

Washing the Linen

In a shocking revelation, Dhaka University authorities put up an admissions cancellation notice in the newspapers on Wednesday involving as many as 80 enrolled students.

By publishing this notice Dhaka University has no doubt sought to fulfil a legal requirement. In the process it has also served a public interest of vital importance concerned with the maintenance of sanctity and high moral standards at the top-most seat of learning in the country.

One wonders why the mechanism at the university that has now worked to discover the truth had failed so badly to detect the wrong-doing when it was being committed at the time of admission. The figures are just for a certain number of disciplines at one level — the post-graduate level.

Since the action against the students is based on 'proven' grounds — as stated in the DU notice — the natural question to follow from this is: What measure the university authority simultaneously proposes to take against those who from inside must have abetted in their illegal entries.

We are not assuming anything; but there is no denying the fault line in the system the DU notice indirectly once again has opened our eyes to. Those can be enough of a loophole for outsiders to sneak in through, whether we want it or not.

Consumer Lobbying

How the consumers in Bangladesh find themselves at the receiving end has once again been brought to the fore by two news items carried in this newspapers yesterday. One of the reports shows the extent of consumer travail in economic terms through price indices. The other concerns the finance minister's lamentation over the common people's inability to receive any benefits of the tax relief given in the budget.

That is however the average rise in prices. During the last six months items like vegetables and rice have registered a spiralling price hike upto 34.02 and 25.63 per cent respectively. The budgetary provision of tax relief this time should have brought a down trend in the prices of some of the goods of daily use. But so far there is no reflection of the tax cut on the price indices.

Now the question is how to ensure a fair deal to the consumers? Even the budgetary benefits for the commonman are robbed by a sellers' market. Both the government and the people are cheated. In the face of such an organised market manipulation, the government and the common people need to devise effective means to defend their interests.

A Plea for Life

Committing suicide is the ultimate decision that a human being ever takes. Behind each such case of refusing to live there is a history — long or short. The reasons too are varied. But when cases of suicide erupt in a particular locality, as in this city last month, there are reasons to be particularly alarmed that we usually should be. Well then, a month's or two's figure should not necessarily set a pattern for us to rely upon.

The astrologers are expected to refer to zodiac signs and the position of constellations. That, to our mind, is not very appealing. We need more cogent arguments to establish the causes. And we are not always off targets. Given Dhaka city's socio-economic make-up, a high incidence of suicides cannot be something out of the ordinary. The co-existence of shameless affluence and abject poverty has given rise to an inner friction within society and the self.

The number of frustrated young people is increasing, so is that of the victims of wife-bashing. Together they make a sizeable portion of Dhaka city's population. Not all of them turn to be mastans or culprits of the worst variety. So a few of them find life unbearable and may decide to bring a premature end to it. Very, of course, there are Romeos or Juliets but today's version of the same name hardly ends his or her own life. Rather they throw acids or stab their loved ones when jilted. So we can leave such types out of our count. Better we concentrate on the socio-economic factors and try to address the severe unemployment problem. There is a great need for reducing gaps between social classes.

LIVING close up to events it is difficult for us to stand back from the transition and appreciate just how extraordinary a process it has been. For a minority to give up exclusive power and to begin dismantling the edifice that protected its privileges is an uncommon event in history.

We had violence, to be sure; the economy was being strangled; and racial polarization showed danger signs of passing some kind of point of no return. Somehow, the inevitable descent into war was averted, and out of the wide divisions a tolerable compromise was achieved.

In giving ourselves a pat on the back we should note several points: South Africa's transition reflected the cynical saying that 'Men and nations will act rationally once all other possibilities have been exhausted'. It was madness for the National Party to have believed even into the mid-1980s that some form of neo-apartheid could have provided a durable basis for an accommodation.

The transition began when, in one of those rare historical moments, the leaderships of the two contending forces recognised that neither would win outright and that a negotiated settlement was the only realistic hope. It took leaders of the stature of Mandela and de Klerk to pilot the process through what was to be a rough sea.

It is unfashionable these days to say anything in praise of FW de Klerk's predecessor, but credit should be given where it is due. The preliminaries that led to the initiation of the negotiating process began in the mid-1980s, presumably with Botha's knowledge. It was Botha, too, who knocked out the major ideological props of apartheid and destroyed some of its major institutions, like the pass laws.

