

Why Nuclear Power?

A decision to revive the Rooppur project in Ishurdi has recently been taken, according to a report. This is for the fifth time in the last 34 years that such a decision to go ahead with the proposed nuclear power plant has been arrived at.

We do not know what has prompted the present government to give a fresh start to a project that was thought to be long dead. Much as we may claim that the reactor of the plant will not be used for any purpose other than producing electricity, it is a serious policy decision.

Perhaps we must take note of a few things before opting for the plant. As far as we know no developing country — or even developed ones with far more resources — of our size has opted for nuclear power plants.

We agree that the country needs more power. But that does not necessarily lead us to opt for nuclear power plants. Have we carefully examined all other means of generating power?

Managing Our City

Why shouldn't Dhaka have an appropriately sized outfit to manage its affairs? DCC is simply not cut out to take on an eight-million city. Here was a chance that, with its first democratically elected Mayor, the DCC could have gone for big expansion and thorough modernisation.

Dhaka's problems are as giant-sized as its population. It would take a whole national government — and not just a municipal authority — to try to grapple those with any result. The government, whichever party is on the seat, must get the villages to live again in order to stop the township exodus and allow Dhaka to get into curable dimensions.

The Daily Star has been consistently trying to bring into focus the problems of this mofussil town growing into a megacity in less than two decades. But there is always that growing suspicion that all this is being lost on the government.

Sour Story behind Sweet Mango

Unconfirmed sources say mango harvest this year has been the highest in the past 30 years. The market, of course, is, to a certain degree, a reflection of a bumper crop. In deed, even the general consumers are getting quite a treat of the king of fruits at a reasonable price.

The underlying message is not quite unfamiliar. We ask our farmers to produce crops, fruits included, enough to meet our need but the rest is left in a shambles. What we mean is the development of our market and other requisite facilities for ensuring fair price for the perishable produces.

No matter if it is fruit or crop, its bumper production should not necessarily bring outlandish prices for the farmers or growers. The market has to be developed in a way that can absorb the extra quantity economically. Under no circumstances should the middlemen be allowed to eat the cream leaving the growers and consumers in the lurch.

TEN years ago, five persons were arrested following a series of bomb explosions in old Delhi. The benumbed nation by the shock over Mrs Indira Gandhi's assassination, the 1984 killings in the capital itself and the unending terrorism in Punjab, was prepared for any step to cope with violence and disruption.

The then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, shattered by the loss of his mother, rushed to his cabinet to get approval for the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Bill. A few top officers warned him against the misuse of such a measure but he brushed them aside.

Parliament, which met under the shadow of Mrs Gandhi's murder and the Delhi blast, was too dazed, too frightened and too overwhelmed. It was not in the frame of mind where it could appreciate the dangers that TADA could bring to the society, which was already suffering from the rough and ready methods of police.

When the then Home Minister assured the two houses that what they were 'trying to do is, for a period of two years, in an extraordinary situation, even the conscientious objectors lowered their standard of opposition. Little did they know at that time that the government would extend the life of TADA by another two years, after every two years.

Some MPs suspected a foul play. But never did they expect its misuse at such a

TADA has Become a Habit

Even with the most comprehensive legislation, terrorism will be hard to fight if the state police is corrupt, flabby or mixed up with the mafia as is the case today.

large scale. In the name of terrorism, the innocent have been hauled up because of politicians' personal pique. At many places the police have run amuck to use TADA to defeat liberal values of humanity, equality, liberty and justice.

The five persons, whose bomb explosions had provided the proverbial last straw, did not even reach the portals of specially designated courts for TADA. All the five had 'committed suicide'. They were the first victims of the law which was supposed to bring order to daunt the killers of democracy by gun. Scores have died in police custody.

If Home Minister S B Chavan's plea for the removal of TADA has fallen on deaf ears, the government has to blame itself. Police third-degree methods and wrong detentions have denuded the measure of confidence and fairplay. When a state like Gujarat, which has no history of terrorism, detains some 1,500 people under TADA, what motive could have goaded the authorities except personal or political vendetta?

This is what the National Police Commission report, accumulating dust in the home ministry, said: 'We find that policemen have a tendency to become cynical. We also find that frequently such cynicism is developed, within very few years of service. Policemen

very rapidly pick up the knowledge that what the law requires is one thing but what has actually to be done in practice is another. Once this dichotomy takes roots in their minds, all training, all exhortations are a waste.'

No doubt, terrorism is neither legally justified nor ethically acceptable. It is a crime against people and the country. The killing of 35,000 at the hands of terrorists is a tragedy beyond words and an act that should evoke anger. That the Lok Sabha seats among them.

