The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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On to the Second Quarter

We carved a state of our very own in 1971 with a price seldom. if ever paid by any other people. To make our independence true we should perform being eternally beholden to that price — the blood and dignity of millions from our midst. Only a fulfilling social and cultural becoming can take this puny 25 years past a century and far more of an ever-enriching nationhood. And only a state of shared well-being can ensure that.

The silver jubilee celebrations have very nicely been heralded by a congenial political change in the land and the first big success in engaging the stupendous physical problems facing this country. What better one can wish than this beginning to hold and our state to score evernew victories overcoming the challenges of the new millennium. Nothing short of universal literacy and meaningfully true education, optimum gainful employment equally of both men and women, empowerment of all backward sections of our people and perfect insurance against non-civil blackout of the citizen's rights can enable us to profitably grapple with everything standing in the way of our catching up with the leading nations of the world. Japan has done it from worse beginning. So had China and the nations on the Pacific rim. Except for China and India now raring to go ahead full tilt, all of the super performing nations are small. And if small is beautiful to credit Schumacker, in the economic sphere — we are very ideally small. But let us beware of paying prices for that spurt with culture, taking lessons from some of these achiever nations.

The Bengalee people of this clime fought a very unequal war in 1971 — and won the bloody encounter through heroism and bravery, patriotism and sheer power and willingness to undergo the ultimate of sacrifices. But their war was shared by others specially India as hardly ever matched by a good turn done by a state to its neighbour. To the Indian people and their state and to Russia, the successors to Soviet Union, we shall be ever bounden in gratitude. Valiant Indian fighters in our war with Pakistan, both on and off the front, must be respectfully recognised with honour by our state.

At this moment of commencement of our new journey, we remember the founder of this state Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for his glorious achievement, sanctified the more by his death as a martyr and Tajuddin Ahmed who shaped and led the Liberation War and was to follow his dear leader into martyrdom on the 80th day of Mujib's gory parting.

WTO Does it Right

On the face of it, the first ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has been a success. A package of measures aimed to liberalise trade through investment, fair competition and government contracts under global trade rules has been adopted by the 128-member world trade body. The most outstanding deal came in the form of an agreement on eliminating tariffs on computer equipment by the year 2000. The indication is that more than 90 per cent of global trade in information technology will soon be covered by the Information Technology Agreement.

While some progress has been made in the area of simplifying investment rules, preventing anticompetitive business practices and root out corruption in lucrative government contracts, the more controversial issues such as labour standard and environment have been skirted around for the sake of a compromise deal. If the rich, developed part of the globe considers cheap labour in some developing countries a threat to fair trade competition in the world, there are equally - and potentially more dangerous — anti-competitive practices and developments all across the globe.

Regional trade bodies such as the European Monetary Union, North American Free Trade Agreement etc, are created basically to protect member countries' interests. Reprieve of tariffs and other mutual concessions within such trade blocs can surely frustrate any hope of least developed countries and even other developed countries from a different region to have access to the bodies' market. Such protectionism does exist in other areas such as agro-industries in the developed West. So, before dismantling the barrier of cheap labour for paving the way of trade liberalisation, such anti-liberal policies have to be taken care of.

Gas Crisis

The gas crisis that has severely hit Chittagong is an example of how bad management of a resource abundantly available, can be a cause of needless suffering. The indication of a shortage of gas was received well in time but the urgency to address the problem did not match it. A report says both slow pace of work and political unrest are to blame for the failure to complete a new pipeline called A-B

line on schedule. The question therefore is: if the political agitation halted the work, why was not the construction work taken up with double urgency? Why was the pace of work further slowed down? Now that the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited and Raozan power plant had to be closed, we can count heavy losses on our national exchequer. Apart from the monetary loss, its cumulative negative impact on production and economy will be great. These are areas where forward-looking plans are always

necessary. We must learn to plan for the future. Think of gas supply all over the country coming to a halt all on a sudden because nobody monitored it, nor gave a serious thought to such a scenario. The problem in Chittagong should keep us on the alert about discreetly using a natural resource we have in plenty.

