# The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Friday, January 24, 1997

# Inform the Public

There was a wartime-like power black-out scene in our large cities on Tuesday. It was called loadshedding; but it had better be termed a major power breakdown, perhaps the worst in recent memory. The euphemistic deception of the so-called loadshedding overshooting the already insufferable daily shortage figure of 300 MW by a full hundred per cent to make up a total of 600 MW it is the innards of a thoroughly decrepit network that spurted in to full public view. The make-do myth has been exploded.

The phenomenal national losses on account of power failures has been gallingly underlined by the swan song of a disaster. And what we are impatiently looking forward to is an action programme here and now.

Such horrendous mechanical faults in the major power plants on top of the transmission related chinks we know of, and the shrinkage in the power generation capacity of the gas-fuelled units speak volubly of planning, management and maintenance deficiencies. We know that for the last nearly half a decade there was no determined effort nor any sizable project undertaken to increase the generation capacity or to repair or refurbish the distribution network. The World Bank's longstanding moratorium on release of funds to our energy sector has ended and MOUs have been firmed up with foreign companies for radically stepping up power generation through the discovery of new gas fields. Barge-mounted power generation units are also being talked of. Spade-work, too, seems to have been done with regard to import of electricity from India.

Obviously the short, medium and long-term perceptions are there but these have been aired so far only in a piecemeal and disjointed manner hardly making any comprehensive sense, or for that matter, any impression on the mind.

Let the government, inform the public by issuing a full and cohesive statement on the latest power situation, the options to turn a corner and finally the steps proposed by it to overhaul, modernise and expand the generation and distribution networks.

# Fertiliser Supply

At a meeting of the Awami League Parliamentary Party (ALPP) chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, a thorough review of the fertiliser distribution situation was made on Wednesday. It is quite heartening to see the government's concern at the reported problems facing the distribution of fertiliser or its price rise beyond the maximum rate fixed by the government in some places. It has been repeatedly claimed that there is no shortage of fertilizer in the country. Quite a number of measures too were taken to ensure that the stocks were sufficient and the supply unhindered. Buffer stocks were built up in as many as 20 places all over the country, fertiliser worth Tk 2,11,00,000 (two crore 11 lakh) was imported and licences of some dealers were cancelled on complaints of irregularities against them.

All these are admittedly good measures but the fact remains that somewhere something has gone wrong. The ALPP's meeting itself admits that the situation may not be critical yet; but unless the delivery system is further improved, there might be a fertiliser crisis in a number of areas. Indeed, the point where things go wrong appears to be the field-level distribution of this essential agricul-tural input. If the stock of fertiliser is all right, there is no reason why the system should fail to work.

Now here is a challenge before this government. During both Ershad's regime and BNP's rule, the dealers faced a lot of troubles — tolls at different stages for mastans being the greatest of all - in lifting their quotas of fertiliser. We do not know if anything similar is at work to frustrate smooth supply of fertiliser at the field level. To pinpoint the system's lapses, therefore, attention has to be given to that end. In this task, no partisan views can be entertained. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has instructed the MPs of her party to keep a close watch on the situation. We feel she could involve opposition MPs as well in the monitoring job. Ensuring timely distribution of fertiliser among farmers is too big an issue to be used for any narrow political purpose. Neither the farmers can be made to suffer nor the country be left to produce less than what it could with the help of fertiliser.

# Mayor Must Answer

Indeed, by suspending seven of its officials, the DCC and its boss Mayor Mohammad Hanif have admitted the corporation's and his personal failure to fight mosquitoes. This departmental action is hardly an adequate answer for the proliferation of the tiny but a menacing insect. It was apparent quite sometime ago that the DCC was either not fighting a serious battle or had given up before the real fight began.

We remember, Mayor Hanif made mosquito eradication one of his pet agenda when he took office. But after two years on the job he can claim very little success. The mayor could do with some introspection.

In this context we would refer to the meeting of the coordination committee for the city's different service agencies. In that meeting various steps were decided as part of a campaign against mosquito. We like to know why the meeting could not be held earlier and those measures taken beforehand. Second, even after the decisions have been arrived at why they are not being implemented expeditiously enough? The issue could be treated on a more urgent basis than this. The mayor is faulted on this count. Action or no action against his staff, the city people are keen to see the launching of on effective drive against the mosquito menace.