Most political parties have also expressed their opposition. The Congress party has chinks in its armour. The Bharatiya Janata Party's anger was that the government was giving in to the demand made by Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who has reportedly said that TADA should go because of 'harassment to Muslims'. The BJP does not know that she recently promulgated an ordinance to

introduce in Pakistan a TADA-like measure. Human rights groups have denounced it. But she has stuck to her ground in the name of terrorism. In Pakistan also, a detainee's statement before a senior police officer has been made admissible as evidence.

Indeed, this part of TADA is the most reprehensible one. Article 20 of our constitution says: 'No person accused of any offence should be compelled to be a witness against himself.'

Supreme Court judge R M Sahai, who dissented on the

case (Kartar Singh vs State of Punjab) that upheld TADA, said that no civilised democratic entity 'has accepted confession made by an accused before a police officer as voluntary and above suspicion, therefore, admissible in evidence.' Still more obnoxious is TADA's clause about the possession of unauthorised weapons. Poor Sanjay Dutt has been languishing in jail for more than 10 months because of that. He had three AK-56 rifles in his possession for three days and then returned two to retain one for self-defence.

How does the mere possession of weapons make one a terrorist? It has to be proved that the weapon was meant to disrupt sovereignty, territorial integrity of the country or the like. Even under the Ireland Emergency Provisions Act, 1978, there is no such a harsh provision. Unless there is a relation between the weapon and the possessor's intention to use it, the detention is arbitrary.

In fact, the entire exercise that the home ministry has been conducting for renewing TADA is futile because the law itself is counter productive. It smacks of bonapartism that has become the distinguishing feature of Congress since its authoritarian rule during the emergency 20 years ago. In a note to the prime minister, the home ministry has rationalised the opposition to TADA as a natural resistance to any 'special act'.

This may be psychologically true. But there is no going

away from the fact that special laws or powers are feared because they have been misused. They have left a scar on thousands of families, which have suffered. Law and order is primarily a subject of the states. Not all of them are exposed to terrorism.

Therefore, those who feel that they have to arm themselves with special power to deal with terrorists, they can legislate for it. Why should New Delhi come into the picture? Even with the most comprehensive legislation, terrorism will be hard to fight if the state police is corrupt, flabby or mixed up with the mafia as is the case today.

Law courts are probably the real villain of the piece. Their disposal is only three per cent of the cases filed. Every year the 97 per cent of cases get added to the backlog. Stricter laws have to be enacted to deal with the culprits who should have normally been in jail. Curiously, the government is increasing annually the police budget but not appointing more judges or opening new courts.

It is, however, unfortunate that India since independence has been having one detention law or the other on its statute book. It is sad because our national movement was guided by the principles of liberty and human dignity. I recall that EMS Namboodiripad was the only chief minister who recorded his note of assent when the prevention detention act of the British days was renewed in the mid-fifties. Once a government begins to depend on the crutches of extraordinary laws, it cannot govern without them. TADA is a habit. The sooner the rulers get over it the better it would be for the ruled.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

state has to overcome such inhuman menace cannot be seriously doubted. But care has not been taken to distinguish between the terrorist and the innocent. If the state becomes the aggressor — as has happened in the last 10 years, — what happens to our values or the constitutional guarantee of liberty? Every action of government has to be weighed in the scale of rule of law.

New Delhi's claim, after holding a meeting of chief ministers, that the majority of states favour TADA is not correct. The number may be more. But those who said 'no' to the renewal are all big states: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, apart from Kerala. These states have more than half of

the most reprehensible one. Article 20 of our constitution says: 'No person accused of any offence should be compelled to be a witness against himself.'

A confession is an admission of guilt. What is the guarantee that the superintendent of police has not obtained the statement under coercion? TADA negates the basic freedom guaranteed under Article 20.

Supreme Court judge R M Sahai, who dissented on the

Violence, Poverty, Lawlessness Thwart Society — Should Administration Remain Silent Spectator?

by Md Asadullah Khan

Allegations of police brutality and kickbacks are also common. Police have never been questioned about the alleged links with the criminals.

People are venting their outrage through the media. As it appears if the inaction and the present trend continue to run like this the social conditions underlying the city will not be easy to fix.

Among the city dwellers it reinforced the spreading conviction that the cities like Khulna, Chittagong and Dhaka have spun out of control. A growing sense of vulnerability has been deepened by the belief that deadly violence, once mostly confined to identified crime-ridden zones is now lashing out randomly at any one, any time even in areas considered relatively safe.