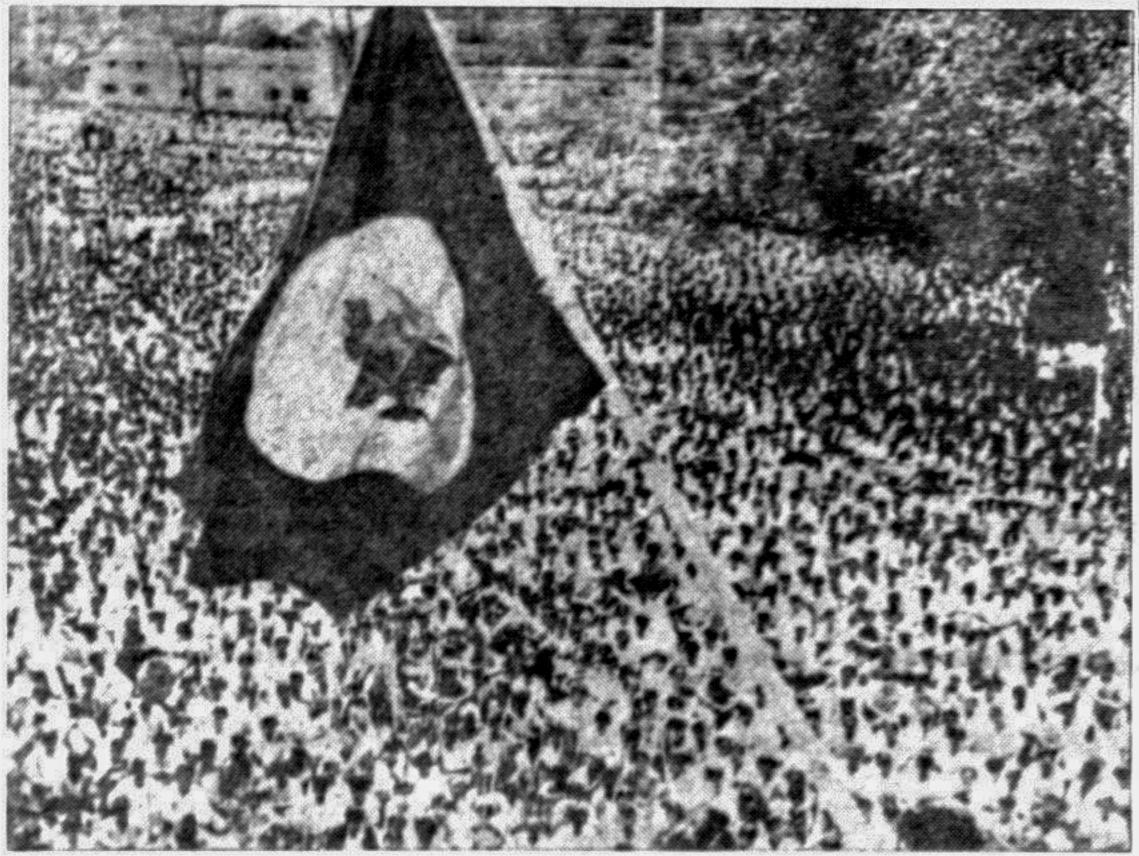
Pledge for a Better Future

by Mahfuz Anam

As we celebrate the 25th year of our independence, we once again feel extremely proud of the fact that years ago our men, women and the young together waged an armed struggle to gain our independence from Pakistan, a country that had started a genocide to crush and destroy our dreams.

The most important edifice required for the Bangladesh of our dreams is of course democracy. It has been proven over and over again that whenever democracy was destroyed in our land, all sorts of evil forces gained ground. It is only natural that those who come to power without the support of the people have to create all sorts of artificial forces to prop them up. They play on existing divisiveness and use them to consolidate their power. It is the divisiveness created in those times that still divides the nation today. It is our view that if democracy be allowed a free play then much of that which divides the nation will resolve itself through the process of informed public opinion. As people will give their verdict through election after election, forces that survive on lies and distortions will automatically get eliminated. Thus, an essential ingredient of building our future must entail strengthening democracy and the parliamentary culture. We note with regret that BNP

appears to be following the path of the previous opposition party in boycotting the Parliament. It must be mentioned that Awami League did not start its boycott till well after three years in Parliament, and that it did unitedly with other opposition parties. But that is not the point We write now, as we did then, that it is wrong to denigrate the Parliament in such a manner. Nothing has happened to conclude that Parliament has become ineffective. The various committees that should have been formed by now - the delay in many cases



is due to absence of opposition names — can greatly strengthen the supervisory role of the elected representatives. With all its present flaws. Parliament still provides the best chance for an accountable and transparent government. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already announced plans to increase the working facilities of

the MPs which will allow the public representatives to perform their tasks better.