# Economics of Sonar Bangla: Resistance to Pauperisation

In the fitness of things, the course of politics should take turn in favour of the poor majority, and the government must endeavour to contain the wave of corruption and terrorism, crimes and lawlessness, writes Abdul Khaleque.

FTER Plassey, East India Company hurried to loot Bengal, the richest and the most prosperous province of India, and to consolidate its foothold by breaking the power of Muslim landed gentry and destroying industrial manufactures and crafts which brought enormous wealth in gold from internal and external markets. The new revenue system extracted the uttermost farthing from cultivators and it was no wonder that the famine of 1769-1770 swept away a third

of the population of Bengal. The influx of Indian treasure added considerably to British cash capital enabling Britain to set up industries in the wake of inventions such as spinning jenny (1774), steam engine (1768), power loom (1785) etc. which brought about the industrial revolution. A new class of capitalists and robber barons of East India Company pressurized British Parliament to close British market to Indian products, and to open Indian market free to British manufactures. The collapse of our manufactures and crafts compelled workers, weavers and artisans to move back to agriculture for survival. The rulers did not import into India the newly invented machines and techniques of production, and India gradually became an agricultural colony of industrial Britain, supplying under compulsion raw materials and providing monopoly market for British products. The economic exploitation was so cruel that by the time British rule ended in 1947. Bengal was a staking and dying province of India. The partition of Bengal in 1947 brought in the share of West Bengal almost all that was industrial and commercial in pre-

partition Bengal. Now that we dream of Sonar Bangla we need to look before and after and pine for what is not. Sonar Bangla is an economic epithet of Bengal's richness and prosperity in term of gold stock and store. Tagore composed Sonar Bangla and sang to inspire people of Bengal to resist the British partition plan of Bengal. When we sing our national anthem (Sonar Bangla) we should breathe out resistance to further pauperisation of Bangladesh, urging upon government and fellow citizens the need to modernize our agricultural and industrial production. And in the fitness of

things, the course of politics should take turn in favour of the poor majority, and the government must endeavour to contain the wave of corruption, alcoholism, terrorism, crimes on women and children, com-

munalism and lawlessness.

About 150 years ago, India demanded modern industry but the rulers paid scant attention to industrial development. In Pakistani rule, we suffered from regional discrimination. After the devastation of 1971, the dismal industrial scene was handled by the government. At the moment, constraints of essential infrastructure, finance, management and labour skill; corruption; low productivity per head are the major debilitating industrial problems along with the outstanding problems of technology, foreign aid, law and order and investment climate. For a balanced agricultural and industrial development of competitive strength and stamina in the world economy, we shall have to face the constraints. And in agriculture, we need to (i) consolidate land-holdings for economic cultivation, (ii) rescue debt-ridden peasants from the clutch of exploiters and certificate case, (iii) supply inputs in time and in required quantity. (iv) educate people, (v) create employment opportunity for displaced agricultural labour, (vi) provide marketing facility for products within the country and outside. It may be borne in mind that the man behind the plough and his cattle do not have the required physical fitness to carry on the tough agricultural operations efficiently and economically.

India, Pakistan and some Asian countries which suffered from colonial subjugation have drawn up programme of resuscitation and restoration of their ancient crafts and skills as an integral part of their Master Plan and scored great success. At our industrial fairs, we saw recently huge rush into handicraft stalls of Pakistan, Iran and India. Metal, stone, wood, glass, leather, textile items dominated the spectacle. In the handicraft world, the Indian strategy has been to set up import houses abroad at the instance of manufacturers and run in many instances by Indians (associates of manufacturers). The strategy aims at keeping all the benefits out of the transactions to Indian interest

The recent Arab fascination for

lungi as male undergarment drew Indian attention and India is known to have the

monopoly in its export.