Think of the hapless ward commissioner of Khulna who entered into a cloth shop in the city and was shot dead by the miscreants in broad day-

Gazipur and Savar, the city centre continue to roll in a place of aching poverty and little hope. While the ruling party remain ensconced in their abodes, political uncertainty grips the country and people are not convinced that the Govt. will be able to correct long standing social and political problems or steer the country out of moral drift.

A telling example of general imperviousness to change is provided by the Dhaka city itself and the areas that form the metropolitan area. The wealthy still inhabit the luxurious villas, complete with manicured gardens, dine at fancy restaurants and hotels and send their children to expensive colleges in the US. Despite a 100 to 200 per cent import duty on luxury cars, new cars abound in a city where 7 out of 10 citizens live at or below the poverty line.

No other activities has attracted public attention than the violence and political vendetta that Dhaka city including other cities in recent times have been prone to.

The number jobless young people is likely to shoot up alarmingly because we have hardly any space available in colleges in the country to make room for about 5 lakh students who would come out with flying colours in the on-going S S C examinations in the country under the four Education Boards. And what will happen to the rest who will cut a sorry figure in this exam? Many of them would like to set up small commercial ventures and go for trading goods if they are denied access to educational institutions but business activities have so much shrunk and these vast co-hort of youths are so much cash-strapped, that these budding

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light in the crowded market place, or a student leader who was gossiping with his friends in front of the B.L. College. Khulna and was targeted in the twinkling of an eye or an innocent cab driver taking his lift in the DAS Cafe in front of the TSC at Dhaka University became a victim as a mis-target. No wonder, crime, gangsterism and group feuds are tearing at the vitals of the country and have completely altered ordinary life. The looming question in many minds was what if anything people could do to protect themselves when none in the safe boundary of his house. Truly speaking, these cities seemed so much consumed with crime that it was incapable of thinking about anything else.

What has dismayed the average city dwellers is the tepid response of the city's leaders to the surge of mayhem. It is a country where elections loom, but poverty and violence reign and where hope once blossomed. Today, however, despair and confusion once again grip the country.

While more lands are being recovered for housing and business installations in and around Dhaka far upto Tongi,

which is pegged at a monthly income of 1500 Taka. Though the economy is showing some signs of revival, little of the effect has trickled down. For the poor, hope for economic and social advancement remains constricted.

The abodes of the well-off are vastly outnumbered by the shanties that flourish on side walks, in alleys, in such slums as Mohammadpur, Mirpur and Gandaria. Garbage trucks roll the streets with occasional haul of the garbage but most of the time these bins are overflowing. Still more annoying, these garbage bins are beset by scavengers with sacks and large straw baskets on their shoulders. They rifle the trash to grab the best bits: plastic containers, polythene bags, tin cans anything that can be re-cycled. The squatters have frequently been evicted by the authorities but they inevitably return to the city. They can't make a living anywhere outside the city limits.

As far as the urban poor are concerned, the question who remains in power are totally meaningless problems compared with the affordability of 'Dal Bhat'.

young people vibrating with energy and vigour will slip out from the mainstream of nation building activities.

More alarming, in recent times the country's old woes have come rushing back and the old paralysis is spreading through the body politic once again. The country is embroiled in a virtual civil war. In Dhaka, Khulna and Chittagong, democratic movement has splintered into squabbling factions, each intent on preventing the other from accomplishing anything. Most important economic reform is sadly adrift. The possibility of an agreement among the different parties has floundered. People's patience is wearing thin. Now people are wondering whether the country having fought for democracy in 1990 is ready for the popular government after all.

While the politicians are engaged in elusive dialogue that will never bring about any tangible result, the economy and the country are sinking like a stone. That means democracy is under threat and this really stems from the deteriorating economic situation and declining production at all levels. Bluntly speaking, if we

that these resources can generate.

The widening disparities and gap between the have-nots in our region must be a pressing reminder to the leaders that it is people, in the absence of vast natural resources like oil, forestry, coal or other minerals that other countries are blessed with can sustain a political stability or act as catalysts of violent change. Our country does not need nor can it afford more violence. Our people don't need more words, however, well-meaning. They need alleviation of their pain and the creation of hope for better life.

Not that violence would strike the Bangladeshis with any surprise now a days. On the contrary, the bloody ideologies, in-party vengeance and extremism have been threatening to eclipse all norms of democracy in the nation. In the last few months, the country has witnessed an unprecedented wave of killings, looting and arson symbolising a fissure that has developed deeper into the soul of the nation that has taught and practised the virtues of tolerance, amity and peace. As it appears, the hopes and aspirations of 120 million people are almost becoming hostage to a terrible uncertainty.

