The Daily Star

CIVIC AMENITIES : Part-5

Stop misuse of gas

By Krishna P Roy and Morshed A Khan

In 1968, when natural gas was first on offer for domestic use in Dhaka city, a superstition ran high among its inhabitants — cooking food on a gas burner could cause gastric ulcer.

Workers of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited (TGTDCL), the introducer of the service in the city, then had to go from door to door to convince people to take up its services.

Prominent litterateur Shawkat Osman was the first city dweller to break the circle of superstition when his residence was connected with this invisible burning power.

The history of the use of natural gas as a source of energy and feed stock in Bangladesh, however, dates back to early 60's Haripur Gas Field in the district of Sylhet, discovered in the year 1955, came into commercial production in 1961 with the supply of gas to Natural Gas Fertiliser Factory at Fenchuganj.

The Chhatak Gas Field discovered in 1959 was brought into commercial production with commencement of gas supply to Chhatak Cement Factory in 1960 by a 12 mile long transmission pipeline.

This came as a relief to a country where rapid deforestation was taking place because a fast growing population had been using wood as the only fuel to meet their household requirement.

And the TGTDCL first went into operation with the commissioning of gas supply to Siddhirganj Thermal Power Station on April 28, 1968 following the discovery of Titas Gas Field in Brahmonbaria in 1962.

The TGTDCL, incorporated as a public limited company on November 20, 1964 is responsible for distribution of gas in the city of over seven million.

Since the inception of Titas gas in 1968, the expansion has been remarkable as today some 3,69,715 holdings benefit from the services in the city, of which 3,64,585 are domestic, 4,344 commercial, 768 industrial and 18 seasonal business subscribers.

The managing director of the TGTDCL Major (retd) Muqtadir Ali said the daily requirement of natural gas in the city now varies from 150 to 170 million cubic feet.

Initially, when the gas lines were set in different city areas, it was done to meet a much lesser demand. Today, the company has a maximum capacity to supply 125 million cubic feet gas pre day, leaving a considerable vacuum in the supply.

Moreover, the number of customers in the city is rising by about 20,000 per year.

In many areas of the city, this causes low pressure in the lines and household users of natural gas frequently complain that with that low pressure they cannot even meet their day to day requirement.

The Managing Director pointed out that the company's domestic sector has been a losing concern for them.

"We offer the service to each domestic user assuming that some 85 cubic feet of gas would be spent monthly, therefore the price is fixed at Tk 250," he said.

In fact, he added that on an average, more than 100 cubic feet is used by each domestic consumer every month.

Some alleged that this is due to widespread misuse of the fuel on part of the subscribers. In some cases, subscribers sublet their gas burners to families without the facility charging Tk 30 to 40 per month.

An official of the TGTDCL said that in this way some subscribers earn three fold more than what they pay to the company. This practice, it was alleged, is quite rampant in different colonies of the city.

In the city, system loss of the company stands at below 7 per cent, and some Tk. 17 crore is now outstanding to the subscribers, said the Managing Director.

The total yearly income of the company was Tk 7942.707 million in 1993-94, while the operational expense was Tk 7390.46 million.

In response to a query about whether meters would be installed in the domestic sector the Managing Director of the TGTDCL said that the company had no such plan as he thought, it would require more manpower, therefore, increasing the scope for more corruption.

About the recent gas accidents in the city, officials of the company said that the government has taken up a massive awareness campaign to educate the users of the natural fuel.

Experts felt that many gas pipelines in the city are faulty and this is due to assignment of incompetent contractors by the TGTDCL to do most of the domestic gas connection related work.

A committee has recently been formed by the gas supplier to set a new guideline on issuance of contracts.

A high officials of the TGTDCL pointed out that the city of Dhaka has been growing too haphazardly. Planning has been almost non-existent and the streets are too narrow to do a proper development work.

Moreover, the official said that industries, the big consumers of natural gas, should not be allowed in the city. Instead, they should be encouraged to settle in an area where fuel facilities are purpose-built — such as Mymensingh.

"We are unable to plan," said an official of the TGTDCL, "because we have no idea of the city planning."

This neither a scarecrow, nor some elevated chair. Rather, it is a mere gas meter, wrapped up in thick sacking in a bid to discourage thieves. — Star photo

Writ against voters' registration rules

Fixing of retrospective date for eligibility challenged

The authority of the Election Commission (EC) to fix a retrospective date for determining the eligibility of a voter was challenged yesterday by the lawyer for a petitioner who filed a writ in the High Court against certain provisions of the on-going voters' registration, reports UNB.