Bangladesh will do well to make an economic survey pertaining to the prospect of revival of muslin, wood and ivory works, metal and needle crafts etc. which once made Bengal so famous. Among other things, the cultivation of indigo, cotton and spices may be restored. Tragically enough, the historic fame of Jamdani has substantially travelled across the border of Bangladesh. Muslin is almost gone for lack of patronage from the present generation of socio-economic high-ups whose love for western dress is spectacular. The left-over garments of USA and Japan are very popular in Bangladesh. Lungi and dhuti are disappearing fast, giving way to pant and

Our economic policy has created a mercantile gentry whose tastes are unpredictable unlike those of Zaminders. Rajas, Moharajas and Nowabs whose taste for art, crafts, and manufactures with aesthetic beauty and special elegance was well-known. Although the present century is that of the common man, the racket of ancient and feudal aristocracy has not yet been played out in the capitalist countries and dictatorships. One can find in Italian cities furnishing and leather shops catering for European aristocrats of high pedigree with Bangladeshi plywood and leather. Aristocrats of classical and mercantile origin exercise dominant influence in British and German society. In Bangladesh, the mercantile gentry walk on the road of political ambition, and prefer

the corridor of power. Most people in Bangladesh do not like to hang on rural life any more and look for earliest opportunity to move out. The rural poor are desperate and have already created urban slums to the worry of municipal administration. One may feel tempted to argue that urbanisation is a sign of progress Bangladesh cannot perhaps afford such progress in view of the vastness of its rural population, most of whom are very poor. Whereas most advanced countries after initial vicissitudes succeeded in absorbing rural immigrants in urban occupations created in the wake of industrial development and commercial activities.

Bangladesh has the potentiality to provide income-earning opportunity to the rural poor if the rural development plan is properly drawn up and executed. Crafts, cottage and small industries may be established with modern technology to absorb quite a large number of job seekers. One important point for serious consideration is to control further growth of population by any means and stop the practice of begging. The psychology of our poor people has turned towards expectation of cash and relief, and credit from government source. Bangladesh is now full of credit defaulters to the detriment of the economy which is incapable of absorbing the huge mass of the unemployed who have no worthwhile skill and education. Manpower development for internal utilization and export has a big prospect and it is expected that foreign earnings on this count will constitute a big chunk of

wealth of Bangladesh. Of late, we talked too much about marvels of private leadership in development, losing sight of the fact that we do not have private enterprises with investible resource and technological know-how. In such a situation the role of government can hardly be overemphasised. It is, indeed, the government which alone can direct the course of economic activity along the principles and practices of social justice to which Bangladesh is committed constitutionally. The capitalist exploitative approach is negated by our constitutions, to say the least.

In conclusion, I would suggest that the course of politics should be directed in favour of the poor majority, along social ist economic principles and practices. Eminent economists representing diverse schools of thought (right, left, middle-ofroad) may be brought together at the instance of the government to draw up a full-scale twenty-year blueprint of socialist economic development as much performable as possible under the parliamentary democratic polity of Bangladesh. The words of our national anthem with their moving strength will, it is hoped, move Bangladesh in the direction of economic humanism and universal welfare.

The writer is former Inspector General of Police.

# by Raffat Binte Rashid

🛮 Dhaka Day by Day 🖠

Interdependence

for Survival

Some 24 years ago the Royal Botanic Garden Kew, UK had introduced a seed bank to save mother nature. Its main task is to collect seeds of plants from around the world that are on their way to extinction. Recently Professor Ghillean Prance, Director of the Kew gardens came to Bangladesh to collect samples of Bangladeshi seeds for his bank, before human interference totally wipe them off from the face of the

Due to merciless economic interference by humans with nature over the past years. 26 species of plants became extinct around the world and the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew has re-introduced these species in the wild not merely out of curiosity but for preservation as well.

Professor Prance, who is the Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew since 1988, came to Dhaka to attend the ninth biennial botanical conference which aimed at helping Bangladesh to improve and restore its natural resources in

practical ways. "I took the opportunity to come to Bangladesh to see the Sundarbans, world's biggest mangrove forest. It has a lot of wonderful wild area. In only two days time we've seen 45 different species of birds. We are not only going to help research the reason for the top dying of the sundaris but also encourage more organisation eco-tourism

in the future," said Sir Prance. His visit has helped him to see Bangladesh in a different light "I was pleased to notice that the local participants in the conference were aware of the problem to conserve what is left of their environment, they showed great enthusiasm, I believe that is a start. Moreover the government here is also keen to help resolve ecological problems." Prance expressed

his views. Professor Prance, who was born in Suffolk in 1937, was educated at Malvern college and Keble college where he obtained a BA in Botany and a D. Phil. His career began at the New

York Botanical Garden in 1963 as a research assistant and subsequently BA Krukoff curator of Amazonian Botany, Director and Vice President of Research and finally Senior Vice President for Science.