Botha, alas, had neither the vision nor the sagacity to take the next step, and that is why South Africa was

South Africa: One Year Later

by Prof David Welsh

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like a rudderless ship for the last four years of his administration. It is fascinating to speculate whether, had he not been stricken with a stroke early in 1989, he would have moved significantly or, as is more likely, have tried to stand pat. At all events he was the Gorbachev of South Africa.

The case of Mr de Klerk fascinates me. I have been looking for modern instances of political leaders who have acted as boldly and sagaciously as de Klerk. Of course, the contexts of leadership differ profoundly: Churchill, de Gaulle, Gorbachev, FDR, perhaps John F Kennedy (for his handling of the Cuban missile crisis), and Sadat are some possible names who deserve similar accolades, but each operated in contexts and with restraints that were different from those of de Klerk. Even so, there is an inescapable ranking of leaders, and on that scale he must rank near the top.

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Another leader deserves praise. Constand Viljoen for his decision to opt in to last year's election, thereby substantially defusing the right-wing threat. Heaven knows what might have happened if, as was widely predicted, the right-wing had tried for some UDI, seizing a large tract of territory where Conservative Party-controlled local authorities were in power and then said, in effect, what are you going to do about it? And what might have happened if as many as 100,000 trained and disciplined men had taken up arms in the name of counter-revolution?

The right-wing as a threat to stability has been largely neutralized, and those who are in Parliament under the banner of the Freedom Front have managed to create good working relationships with the ANC, imitating

the example of the personal chemistry between Viljoen and Mandela. The achievements of the past year have mostly been in the realm of the symbolic and in the critically important area of reconciliation. With the powerful example being set by Mandela, the ANC has gone out of its way to avoid triumphalism — or crowing over its victory and lord it over whites. It has held in check potentially powerful anti-white sentiments and has stuck to the principle of non-racialism. It could have been so easy for the ANC to inflame black attitudes with an appeal to a kind of counter-racism. Almost certainly, something is owed to people like Joe Slovo who, however regrettable his earlier views (which he recanted) may have been, played a role in preserving the ANC's non-racial commitment.

As I have argued before, 'non-racialism' in the sense that racial considerations disappear completely is a utopian hope: no other multicultural/multiracial society has been able to achieve this; but non-racialism as the entrenchment of non-discriminatory norms and an atmosphere of interracial tolerance is achievable. Much remains to be done on the latter score, but a hopeful start has been made. It is astonishing to hear reports from the Free State of reasonably cordial working relationships between pillars of rural conservatism in the farming community and ANC ministers, with the estimable premier Patrick Lekota leading the way.

Tolerance will remain a fragile plant for years, if not decades. It will require careful nurturing and the avoidance of measures that can endanger it. So many good qualities and institutions in life take decades, even generations to build up, but such is their fragility that they can easily be destroyed in a month.

As far as the mercurial Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi is concerned, the report must be mixed. It looks as if the issue of international mediation may itself require mediation to

solve. Buthelezi is making bellicose remarks, and the ANC is stoutly asserting that it will not yield to threats of coercion or black mail. One never knows with Buthelezi; I suspect now that his stated reasons for participating in last year's election were the real ones, namely that non-participation and the violence that inevitably would have ensued, would have been disastrous for the country.

Watching him on Agenda (27 April), he gave me the distinct impression of not wanting to plunge the country into a crisis. I believe that he has a strong sense of history that disinclines him to want to be remembered principally as the leader whose tactics destroyed a promising start to democracy. He may well believe that his tactics in the run-up to last year's elections brought him more gains, in the form of amendments to the draft interim Constitution and the agreement on international mediation, than he would have obtained by staying in the Multi-party Negotiating Process and agreeing far earlier to participate in the elections. He may believe that brinkmanship will bring similar dividends this time round. My prediction is that a face-saving formula will eventually be found and that FW de Klerk may be the broker. There are many reasons for wanting Inkatha back in the Constitutional Assembly; not the least of these is that its withdrawal gives the ANC a two-thirds majority and thus enables it to write the final constitution (subject to embodying the 34 constitutional principles). It is not desirable for any single party to have so big a say — as Thabo Mbeki is prepared to acknowledge.