For far too long divisive pol-ities has monopolised the centre stage of our national politics. This must be replaced by development politics. Though if sounds like a platitude, however the bottom line is that unless we can bring about a drastic

change in our growth rate, and do something about taking care of our bottom fifty per cent of our population, all talk about democracy and the future will amount to nothing. As far as we are concerned, in today's context patriotism has only one definition - national development. All our energies will now have to be directed to one goal,

that of improving the lot of our

As we aspire to take our place in the comity of nations. we must realise that a great force of change is sweeping the world. Technology is opening up all new possibilities which is already changing the way we do things. Changes that are on the way, will fundamentally alter the way our lives, societies; and nations are organised.

How will Bangladesh fit into that altered scene? This is the core question that should concern our leaders. If we think how China has changed its economy, how Vietnam has reformed and how Malaysia. Thailand and Indonesia brought about their economic miracles, we will see that the answer lies in their capacity to change, adopt, adept and take advantage of the new opportunities that global change is causing.

Can Bangladesh do the same? If our politics continues to be a prisoner of the past, if our thinking remain backward and if our governance and implementation of policies continue to be as archaic as they are, then the answer is a resounding NO. With the existing system we cannot be a part of the global change and as such take advantage of the opportunities that are bound to come

On the 25th anniversary of our independence, our strongest plea would be to all, to be aware that the world is undergoing a drastic change, and we must be a part of that process. Businessas usual approach will marginalise us. To prevent that from happening we have to make significant investment in democracy, good governance and human resource development. Let that be our resolve on this auspicious occasion.

Silver Jubilee to Augur Well for Development

Since the people have realised that good 'neighbourliness' is a pre-condition of development, the political parties also should come to a consensus in this regard, argues Muhammad Quamrul Islam.

TS a pleasant coincidence that West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu came on a six-day visit to Bangladesh, from November 27, 1996, when year round celebration of Silver Jubilee of independence and liberation war was reaching its climax. He returned to Calcutta on December 2, 1996, after working out a formula for resolving the long-standing Ganges water sharing issue. He travelled to New Delhi to apprise Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda of his discussions and understanding with the Bangladesh leaders, to facilitate the signing of agreement between Bangladesh and India. It has not been an easy sail for Jyoti Basu to achieve this breakthrough; even the West Bengal Congress opposition leaders have raised questions on his visit, as reported in the press. In Bangladesh, we know very well, a section of self-seeking politicians always nag at the relations between the two closest neighbours. However, this did not bring any benefit to the peoples on either side of the Jyoti Basu is one of the se-

T is a proud and jubilant

nation that celebrates the

Silver Jubilee of its

independence. It is a young and

vigorous nation that wants to

tell the world, once again, that

it will deliver on the pledges of

our Liberation War. It is a sad

and humble nation that

realises on its 25th anniversary

that much of its promise of the

last two decades-and-a-half

remains unrealised. It is

however a determined nation

that announces, once again, its

commitment to build the Sonar

year of our independence, we

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gether waged an armed struggle

to gain our independence from

Pakistan, a country that had

started a genocide to crush and

destroy our dreams. As we re-

call the faces, the moments and

the events, we cannot but re-

alise how fortunate we were. It

was a privilege to have been

given a chance to fight for the

however, that much of the gains

of our hard earned freedom we

quickly lost. Conspiracy won

the day. The assassination of

Bangabandhu along with his

family members began our slide

into military dictatorships

which fed on a wholesale dis-

tortion of our history, espe-

cially that of our Liberation

War. Democracy was restored in

'91 after a long and protracted

anti-autocracy movement. But

by then already fifteen years of

distorted history, and direct

and indirect denigration of the

values and principles of our

freedom struggle wrought havoc

sary we have to regain what we

had lost during the years of mil-

itary and quasi-military rules.

Now on the 25th anniver-

on the national psyche.

There is no denying the fact

freedom of our nation.

