of land and therefore any measure of wilful public participation in the so-called action plan will be difficult, if not impossible, to secure. Instead, let us go for the drainage-based strategy for water and land resources development. People 9 participation will then be automatically induced, as a result of which cost of development would tend to be localised. It would then be a demanddriven endeavour which could be enlarged into a national movement for the beginning of an agrarian reformation which has remained postponed since the days of the Permanent Settlements - two hundred

years ago. But what I have proposed refers to a different culture as well as value structure, unknown to the bureaucratic inftiatives of official schemes implemented through the established competitive bidding system. First, drainage based strategy of living with the floods is a people-centred approach, directly for those who live in villages and in communities of few hundred families and not within the four walls of the WAPDA building at Motijheel Commercial Area Therefore, the schemes must originate from within the con-

erally, if need be. Yet, this is

the one embargo that the Rus-

sians, the British and the

French are united in not lift-

ing. All fictitious reasons are

forwarded as excuses: this will

result in more killings (yes.

but not one-sided killings).

will endanger the peacekeep-

ing forces (they already are

Serb hostages), and will force

Britain and France to withdraw

their forces (the Bosnians will

welcome it because Britain and

fines of those small, often isolated rural communities. Literally, thousands of those microschemes will make up the action plan. Their implementation would automatically depend on the team work and group actions of the same rural communities. The role of the engineers will become all the more crucial since they have to ensure the proper design and standard of the works being carried out at literally thousands of locations of those micro projects for land and water resources development. It is not an idealistic enter-

prise. As early as 1960s, a beginning was made through the rural works programme which was later on vitiated by political considerations. Making money from the mud turned out to be the main business: while we continued to waste the enormous potentials of our land and water resources.

However, the potentials still remain intact. Let us stage a revival of the local government, institute a system of periodic elections so that the dedicated honest people come to the forefront to serve rural communities. After the essential institutional development. which must not take a long time, let the Water Development Board (WDB) go to the local bodies. The role of WDB is absolutely critical. Its central design office at Dhaka will be the nerve centre of innovation and design; while, bulk of the engineering staff should be outposted to various local government institutions, particularly to district first and then to thana parishads. The engineers will become the technical guardians - the technology father-figures - of the local bodies and start off with the 65,000 schemes involving each and every village of the country; since at every village, we have the land and the water

Do Not Lift Sanctions on Serbia

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton, USA

helicopter shipment of arms across the border to the Bosnian Serbs, are confirmed, the the Serbs. The British and the five-power contact group is French would rather die than once again bent on rewarding see a viable Muslim-majority the renegade regime, this time state in the heart of Europe. Is by removing all UN sanctions justice and decency possible against them. The logic seems from a group comprising of to be that as long as the Belsuch moral lightweights? grade Serbs get all they want, sooner or later they will lose Starting with the much

vaunted "Vance-Owen peace plan" to the debacle at Bihac. the contact group has always retreated under Serbian intransigence. They have shamelessly gone back on their words of honour. They have never demanded Serbian compliance. Lately, they have taken to rewarding Serbia. the primary instigator of the conflict and the backers of the Bosnian and Croatian Serbs. The lifting

The one embargo that the contact group refuses to consider lifting is the one that should not have been imposed in the first place: the one that hinders the Bosnians from defending themselves.

The contact group now wishes to lift all the remaining sanctions on Serbia only if they promise to recognize the borders of Bosnia and Croatia. As though the Belgrade Serbs have earned the contact group's trust by breaking the previous agreement!

The September agreement stipulated that if Serbia broke their promise, the embargo will be quickly reimposed. It has not. If Serbia breaks its new promise, and it will, be that will be that Serbia, free of

all UN sanctions, will be able to wage war on Bosnia and Croatia with renewed vigour. while Bosnia and Croatia will languish under the UN mandated arms embargo. The duplicitous members of

the contact group will then be able to tell the Bosnians and the Croats that they have no choice but to make peace at the Serbs' terms! America has no business associating with such devious partners.

hinders the Bosnians from de-

pendent on water from this

river will be badly affected. No

world countries will gladly supply replacements). Russia is beginning to find out in Chechnya that suppressfending themselves. The one Bob Dole and the Senate is insisting that the US lift unilat-

ing the legitimate aspirations of a people comes with a heavy price tag. Britain and France should also remember that denying the very secular Bosnians means of self-defense solely because of their religion, may mean that down the road they may have to encounter Muslims of a very different hue, such as the ones that in-

waiting to be developed.