Resuming the hearing, petitioner's lawyer A B M Nurul Islam, citing the Constitution, told the court "the law does not give any authority to the EC to give retrospective effect to the qualifying date." Rather the Constitution says a person would be eligible to become a voter as soon as he or she attains the age of 18.

If the retrospective date takes effect for the registration of voters, then some 25 lakh people would not be able to enrol themselves as voters during the current registration, Advocate Islam submitted.

Referring to the Presidential Order 104 of 1972 and Electoral Collage Act of 1964, the lawyer for Aminul Gani, the petitioner, said the qualifying date to become a voter on those two occasions had been fixed prospective. But this time, he pointed out, the Election Commission has fixed a retrospective date, that is January 1, 1995.

Registration of voters began from May 25 and the final list of voters will be published by the EC on August 31. During this period, he maintained, some 25 lakh people will have qualified as voters.

Attorney General Aminul Huq, placing his arguments, said there was no illegality in fixing a date, because some date was required to be fixed for the work to start. Citing Indian and Pakistani laws, the chief government counsel contended that similar provisions were also found in those countries.

Replying to a query from the bench, Advocate Aminul Huq, however, said that if a person reaches the age of 18 by August 31, the Commission would allow him/her to register as a voter.

"The qualifying date is not stationary but a moving phenomenon," he said.

Presiding judge Justice Ismail Uddin Sarkar, however, contradicted this stand and asked the Attorney General to submit an affidavit on behalf of the Election Commission tomorrow.

Examining a copy of the voter registration form, Justice Sarkar said, "this form is for all time. The date January 1 has been mentioned in the form, so there remains no scope for correction,"

K S Nabi, Bar at Law, earlier, arguing on behalf of the petitioner, said the Ordinance No 61 of 1982, which had fixed the first day of the year as the qualifying date was ultra vires to the Constitution. The qualifying date is contrary to the provision of the Ordinance, he added.

The writ was filed on May 29 by Advocate Aminul Gani challenging the legality of the fixation of the date January 1, 1995 as the cut-off mark for becoming eligible as a voter as well as the stipulation regarding the place of registration of a particular person as a voter.

The two-member bench comprises Justice Ismail Uddin Sarkar and Justice Abu Sayed Ahmed.

ADB sees 5.3 pc GDP

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account deficit in recent years has been contracted substantially, the report added.

While nothing that though the favourable macro-economic situation has not elicited much supply response owing to political uncertainty, the report suggested that the process of fiscal consolidation and structural reform must be pushed ahead if increased investment and economic growth are to be achieved over the medium term.

The report said although Bangladesh has made substantial progress in liberalising its economy, a more distinct impact on economic growth and investment was foreseeable "If the government is able to implement more effectively the reforms in the public sector, labour markets, infrastructure development and the financial system".

It also mentioned that a conducive political environment "is important" for the achievement of these fundamental reforms.

Dwelling on Bangladesh's export performance in 1995, the report said the indications are that export will rise by 11 per cent as exports of ready-made garments are likely to pick up following the easing of the temporary supply constraints affecting imported fabrics.

Imports are projected to rise by 11.5 per cent in 1995 with higher imports of fabric for the readymade garment industry and increased imports of capital goods and intermediate goods such as cement and fertiliser.

These developments in export and imports will result in a small increase in trade deficit and that the current account deficit is forecast to rise to 2 per cent of GDP in 1995 despite the continued rise in the inflow of worker's remittance.

The report, however noted that with improved aid disbursements, it is expected that there would be an overall surplus and a rise in foreign reserves to 3 billion US dollars by the end of 1995.

The reserve was 2.8 billion dollars in 1994.

The report said one of the key challenges for the government was an overhaul of the civil service and public administrations structure to strengthen accountability and transparency. Another major challenge is to secure a substantial increase in private investment. The financial system is another area in which reform is necessary if private investment is to be promoted, the report noted.

Changes in US immigration policy recommended

NEW YORK, June 5: A federal advisory panel will recommend reducing legal immigration by a third over the next few years and changing visa priorities to grant preference to spouses and young children of legal aliens, The New York Times reported, reports AP.

The nine-member commission, headed by former Texas Rep. Barbara Jordan, will emphasize the importance of the nuclear family as the basic unit of immigration, The Times said in Monday's editions.

Members of the Commission on Immigration Reform told the newspaper that at a closed meeting last month they affirmed the value of legal immigration but also voted to recommend Congress reduce it by one-third of its average over the last three years, which has been 8,30,000 a year.