As we celebrate the 25th

Bangla of its dreams.

nior-most politicians of the sub-continent, having his ancestral home at Baradi, a village in Sonargaon thana of Narayangani district. After the partition in 1947. Basu and his family migrated to the Indian state of West Bengal. On November 30, 1996, he enthralled the huge audience at the Shilpakala Academy by vivid expositions of his politics and long career passing through critical junctures of history. Basu has expressed his desire to donate his ancestral property for the cause of the people, to the Government of Bangladesh. But, it is learnt that vested (Enemy) Property Act is standing in the way. However, government of Sheikh Hasina will

review this matter, we hope. It was not water issue only.

that was discussed in course of the visit of Jyoti Basu and his entourage. Basu has suggested to reduce the galloping trade imbalance between Bangladesh and India. His sincere feeling and concern for Bangladesh were quite apparent in his speech at Shilpakala Academy Presently, Bangladesh imports goods worth about US dollar 1.2 billion from India against exports worth US dollar 72 milion to India. At BIDS healthy cultural activities. Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies) seminar on December 1, 1996, West Bengal Finance Minister has said that tremendous development has been achieved recently in West Bangal due to decentralisation

of the administration and direct participation of common man; as compared with other parts of India. Currently, the general production rate in West Bengal stands at 7.3 per cent, while in the whole of India the average is 5.9 per cent. We don't know if our policy Makers have taken note of it! Ours should be more than West Bengal, as we are independent and sovereign

republic A section of our intellectuals are perhaps not wrong to suggest to consider the growth model of Indian state of West Bengal, while planning and implementing our five year plan and ADP, in the prevailing situation. Let us have a glimpse of history. Before partition of India in 1947, the position of West Bengal was at the top in India on various counts. In subsequent 30 years, it was reduced to a very weak state. In 1977, Left Front came to power when things started to change towards development, with new work programmes implemented with vigour and honesty. Over the last two decades of good

governance West Bengal is again in the forefront of the Indian states in many respects education, culture, agriculture, industry. At present, education up to 12th class is free. Every year students get books free of cost, up to class V. Simultaneously, various measures have been undertaken to motivate the youth community through library development. sports and recreation and

In the country side, where majority of the population reside, socio-economic changes have occurred in the right direction. Through 'Panchayeti Raj project, rural people have been organised at the grassroot level, to meaningfully decentralise power at the local level. As far as possible, land reform has been carried out, which has contributed to agricultural development. At village level, the main responsibility to construct roads, schools etc. lies with the local organisations.

In the industrial sector also West Bengal lorged ahead under the Left Front Government. Earlier, it was lagging behind other Indian states. The work started with cottage and small industries. In 1991, when central government relaxed strict controls over the states, the state government took up quick industrialisation programme, by foreign investment, to combat increasing unemployment and despair. Party's ideological position did not stand in the way. Under the new industrial policy, foreign investors were invited to invest in West Bangal, which provided attractive facilities and congenial atmosphere. Widely reputed investors from Lurope, America and Asia responded to the call in a big way. This was because

an investment-friendly environment was built up to draw them in Infrastructural facilities, availability of raw materials, and skilled manpower have expedited the process of industrialisation. Calcutta-Shiliguri Express Way, World Trade Centre. Bengal Airways. Food Processing Park have been built. In the field of electronics, a selfsufficient complex on a 100 acre area has been established. which contains one modular standard Design Factory, world-wide modern telecommunications net-work, one Software Technology Park. There are spurts of development in all sub-sectors.

in this very state of West Bengal, during '70s, industries were getting sick and closed one after another, or moved out to other states. There was extreme dissatisfaction among the workers. There was critical shortage of electricity, without which industry cannot be kept running. Now. West Bengal has not only met its deficit, but also generates surplus electricity for export to other states. Electricity generation has increased to 4500 megawatts from the level of 945 megawatts in 1976. And it is supplied at low tariff. Villagers also got electricity expe-

ditiously. These unprecedented overall development has taken place under the guidance of government in an integrated manner, three components of which are — government initiative, private sector and joint approach. West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation Ltd. and West Bengal Electronics Industry Development Corporation prepared the stage of takeoff. West Bengal has set an example of communal harmony, which in turn has contributed

to development. The honesty of government leadership is beyond dispute.