The down-side of our first year has been in the matter of delivery. The evidence of mass impatience has been largely anecdotal and is not supported by survey data. But there are sufficient warning lights flashing to make it clear to the Government of National Unity that delivery must begin to roll this year, or else tension

levels will rise. It was always unfair to the new government to expect instant delivery: reconstructing the bureaucracy, merging homeland administrations into provincial administrations, and brokering transitional local administrations have been immense undertakings. Problems have been exacerbated by the virtual collapse of administration in parts of the old Transkei, Bophuthatswana and elsewhere.

That said, the time for delivery to start is now. No-one, even the most impatient, can reasonably expect overnight change; but they can — and do — expect visible movement: people accept the principle of a queue, but only if the queue moves. There is no inherent reason why it should not begin to move.

Longer-term problems are abundant and some of them are likely to prove intractable. I focus on three inter-related issues in the second half of this report: urbanisation, population growth and the growth of (technically) illegal immigrants from neighbouring states. Roughly 750,000 people migrate to the towns and cities annually. Substantially, the white and Indian communities have peaked as far as urbanization is concerned, and the Coloured community is not far behind. Although completely reliable figures for Africans are not available, it would be a fair estimate to reckon that roughly 50 per cent of the African population is urban, and that the expected swelling of urban populations will come largely (90 per cent plus) from continuing rural-urban African migration and growth generated by existing urban populations. To this one has to add foreign migrants, estimated to number between one and a half and as high as four million — again, the figures are imprecise because officials simply do not know. Neither electrified fences nor efforts to repatriate them have much hope of success. The problem will have to be addressed in a regional context.

Population growth rates have come down quite significantly; for the white communities it is a little below replacement level; the figure for Coloured and Indian communities is rapidly approaching that; for urban Africans the figure is 2.3 per cent, demonstrating again the impact of urbanization on population growth. For rural Africans the figure is significantly higher. The average rural African woman bears over five children on average, though this figure (1989) may be coming down. Overall, for the entire population the figure is 2.3 per cent, which exceeds economic growth rates for the past few years.

The spread of the AIDS epidemic may have an impact on population growth. Some estimates say that it could reduce the population growth rate by 0.5 to 0.7 per cent. I will say nothing about the conventional ways of addressing these issues, except to observe that propaganda and exhortation appear to have achieved little. The decision to have smaller families is in general a direct consequence of recognizing the economic costs of large families; and 'safe sex' is probably promoted most effectively when people are involved in networks that drum in the message about the dangers of infection, and when, tragically, the demonstration effect of seeing people in your community die of a terrible wasting disease takes hold.

A less conventional way of addressing these issues is to view them through the prism of the status of women. If one message has come through clearly in our times — here and globally — is that the gender revolution is permanent! Apart from the elementary question of justice, other benign consequences flow from the increasing capacity of women to assert their rights and mobilize their power: by taking charge of their own reproductive power they become critical agents in the drive to reduce population growth and, perhaps, to limit the spread of HIV. On the whole, the evidence from Third World countries suggests that development projects managed by women have a better chance of success than those managed by men. Women also stabilise communities and, in general, are more peace-oriented than men.

(To be concluded tomorrow) The author is Professor of Southern African Studies, University of Cape Town.

Emigration Syndrome Grips Bangladeshis : Bane or Boon?

by Md Asadullah Khan

Paradoxically, the prospect for Bangladeshi emigrants, despite the fact they are quite talented and hard-working, looks very grim. The Consular Office of the US, of late, is trying to discourage the prospective applicants in all possible ways.

THE spectre of joblessness, uncertainty and bleak future in the country looms like a thunderhead on the horizon fraught with desperation. The frantic search for job outside the country continues unabated. Restaurants, drawing rooms, small get-together parties, clubs buzz with excited talk of emigration.

Tired of the years of economic privation, lack of means to make a living at home and frustrating environments in the country, millions of Bangladeshis are lining up at foreign consulates, manpower agencies — fake or real — for job outside and often, if possible, to flee the country for good. This emigration syndrome, unlike in the past, is not limited to intellectuals alone. Everyone in the country, even in the remotest village, is engaged in a hot pursuit for a sponsor-certificate from relations or friends staying, say, in the US as a permanent citizen that entitles him for an interview at an inflated fee of \$200 per person. This trend of massive emigration must be viewed with increasing concern for this country, which is making strenuous effort to chart out a place on the world map.

For this fledgling democracy, it means an exodus of talents, brain-drain and a loss of productive labour force and thus weakening of the reform measures and viability of the nation — economic and intellectual. Small wonder, people haunted by despair, disillusionment, deprivation, poverty and social cataclysm, want to flee the country. But did we ever think of the colossal loss of brain-power, and productive entrepreneurs this country will be facing because of the exodus of a vibrant youth force, intellectually aggressive and potentially useful to the nation.