Saudi reform activist held

NICOSIA, June 5: Saudi police have arrested a blind Muslim cleric who has pushed for reform in Saudi Arabia, an exiled opposition group said today, reports AFP.

Sheikh Hammud Ibn Abdallah Al-Aqla Al-Shuaibi, 75, was arrested late Saturday when 60 policemen surrounded his home at Burayda, northwest of Riyadh, the London-based Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR) said.

The Midnight File

Bukhari banned from visiting Kashmir

SRINAGAR, June 5: The Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jamia Masjid, Maulana Syed Ahmad Bukhari has been banned from visiting the Kashmir valley by the centre, according to the All-Party Hurriet Conference today. The APHC quoted the Shahi Imam as having told them that he could not reach Srinagar as per schedule because of an order of the centre banning him from visiting the valley, reports PTI.

Blast in car parking area at Colombo airport

COLOMBO, June 5: An explosive hidden in a van went off in the car parking area at the Colombo international airport on Monday night. But there were no casualties, police said. The Toyota Hiace van was wrecked but there was no damage to any other vehicle, police said. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack, reports AP.

Congestion at ferry points

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loaded with mangoes on the night of June 1 on the approach road towards Nagarbari terminal.

When approached, Hussain said, "I am taking mangoes from Shibganj of Chapainawabganj to Dhaka paying a truck fare of Taka 13,500. But, now the truck is forced to stay here overnight just to crossed the Jamuna."

A BIWTC official told The Daily Star that the Corporation had already informed the ministry concerned that the BIWTC's fleet should immediately be expanded, adding at least eight more ferries.

He stated that following the commissioning of the bridge on river Meghna on Dhaka-Chittagong route, the flow of vehicles running between Chittagong and the southern and northern districts has just doubled. Moreover, the number of vehicles, in general, is increasing by 10 per cent every year, added the BIWTC official.

Besides the crowding of vehicles, a hazy situation at the ferry terminals and gross indiscipline in maintaining serials for boarding the ferries contributed to the present state, it is alleged.

Some drivers alleged that a group of people at the terminals do brisk business in exchange of providing early serials.

When asked Nurul Amin, a US at Aricha ferry terminal, said local *mastaans* posing as terminal staff take money from vehicle staff, promising early serials and "this earns a bad name for us."

If the authorities would provide us with uniform, then it would be easier for the drivers and passengers to identify the phoney people," he added.

However, BIWTC officials said, ferry staff was provided with dress but they never use those. "We spend Taka 18 lakh for this purpose yearly. Now, before we give the terminal staff any uniform, we have to ensure first that they will wear the dress", one official said.

AKM Shamsul Haq, Director (Commerce) of BIWTC, told this correspondent that the authorities had recently sent letters to the SPs of Manikganj, Pabna and Rajbari requesting them to take necessary steps to free the ferry terminals from the grip of *mastaans*.

AL complain to EC

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amount of Tk 20 to 25 lakh to influence the results of the next Parliament elections.

"The Deputy Commissioners have been asked to disburse the said fund, remitted from the Prime Minister's Secretariat, and to spend the same amount of 20/25 lakh and per the directives of the local BNP MPs and ministers, if any," said the petition.

The Awami League alleged that the ruling party MPs were drawing the funds and handing out donations to various mosques, madrassahs, schools, colleges, local cooperative societies and BNP front organisations with a view to promoting their prospects in the next general elections.

The petition said as per Article 91 of PO 155 of 1972, the Election Commission is under legal obligation to issue necessary *ad-interim* order restraining the parties from spending money to influence the voters.

Hasina's denial

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The Awami League president also claimed that Maudud Ahmed had telephoned her yesterday morning and regretted having made the reference in his book.

Maudud reportedly told her yesterday that he had heard the story from others, Hasina said. She wondered how he could include a mere hearsay in his book.

"Maudud Shaheb frequently changes his colour. Possibly he wrote this fiction to change his colour again," she said sarcastically.

In his book, Maudud claims former president Ershad had maintained secret links with Sheikh Hasina, Begum Khaleda Zia and kept them apart to rule the country smoothly.

The book was published by the University Press Limited and released simultaneously by the Oxford University press in Pakistan and Vikas Publications in India.

N'ganj violence

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of Afzal. Later, they attacked Murad with sharp weapons and left the place firing shots, witnesses said.

Murad, stated to be in a critical condition, was shifted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital tonight while Ripon was admitted to the Narayanganj Hospital.