France will run out of all ex-

cuses for inaction, and third

DR FAKHRUDDIN AHMED is a Rhodes Scholar from Bangladesh, presently living in Princeton Junction, New Jer-

Bureaucratic Mystique in South Asia of contact. America, and to The one embargo that the some extent Germany, are the of the partial embargo on Sersure that Russia, Britain and contact group refuses to cononly honest brokers. The Rusbia last September was purby A K M Jalaluddin France will use their veto, if sider lifting is the one that sians make no bones about portedly for the sealing of the necessary, not to reimpose the should not have been imposed their complete support for the border with Bosnia. The borsauctions. The net result of in the first place: the one that cause of their Slav brothers, der remains as porous as ever

ACR-I A Love Letter from Governmeni

ACR (Annual Confidential Report) is an essential element in our government's system of personnel management. Drawing on his 28 years of public service, the author discusses, in the five-article series, various aspects of ACR management in South Asia with its hilarity and seriousness. All the anecdotes narrated in this series are based on facts, quoted from memory. The identity of the Bangladeshis who somehow attract unfavourable references have been withheld, "but without any prejudices to the authenticity of the subject/event". explains Jalaluddin.

HE year was 1942. The Second World War was just about its mid-career and the Japanese bombs were raining death and destruction on the Burmese front. The British lion had to be content with 'successful retreats', that were executed with monotonous regularity.

In the rarefied atmosphere of the Writers' Building, Calcutta, hawks and doves were equally disturbed: what would they do with the huge number of vacancies that were arising in various areas of government? The British Raj was built on a tight system of efficiency and merit; the steel frame presided over the whole system occupying pivotal and supervisory positions at every level. Recruitment to the civil services had to be virtually suspended to make room for emergency war recruitments. The big problem was that there were no competent persons available to man certain sensitive positions. According to the perception of the Executive Council of His Excellency the Governor, the threat to Indian security was as dire for shortage of efficient manpower as the Japanese scheme to set up the "East Asian Co-prosper ity Sphere

There was a number of positions lying vacant in the police department, whose resources were stretched to the limit because of the war. After a great deal of deliberation in the salty heat of Calcutta (the annual journey to the cool heights of Darjeeling during the summer had to be suspended as a cost-cutting measure), the Governor decided that the positions of police Su perintendents and Additional

filled up right away, regardless of the competence of the native officers; simply because his noble Lordship observed something was better than nothing. Accordingly. Mr XYZ was promoted to the rank of Additional Superintendent of

. But there was a condition to be met. The fact (concessional promotion) would be carefully preserved in the officers' dossier (i.e. file of Annual Confidential Reports). So a letter (nick-named "love letter" in the bureaucratic circles) was sent to the officer by the Deputy Secretary (S.A.) branch of the Home Department of the Bengal govern-

The letter was somewhat like

"My dear XYZ. ISDPO CONTAINA

You have been recently promoted to the position of Additional SP : Burdwan Government would like you to know that it was not because of your merit that this promotion was given but because of an acute shortage of competent officers that this promotion had to be effected. Government hopes that you will be mindful of this fact and prove equal to the task given you'

Records do not show how

Mr XYZ reacted to the letter but soon the British rule ended in the subcontinent and a different set of norms and ethos overtook the new government of East Bengal. The love letter had not altogether lost its relevance but was not counted as a big minus for Mt XYZ. He did well in service and prospered both with Pakistan and Hangla desh regimes

Superintendents should be The writer, formerly a journalist and a Dhaka University teacher, is now an Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Industries.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

US State Deptt Report

Sir, Every newspaper plays a crucial role in protecting human rights by disseminating information and raising awareness about human rights violations.

Last month, your paper gave front page coverage to the US State Department's Report on Human Rights Practices in Bangladesh. This was a laudable attempt to expose grave human rights violations in our country during the past year.

The State Department's report dealt at length with the issue of the right to freedom of expression, and categorically identified as a violation of this fundamental human right the pending criminal case against Dr Taslima Nasreen, charging her under Section 295A of the Penal Code with having "caused hurt to religious sen-

timent". It is ironic therefore to note that this particular case finds no mention whatsoever in the summary of the State Dept's report. It is unfortunate to note that journalists, whose life and livelihood is dependent on their free exercise of the selfsame right to freedom of speech, are often so quick to deny this right to others.

Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka

BNSB Hospital

Sir, In today's climate of a massive flight of rich patients for expensive treatment abroad, I'd like to share with your readers my experience of a hospital in this country which compares favourably with any centres of excellence abroad.

I am talking about the Bangladesh National Society for the Blind (BNSB) Hospital at Pahartali, Chittagong. I had the fortune recently to have an intraocular lens inserted in my left eye after the removal of a cataract at this hospital. As many of your readers may know, this is a relatively new and sophisticated operation in this country. The surgeons at the BNSB Hospital have had special training abroad in this particular operation and are equipped with the latest instruments to carry out their extremely skilled work.

Added to this the whole climate of the hospital (the cleanliness, the efficient and caring nursing staff, the dedicated, gentle and ethical doctors) was such that my short stay there was unlike that in any other hospital or clinic in Bangladesh. The total bill for this unique service came to Taka 12,500 and I did not have to part with a single paisa more as bakhsheesh to anyone. If I had flown abroad for the same operation I would have wasted a further Taka 1,50,000. I feel that since this hospital is located in Chittagong it does not get as much publicity as it deserves and the excellent doctors here are not being recognised for the tremendous service they are pro-

hope that other health institutions in the country learn from the BNSB Hospital and improve their services to such an extent that our citizens no longer drain the country dry of foreign exchange for treatment abroad.

Dr S M Amanullah Mahbub Hills, Askerdigi, Chittagong

Drug tests in schools and colleges

Sir, Recent incidents and reports of experts reveal that the number of teenagers experimenting with drugs has trebled in the past few years.

One report in UK states that at least one third of the boys and 28 per cent of the girls have taken illicit drugs by the age of 15. The situation in Bangladesh is perhaps no way brighter. But we have no means to survey or keep a check on the use of drugs among our teens.

Such use of drugs and their availability in students' circle have prompted large number of private schools in UK and other western countries to use urine tests for suspected drug takers. Some boarding schools are planning to have random sampling for ensuring against such habits. Home drug testing kits now readily available in the markets are being used by parents without the apparent

knowledge of their wards. We believe drug testing will not only be a deterrent, but it would also be a way of identifying pupils with drug problem for effective counselling Cannabis is the most common drug taken by school students in the west. Then comes the use of amphetamines etc. Locally, in addition to the imported/smuggled ones, stuff like ganza are rather common with our young people. Recently, it was reported that Indian stuff like TD Jessic injections are being used by

Finally, coarse drugs found at cheap rates are reportedly being smuggled in by some unscrupulous traders at random for easy money, and our young generation rather hardly think seriously about them. So we need to be very careful toward them and if required the home-testing equipment should be imported by the educational institutions or department for keeping a general check on our young genera-

Col Mirza Shafi (Rtd) Banani, Dhaka

many in our country.

Closure of the Dhaleswari river

Sir. Ground work for the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge (JMB) is going on in full swing. The river Dhaleswari has been closed down and the areas downstream, which are dewater from the river will be replenishing the Dhaleswari floodplains nor will any fish and other aquatic animals migrate. The ecology of the concerned area will be affected and will aggravate environmental damage to the ecosystem Construction of spillways have been proposed downstream of the bridge to palliate the affected areas. The Dhaleswari. an active and live river, has been closed without the construction of spillways. I believe. no one will accept such an act of colossal abuse to the nature, and the local people whose life line is the Dhaleswari river it-

Work on the construction of alternate spillways are not underway which means that coordination among the various donor and implementing agencies are not in place. The closure of the Dhaleswari river is known to the relevant persons/authorities for quite some years. Before the initiation of the actual bridge work these spillways should have been completed. As citizen of the country, every one has the right to ask why the proposed mitigation measures were not implemented. Those responsible should be brought to book and punitive measure taken against them. The environmental consequences in the long run will be a curse for the nation rather than a 'blessing in disguise' - as predicted by some environmental consultants involved in JMB.

The World Bank is coordinating both the JMB and Flood Action Plan (FAP). The closure of the Dhaleswari without the spillways will also affect FAP-20. In other words, the money and time spent for the Compartmentalization Pilot Project/FAP-20 is just a wastage. Would the World Bank and the relevant government agencies coordinate these activities more wisely and with more responsibility and see that what is proposed is actually implemented in time?

S M A Rashid Nature Conservation Movement (NACOM) Sobhanbagh, Dhaka-1209