By any criterion it was felt that the economy of Bangladesh would move fast after attainment of independence, the Sil ver Jubilee of which is celebrated now. As an independent and sovereign republic, it has all the Ministries, including Foreign Ministry with em-bassies abroad, and representations in the UN system and other international bodies. The international support was forthcoming. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said that Taka 1 lakh 6 hundred 51 crore has been spent on account of development during the last two decades. But, expected result has not been achieved. There are no lack of studies, either nationally or internationally, to determine the extent of abysmal poverty of Bangladesh. Reports indicate that more than 50 per cent of the population live below the poverty line. However, on the other side, the number of rich people has also increased manifold; but with this the discrimination between rich and poor, city and village and other inequalities have also been ac-

centuated. The reasons are obvious. In the absence of clean politics and sound administration, we have seen rampant corruption. miss-management, inefficiency and wastage. There is no use to blame one regime or the other; the net effect on the people has every time been painful. The permanent bureaucracy and toreign trained officials could not be of any use to the country. Hardly ministers, bureaucrats and other employees suffer punishment for corruption! There has been all talk about transparency and accountability. To

cleanse the augean stable, examples of honesty will have to be set at the top and account ability enforced from there, to start with

It is also necessary to ask as to why so much difference between Bangladesh and West Bengal We can't accept that Bengalees are incapable of doing constructive works. If West Bengal can progress, why can't we! A cursory glance will reveal that our backwardness is due to the selfish aggrandisement by elite group and not lathergy of common man. A sub-group of the elite who changed their lot. say by alleged grabbing of Hindu property under the cover of Vested (Enemy) Property Act. etc. will always be on the look out to fish in troubled water, by what is called inciting communal politics; and, as such, can never be an aid or partner in national development. To facilitate development of the country, it is necessary to repeal the aforesaid black law, at the earliest convenience. Else, the general mass will groan in poverty Here and the elite few may find abode in developed countries without caring for them!

We feel the people have become aware of the precarious situation, for which they have effected a political change on 12th June, 1996. Incidentally, the visit of Jyoti Basu has brought to the fore various development issues. On the Silver Jubilee of Victory Day, let us vindicate our common goal for development, for which good neighbourliness is an essential pre-condition. Will the mainstream political parties arrive at a consensus in the regard? After all, if the country does not prosper, what is the use of their politics. Let us raise the 'image' of Bangladesh.

The writer is an economist and advocate. Bangladesh Supreme Court.

KLM/Biman and business

Sir, After reading the reports

of the Biman and KLM affair. want to make some general comments on doing business in Bangladesh. The lack of qualification and carelessness of the so-called managers are no doubt two of the several reasons for such failures. Even though this is true everywhere, in Bangladesh this is a serious and persistent problem and is taking its toll at all levels. It is therefore very surprising to see the BOI's advertisement, in which they are promoting investment in Bangladesh. Or is this just a joke?

One will fail to take this seriously after knowing the entire system in Bangladesh. Probably most of us have seen the advertisement which frequently appears in the Newsweek. The Economist etc., — Discover Bangladesh and let your business boom! followed by reasons why one should consider it. Everyone who is in business here. knows the lack of having a basic platform to be able to set up a strong and healthy business. One of the many examples is the KLM, which clearly shows how reluctantly and carelessly the government officials messed around with these issues. A reputed, strong and healthy company like KLM will not suffer that much, since they have lots of other opportunities. This cannot be said about Biman. since this company still have to learn a lot, to be competitive with others. This is surely not

only my opinion but actually

this is what is apparent. Even

though Biman's rates are cheaper, people who can afford it, for several reasons, often avoid flying Biman. Has Biman

ever ask itself: why? Biman should at first do their homework and then try to be competitive. The way they are trying it at present calls the competence and behaviour of their managers into question. This is perhaps also true for the garments sector and others.

If the government really wants to attract foreign investments, it has to get moving with their homework. Businesses, NGOs whatever, they are all facing persistent problems on various issues, such as visa (4-6 months seems to be normal), customs clearance, a telephone/fax line (sums up to Tk 20,000 have to be paid). If one wants a quick phone connection, one has to pay for governmental services. However, all the problems can be solved easily by paying 'boxis', but is this really the way to do it? This attitude should change quickly if the country wants

A Foreigner Dhaka

Bangladesh in retrospect

Sir. This year we observe the Victory Day, December 16, with great eclat, political fervour and solemnity because it is Silver Jubilee of our War of Independence.