Afzal was the son of one Habibur Rahman of Pucca Road, Deobhog under Fatullah thana.

Traffic movement on the Narayanganj-Dhaka road came to a halt for about two hours as AL, BCL and Jubo League activists brought out a big procession to protest the killing.

Twenty activists of the Chhatra League and the Jubo League were also wounded when police resorted to baton charge, teargassing and firing rubber bullets to disperse a mob near the District Judge's Court.

The mob damaged at least 20 vehicles in various parts of the town, witnesses added.

Confce

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chaired by DCCI President Rashed Maksud Khan.

Eminent economists, educationists, businessmen, industrialists, prospective foreign investors and fund managers are expected to participate in the conference.

Khaleda

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luxurious lifestyle, she said, the quantity of Carbon Dioxide and Chloro-Fluro Carbon (CFC) in the atmosphere are constantly on the rise and the environment of the planet is thus becoming polluted and the sea level is rising due to global warming.

The Prime Minister said poverty has further exacerbated the environmental problem worldwide. The Rio conference held in 1992 has identified poverty as a major hindered to the environmental development, she reminded.

Ground water

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the Buriganga from industrial discharges."

Pollution risk in the Buriganga is very high due to high river traffic, which causes extensive oil spillage from passing river craft.

It further said, on the basis of a cursory examination, in the Shitalakhya in the upstream of Demra at Ghorashal, two large fertiliser plants were discharging wastes containing significant quantities of organic pollutants including ammonia and arsenic.

"In addition to the abovementioned upstream pollution sources, there are several other point pollution sources whose discharges may reach the Sayedabad Water Treatment Plant intake proposed at Demra because of tidal effects and the reverse flow generated by the consumptive use of the river water," the report said.

"The extent of water quality problems that may arise from the low level of fresh water in the Shitalakhya river should be ascertained and solved as required for the satisfactory operation of the proposed Sayedabad surface water treatment plant," it pointed out.

As regards ground water utilisation, it suggested all new wells in the city with a life span of up to 2010 and beyond should be installed with a pump house pipe deep enough to accommodate the present rate of extraction of 1.36 million cubic metres per day.

Dhaka WASA provides over 1.40 lakh water connections in the city and is able to supply 74 crore litres of water per day — only about half the total demand.

Appointments, transfers

By Staff Correspondent

Retired additional secretary A M Khan Chowdhury has been appointed chief Insurance Controller of the Insurance Directorate for one year on contract basis.

Retired divisional commissioner Amin Uddin Chowdhury has been appointed member, Land Appeal Board, for one year on contract basis.

The order transferring Shamsuddin Ahmed, member, Land Reform Board, to the post of member, Land Appeal Board has been cancelled.

M Amin Ullah, member, Privatisation Board, has been given the additional charge of chairmanship of the Board.

The services of Mafiz Uddin Shikdar, joint secretary, Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, have been placed at the Prime Minister's Office for appointing him on deputation as the Director General of the Bureau of Anti Corruption.

The order transferring M Saiful Islam, Executive Director, Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA), to the post of DG, Bureau of Anti Corruption has been cancelled, says a PID handout.

4 more die in Karachi violence

KARACHI, June 5: Four more people died in violence in Karachi today as the estranged brother of Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto accused her of failing to give good government to her home province of Sindh, reports Reuter.

Today's deaths by shooting or torture raised the toll to 36 in this month's bout of violence in the southern industrial port city, the Sindh state capital.

Hasina's press confce

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"complicated" and "faulty" voters' registration plan although the EC had said completion of a database voter list was not possible before the next elections.

"It's now their headache, what they do with the plan. Let them decide the issue. We're not supposed to bother about their whimsical acts," she told the reporters.

In her written statement, the AL leader demanded inclusion in the voter list of all expatriate Bangladeshis through the country's missions abroad and involving the government officials, employees and teachers in the registration process. She accused the ruling party of engaging its sympathisers in the task and registering the stranded Pakistanis as voters under the current move.

She also reiterated her allegations that the enumerators belonging to the BNP were illegally registering people of their choice at the directives of the ministers and dropping the opposition supporters from the list.

Speaking further on the faults with the registration form now being used, Hasina said it did not contain any serial number and there was no system to register the number of voter registration form books.

Condemning the reported allocation of Tk 25 lakh from government funds for each minister and BNP MP, she remarked, "This is nothing but a bribe to the electorate and the ruling party leaders would spend the money to hire goons."