The thought that looms in public mind, 'What has this country come to?' We were an example to the world. Now we are a warning. The way people especially the students are falling victim to political violence and in-party feuds triggers and alarming situation slowing the pace of economic reforms in the country.

The spate of violence, gangsterism and mastan-type activities that have overtaken the country pose a question over the future of an open political system. More than any other moment in the country's history, the future seems dark and bleak, with differences sought to be settled with bullets, with consensus braking down. With the country torn asunder with political brinkmanship, Bangladesh labours under a potentially crippling foreign debt and a crisis of faith in politics. This situation can't go. The country will have to find leaders of some stature, leaders fired with pragmatism and vision. Politics in the country must not project an image of inaction and disunity at a time when people, more than anything else, are seeking some assurance and stability.

The aid promised by the affluent Western countries has not been forthcoming in as large a measure as expected. That calls for addressing the pressing problems of economic development, desertification water and the environmental issues with all vigour and seriousness, our leaders must accept that they can ill-afford to ignore the hopes and aspirations of the silent majority, the growing numbers of unemployed but educated youths, the dispossessed, the men, women and children who do not enjoy access to great natural resources and to the wealth

Govt seem to have utterly failed to combat the crime activities, fraud and deception of all possible forms.

All concerned with the development of the country must recognise that economic issues are as central to the peace process as political ones. Allowing the by-gone years as the lost decade — a period when international economic turbulence combined with poor domestic economic performance resulted in deteriorating conditions for most people — we have to forge ahead now.

Indian scholarship Sir, Every year quite a number of students go to our neighbouring country India for study. The Indian Government offers a few scholarships. This year also the Indian govt offered such scholarships. But this time some malpractices seem to have cropped up in the process of awarding these scholarships.

As per requirement the student who has secured 85 per cent marks in SSC and HSC examinations is qualified to apply for study in BA (Hons) in Economics. But one such

scholarship reportedly has been awarded to a (girl) student who secured 83.8 per cent marks in HSC. It's really a matter of regret that the scholarship has not been awarded to students who reportedly have secured 86 per cent and 87 per cent marks in the said examinations. Marks, in this case, is obviously the basis for determining the merit.

May I request the authorities concerned to look into the matter and redress such grievances forthwith by fairplay and justice.

Asif Ali 36, Fuller Road, Dhaka 1205

which is sending SOS these seem imperative.

M F Zaman Ciba Geigy Bangladesh Ltd, Dhaka.

office in district towns. Garments industries are also responsible, more than the NGOs, for crowding Dhaka. With all my respect to the foreign currency earnings, I can say that cheap labour being the main input of this industry it was supposed to grow in rural areas. However, perhaps the earlier poor communication facilities forced it to Dhaka and the unemployed workers also migrated to the city. These low paid workers are also a problem to the city. Their standard of living is very poor (they cannot afford anything better) and naturally most of them are living in slums. Whereas if this industry had developed in district level towns they could attain a better standard of living because of the cost factor.

Now, although the task is quite gigantic, the government

has no choice but to do it to save Dhaka: The garments industry will have to be shifted from Dhaka to other towns. As a first step telecommunication will have to be developed more. Preferably private investment should be encouraged in this sector. Since this export-oriented industry must be close to sea and air ports government can make some industrial plots available in the vicinity of Dhaka and Chittagong. Gazipur is a good sight closer to Zia International Airport and Chittagong has enough space. To encourage them to shift from Dhaka, government may declare tax holiday for a couple of years.

These steps may bring discomfort to some garments industry owners and big shots of some NGOs but to save our city

To the Editor

Save Dhaka

Sir, The Daily Star's concern for Dhaka city dwellers is very timely. In fact it has highlighted some of the important things that are contributing in making our city a hell. Thanks to Star for the series of stories.

are making people rich and

also contributed substantially in the economic growth and employment generation.

Well the NGOs are here to help the rural poor in improving their quality of life. Practically 90 per cent of these NGOs have their programmes in remote parts of Bangladesh. But they have their posh offices in Dhaka. Their highly paid executives live in expensive houses and drive expensive cars. These NGOs are also contributing in crowding Dhaka. I have a proposal to NGO Affairs Bureau that they should not allow anybody to have an office in Dhaka unless their activities are based in Dhaka. At best they can have a liaison office. Recently our communication system has improved significantly including the telephone service and it is not difficult to maintain

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