The greatest achievement of our great leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the freedom of then 75 million people of Bangladesh. He always

stood like a rock, like a mountain and he sacrificed his everything for the people of Bangladesh. Bangabandhu never compromised or surrendered to Pakistani rulers in the greater

interest of the country. However, unfortunately during his life-time some of the Indian leaders rather made a breach of agreement and withdrew the Ganges water unilaterally and arbitrarily depriving millions in our country their rightful share of an international river. The Indian leaders also took control over our territory, Berubari, but in exchange they refused to hand over our

rightful territory of Tinbigha. The Muslims of what is now Bangladesh established their first independent government in 1203 under Bakhtiyar Khilji From time to time since thir teenth century the New Delhi rulers like Pathans, Moghuls, British, and later the military rulers of Islamabad had been alluring and attempting to deprive the people of their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and their socio-economic and political rights. In the process they looted the wealth of our country and killed people.

Undergoing many trials and tribulations, agonies and woes of the last 800 years, we declared our independence on 26th March 1971 and after nine months of fierce fighting and making colossal sacrifices we achieved our independence on December 16, 1971 following unconditional surrender by the

Pakistani marauders. Unfortunately due to some deep-rooted conspiracy hatched

in the country, we lost our father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on

August 15, 1975. We are a sovereign and independent country. With our faces radiant and heads erect we stand proudly and blissfully today among the civilised nations of the world. We still have a long way to go in building a happy and prosperous Bangladesh. Let us all forget and forgive our past differences and bitterness and march forward optimistically to ensure a better tomorrow for 120 million

people of Bangladesh. We strongly feel that controversy about the father of the nation, if any, may be done away with and all the MPs irrespective of BNP, AL, JP or JI in the Jatiya Sangsad in a consensus of opinion may declare Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as father of the nation without further loss of time in the greatest interest of unity and integrity of our people inside the country.

Would our Awami League, BNP, JP and JI leaders kindly respond to the voice of the millions and move in the right direction?

OH Kabir 6. Hare Street,

Wari, Dhaka-1203 Determination and commitment

Sir, I have been monitoring the systems loss in the power sector for about one and a half decades. The job of an engineer in broad sense is to utilise naturai resources economically by applying scientific and techno-

logical methods for upgrading the standard of living of the people. In Bangladesh whatever resources we have are being utilised without least consideration for economy. We are producing newsprint at a much higher cost than that of other international producers. We are producing sugar, eggs - and even cultivating crops and fishes — at a much higher cost than in neighbouring West Bengal. As far as our productions are concerned we are capable of producing but as to make them cost-effective we are incapable of keeping it within any reasonable limit. The result is: the more we produce, the more we lose. By any international standard, our production cost is unreasonably high in any nationalised sector of industry Similarly, utility-oriented services like supply of electricity. gas and water are also registering high cost. But why?

The answer is flat and blatant: Plundering by those entrusted with the responsibility of the affairs. Of course, everybody is not a thief, but thieves have attained unwritten consensus much earlier to be at the helms. Political leadership had been exploited for conducting waste of national economy Labour unions, employees unions, officers associations etc., had been unitedly dictating

the country's power politics. Unconfident administra tions of autocratic governments lacking popular support were exploited by the cunning and ambitious leaders of associa tions to cover up their misdeeds and continue building up their own fortune. Thanks have

reached a state where democratic governments find it very difficult to bring back control on these leaders. Our superior service cadre officials stepped in where army officers used to roam about in the past.

Perhaps ex-president Ershad showed them the path at the cost of maneuvering national election results. They are now set in the game.

Would the aggression from inside continue unabated? Attack on power sector by its own employees and some greedy consumers under the cover of systems loss should be addressed and cleared up right now without disturbing anyone If the government is sincere and determined to eliminate plundering which is prevailing in the sector, I, as an elderly, am ready to provide ways and means without any remuneration. As a son of the soil, as an electrical engineer who has been witnessing the gradual degradation of the power sector and serious hurdle in the way to industrialisation, one can no longer sit idle, provided that the government wants to use his ability and method for the cure.

Elimination of systems loss would give birth to a healthy power sector that would neither face apathy of donors nor beg foreign blessing in the form of relief import of electricity. Perhaps, joint venture with other countries including India on equitable term might come up in the region.

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