People leaving the country are not always welcome guests in the countries like the US, Germany, South Korea, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Emirates, Iran and far up to Australia. For many countries, it stirs fears of unemployment and social disturbances that

such an exodus might bring to their not-so-vibrant economies. In recent times, many European countries have tightened their immigration procedures by imposing exorbitant fees for visa application with no guarantee for entertaining the application.

The scare about the post-communist exodus has given a jolt to many affluent western countries. Given the limitations of resources, even the US, mainly the place where most of the emigres want to go, can hardly absorb all these people trying to go there. Estimates for emigration figures for 1992 and onward from Russia only ranged between 6,00,000 and 800,000. Russians themselves joke with a bitter irony, 'This is not an emigration, this is evacuation'. Despite the fact that the number is very big, these people from East European countries and Russia will not be unwelcome in either Germany or the US, because they are educated, technically knowledgeable, disciplined and not coloured, the last attribute being counted as a high plus point.

Paradoxically, the prospect for Bangladeshi emigrants, despite the fact they are quite talented and hard-working, looks very grim. The Consular Office of the US, of late, is trying to discourage the prospective applicants in all possible ways. But still most Bangladeshis are making relentless efforts to leave the country in search of a better living and better education for their children. Many of these people have even failed to make ends meet with second jobs after their regular work either in a office or a firm. Hard-pressed by joblessness, and impoverishment, these young men, bubbling with energy and vigour are taking up any job, even

such as hired mastans and agents for drug-trafficking, trafficking in children and women and smuggling along border zones.

But all these 'trades' bring about only temporary gains and people inside the country are restive. It is common knowledge that every country has its rich and poor classes. But in Bangla-desh the gap between them is especially big and is yawning. No wonder, the richest, about 10 per cent, of families enjoy a life-style that is highly extra-vagant, but on the other side, is an enormous group, so to say about 90 per cent of the population, approaching the despair of Sub-Saharan Africa. But how the situation could come to such a sorry pass? Perversely, of course, the rich have helped perpetuate the economic malaise allegedly by such tactics as sending their money to safe havens abroad and dodging taxes that could help ease domestic deficits.

Joblessness and lack of economic activities have bred endemic poverty in the country. In some places, the rich and poor societies exist cheek by jowl. The facade of gleaming luxury apartment houses in some areas of the country appear in our view while the other group lives amid the stench of urine in the narrow rain-rutted streets close to these villas. Most worrisome to doctors is the widespread malnutrition which is producing a generation of stunted citizens. Poverty now embraces even those with skills and jobs simply because the value of money has shrunk. The difference between this class of people and the other is that they (rich) have money that reproduces. With such a migration fever grip-

ping the country, the brain drain will aggravate the shortage of skilled personnel needed at different tiers of the administration. A recent survey of Computer professionals found that almost all of them plan to leave. The choice for the would-be emigrants is the US because of the high prospect of employment opportunities there and not so harsher racial tensions that prove to be a sort of deterrents in other countries. Asian countries on the other hand do not offer an attractive alternative. Singapore and Japan discourage immigration. Taiwan, Australia, Canada & the US welcome only Hong Kong immigrants who have financial expertise mostly in the 35 to 45 age group with manufacturing and trading background and have money to invest. Viewed in this respect, Bangladeshi immigrants are no welcome guests there, rather a liability for those countries.

Even with money and skills, starting life over a new country is not easy. Differences in the systems and loss of connections in an alien country have proved to be a serious handicap. Despite all these deterrents people regardless of age are making relentless efforts to be in the US with a keen resolve to make good in their adopted land. It is the 'American dream' that haunts them all the time.