The AL chief accused the government of unlawfully transferring, appointing and retiring public servants with an ill-motive to influence the forthcoming elections.

Restating her charges of corruption against several ministers and their relatives, she cited some specific instances with reference to official documents, which she claimed to have collected. But she did not produce any document at the press conference.

In reply to some other questions, Hasina said her party had reservations about the recent appointment of a new Chief Election Commissioner since it was made by the government unilaterally, in breach of its earlier commitment to consult the Opposition. "They always talk about dialogue but ignore it when it becomes necessary," she said.

Central AL leaders Syeda Zohra Tajuddin, Abdus Samad Azad, Abdul Mannan, Zillur Rahman, Abdur Razzak, Rahmat Ali, Suranjit Sengupta, SAMS Kibria, Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin and Abdul Mannan were present at the press conference.

BNP workers block Dhaka-Aricha highway for 8 hrs

SAVAR, June 5: Pickets blocked the Dhaka—Aricha highway for eight hours during a day-long hartal in Dhamrai thana today demanding the release of a local BNP leader, reports UNB.

An unidentified pedestrian was run over by a bus when it was trying to escape an attack by the demonstrators as several hundred transports with thousands of passengers were stranded on the highway during the blockade, witnesses said.

A faction of the Dhamrai BNP called for the hartal demanding release of former Upazila chairman Tamizuddin Ahmed who was arrested on May 27 from his residence in Dhaka. He was detained for a month following intra-party conflicts, party sources said.

Witnesses said activists of the BNP, Jubadal and Chhatra Dal put up barricades on the Dhaka-Aricha highway from Nayarhat to Joypura from 9 am to 5 pm, blocking movement of traffic.

Student leaders held in Sylhet

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, June 5: Kotwali police arrested Fakhrul Islam, President, District (South) unit of the Islami Chhatra Shibir, Ziauddin Nader, ex-president of District unit of the Chhatra Shibir and Mujibur Rahman Mujib an activist of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) from their houses last night.

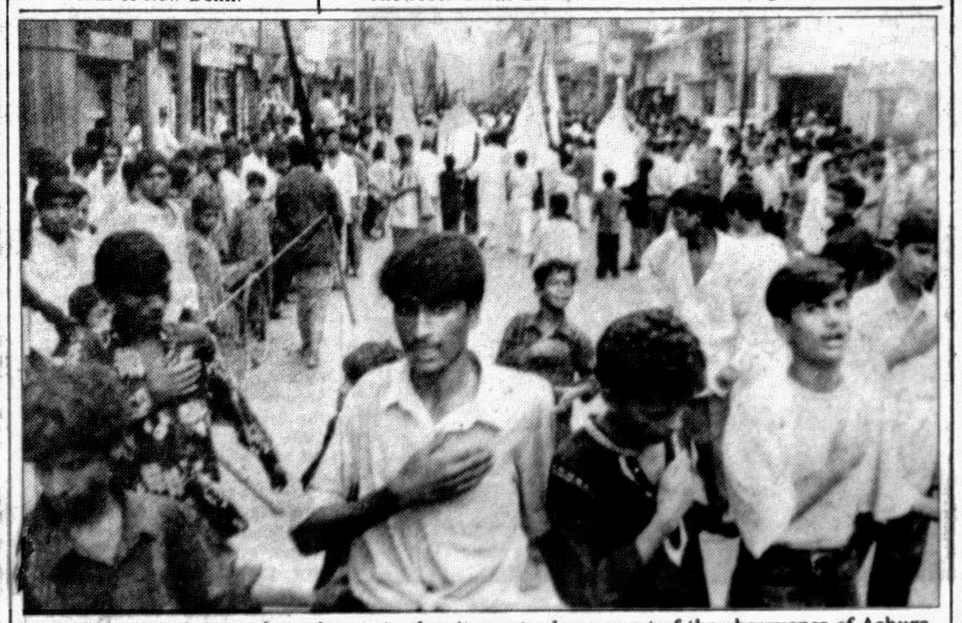
Police sources said they were wanted in different cases.

Environmentalist held in India

NEW DELHI, June 5: A well-know environmentalist was arrested today as she travelled toward a town where protesters are trying to stop the construction of a huge dam, reports AP.

Medha Patkar was taken into custody before she could reach Tehri, where the dam is being constructing in the Himalayan foothills, United News of India reported.

She was accused of violating an order that had banned her entry into Tehri, 400 kilometers north of New Delhi.



A *tazia* procession was brought out in the city yesterday as part of the observance of Ashura or Muharram on June 10. — Star photo

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