The final destination of all these emigres differs from profession to profession, although most scientists and engineers prefer to settle in the US. Even in the most optimistic scenario, the US and western Europe will not be able to absorb all the future emigrants. Most Bangladeshis as such, are expressing their interest in such regions as Australia, New Zealand, and other Latin American countries. One can also expect that

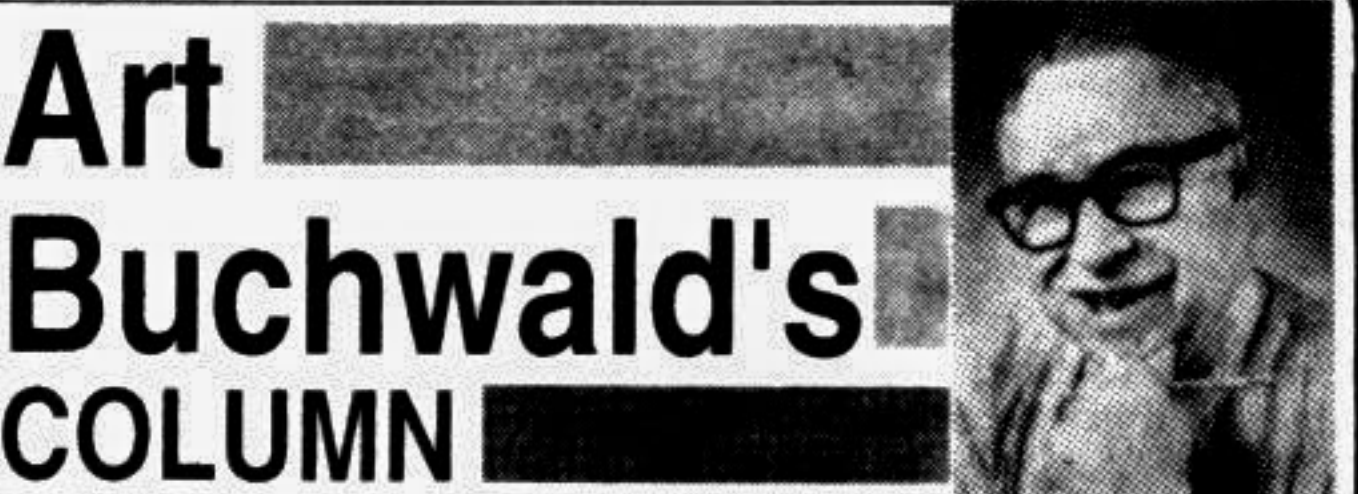
the oil rich countries of the Persian Gulf will become a popular destination for the Muslim population of the Central Asia.

No wonder, the cost of these massive exodus of talented scientists, engineers, educationists, doctors and technicians from the country will be very high. Without a shadow of doubt, it will have a tell-tale effect on the economic and educational development of the country because of a massive short-fall of expert workforce. Despite the fact that this exodus of talents from our country will have a devastating impact on our economy and scientific research, its positive side can hardly be discounted. The new emigrants will contribute immensely to the economic growth, technical progress and cultural development of the host countries. As some projections indicate, by the end of 2000, there will be a shortage of some 400,000 engineers and researchers in the US and about 27,000 Ph.D.s. In such a scenario, the

inflow of graduate engineers from such countries as Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan will add to the wealth of that country.

Although the possibility is quite remote, we can expect against all odds that this emigration syndrome might some day usher in an era of prosperity for our country. The initial positive effect will be that the remittances of these emigres from abroad will help to support the people and the economy back home in the most turbulent period we are now passing through. Most important, with the reforms taking roots in the country, many of the emigrants will themselves come back home after a period of stay in the west, bringing back with them expertise, new skills, money and knowledge. This treasure of knowledge that they will carry may help enrich the faltering economy of the country.

Like Italians in the 60's and Koreans in the 70's they will use capital and experience gained abroad to re-vitalise the economy, establish new business and trades at home as well as help in re-structuring the educational programmes of schools, colleges and universities within the country after the model of the standard colleges and universities abroad.



Art Buchwald's COLUMN

The System is Now

W HENEVER I have nothing to do I think of ways to improve the legal system in this country. This does not mean that it needs much improving, but a teenie-weenie bit wouldn't hurt.

If I have learned one thing from the O J Simpson trial, it is that as soon as they get in the courtroom lawyers never seem to be able to find the piece of paper they are looking for. I have come to the conclusion that the length of a trial could be cut in half if basketball rules were applied to the legal profession. In pro basketball a team has to shoot in 24 seconds or lose possession of the ball to the opposing side. This has speeded up the game and prevented the players from 'freezing the ball' when they are ahead.

If applied to legal proceedings, lawyers on both sides would have only 24 seconds to locate a document. If they couldn't do it, they would be penalized and the judge would hold them in contempt of court.

By imposing this kind of regulation lawyers would no longer be able to pretend that they don't know where a piece of paper is, nor could they claim that they have no idea what they're looking for.

One of the strategies frequently used by lawyers is to bring out a 500-page loose-leaf notebook and start fumbling through it as if they have just seen it for the first time. While all eyes are on them, they suddenly find what they want and slam-dunk it in the witness' face.

If the 24-second rule is adopted, attorneys will either have to shoot or dribble, which is all most of them do anyway.

Another idea I had for the improvement of the profession comes from ice hockey. If a lawyer is guilty of calling the other lawyer some terrible name, the offending counsel would be sent to the penalty box and forced to sit out the questioning of the next two witnesses, thus putting his side in a scoreless situation.

Sports are far better policed than the legal profession, and the players take the rules very seriously since they will be booted out if they don't obey the regulations. This is not true of the legal profession, which, thanks to the Simpson case, is now considered a contact sport — anything goes as long as the judge is not looking.

To the Editor...

District quota

Sir, I disagree with the quota system of doing away with quota system, published in your issue of 29th June, 1995.

Quota system was introduced to ensure equitable representation of different areas of the country in the services. The then East Pakistan was the main beneficiary of the system. Now a completely different argument is being advanced for the same area now constituting Bangladesh.

While the 'Analyst' argues for abolition of district quota for the sake of merit, at the same time he advocates raising of women's quota from existing 15 per cent to 30 per cent. That seems to be a paradox. It is only fair that all areas of the country should have equitable representation in services for smooth national integration.

At the moment we find the domination of three/four districts in the services. And this tendency is perpetuating.

I personally feel that quota system in Pakistan time was fair and just. In that system merit quota was 20 per cent and the rest was regional quota. In the interest of justice and fairness we should revert to that.

If the 'Analyst' pleads for raising of women's quota on the ground that deprivation of women is very severe

in Bangladesh, the same argument is applicable to many areas and districts of the country.

The 'Analyst' argues that district quota has lost its old meaning in view of the increase of the number of districts from 21 to 64. This problem can be solved by fixing quota for the areas comprising the old districts such as greater Dinajpur, greater Bogra or greater Faridpur.

However, I subscribe to the views of the 'Analyst' that there should be no freedom fighters' quota since there are no more freedom fighters of eligible age after 25 years of independence.

I, therefore, urge our Cabinet and the Parliament to fix the merit quota at no more than 20 per cent and the rest 80 per cent on regional basis for the old districts.

Saleh Ahmed Choudhury Dhaka Cantt., Dhaka

English medium students

Sir, I would like to draw your attention towards some of the students from English medium schools who after passing 'O' and 'A' levels see their future bleak.

After finishing the course the students endeavour to get admission in local educational institutions. But

the authorities of the concerned institutions keep on importuning for high grades whereas countries like US, UK etc are accepting students even with lower grades compared to ours.

Therefore, most of the students are preferring foreign educational institutions. Huge amount of foreign currency is also going out of the country.

Some of our parents can't afford this. With no alternative some of the students are still keen to study here but they face obstructions as stated above. This must be removed to facilitate prosecution of their studies in the country.

Many of the students after taking degrees are going abroad and so a part of our talent is lost to the country. Does the government want all this talent to keep on leaving the country? Of course not. And that's why also the above obstructions must go.

Faisal An Advanced level student Dhaka

Self-billing system

Sir, Years back self-billing system was introduced in Dhaka region by the PDB to provide relief to the consumers of electricity against constant harassment and often blackmailing by corrupt meter-readers/inspectors.

Some PDB meter-readers used to give

spurious, inflated and irregular bills to the honest consumers who allegedly did not satisfy them.

In Uttara Model Town we have been paying electric bills under self-billing system regularly. But a few days back the DESA officials have informed us that the self-billing system is being withdrawn and computerized system is being introduced for billing purpose.

The question is: the computer does not work by itself. It will be fed by the same category of officials of DESA, and again spurious and inflated bills may start coming!

The electricity consumers of Uttara Model Town are, therefore, alarmed at the DESA's move to withdraw self-billing system. This move seems to be ill-conceived and counter-productive, if not ill-intentioned.

The proposed system may give rise to more corruption and result in a bigger system loss as the so-called corrupt meter-readers/inspectors may again tamper with meters of the consumers in exchange of alleged gratifications.

We urge upon the DESA and also others concerned to retain the self-billing system and spare the honest consumers from further harassment.

A retired Joint Secretary