Prance, who is the author of 13 books, holds six honorary doctorates and in 1993 was elected Fellow of the Royal Society, and was knighted in July 1995. The paper that he submit ted in the conference stressed on conservation and importance of plants.

In this paper he said, "we need to conserve plant species because of human dependence upon them for many different uses and indeed for our survival. Plants provide our basic food crops, building materials. and medicines as well as oils. lubricants, rubber and other latexes, resins, wax, perfumes, dyes and fibres.

"An often neglected aspect is that a great diversity of plants is needed to keep the various natural ecosystems functioning stably. No organism exists alone but is dependent upon a multitude of interactions that relate them together. Pollination is one such example. Natural forests have many other less obvious but most essential practical uses such as the protection of watersheds to provide potable water for many cities, to stabilise soil, preventing erosion and often to reduce flooding because of their capacity to absorb and release

slowly much of the rainfall. "For the survival of a quality of life and the maintenance of the physical process such as climate patterns, atmosphere and soil the majority of the plant species are needed. It is therefore, of utmost importance that conservation techniques for plants aim at preserving as

many species as possible. We are a selfish species; that is how nature, because of the process of evolution, has made us. But how far should we allow this egotistical self of ours to push on — that is the point to ponder, after all we are humans, nature's best product.

# Flashback: Partition

# Muslim League Opposed Federation

HE Council for Defence and National Security which President Farooq Khan Leghari has constituted. was never in the scheme of things in Pakistan. The council will, no doubt, give legal and explicit role to the military in the country's governance. But it was never envisaged by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the

founder of Pakistan. In what turned out to be his last speech, he said at the Quetta Staff College on June 14, 1948, that "the executive authority flows from the head of the government of Pakistan, who is the governor-general and, therefore, any command or orders that may come to you cannot come without the sanction of the executive head." He praised the armed forces of Pakistan but made the executive head as

the final authority. By then the holocaust of partition was over and many people questioned Jinnah whether the division of the subcontinent was a correct decision. "A division had to take place. On both sides, in Hindustan and Pakistan, there are sections of people who may not agree with it, who may not like it, but in my judgment there was no other solution and I am sure future history will record its verdict in favour of it ..."

But he said he was convinced that "any idea of a United India could never has worked and in my judgment it would have led us to terrific disaster." He added : "May be that view is correct; may be it is not, that remains to be seen. "

Moreover, Lord Linlithgow, then the Vicerov, wrote on December 19, 1940 : " .... broken into separate and independent entities, India would lapse into a welter of contending powers in which free institutions would be suppressed and in which no one element would be able to defend itself against external attack."

The Viceroy was, no doubt, opposed to the Pakistan demand. But he felt that Muslim support for it would keep on growing unless there was a concrete alternative. And for him, the idea of federation, which the British had envisaged through the Government of India Act. 1935, was the best an-

Congress was not opposed to the idea of a federal structure but it did not want the scheme to petrify British rule and vested interests in India. The Indian States' Peoples Conference, a parallel of Congress in Indian states, decided that representatives should be elected and not nominated. Linlithgow conveyed through Ghanshyam Das Birla, an industrialist, who used to be Gandhiji's host in Delhi, a warning to Congress that any attempt to change the composition of the council of

states would encourage a movement for a federation of North-West comprising the Punjab, Sind, and the North-West Frontier Province - an-

other form of Pakistan. He said that "some influential men had openly advocated such a proposal in a private session of a Muslim conference in Lucknow a few weeks earlier. (According to Linlithgow, Birla himself suggested that the best

and find themselves "with only one side organised," that is, Congress. In a letter to Amery. secretary of state to India then, Linlithgow said that "the Muslims are now a very substantial and well-organised whole, and they have not the least intention of permitting progress to be made on lines that the Congress and the Hindu parties might be prepared to consider."

There is a letter of Amery.

# BETWEEN THE LINES

# Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

course might be to let the Muslims have their federation of the North-West.)

The League also did not reject the federation proposal outright, relying on the promised safeguards and the belief that Britain would be there to help it. But when this expectation did not materialise, Jinnah told Linlithgow that he would not support any scheme which would "produce a Hindu majority in a federal India. However, the opposition of the League or Congress was not very material. The Prince of Denmark in this drama was the community of Indian states. The British put the scheme in cold storage when the Princes

rejected it. Lord Mountbatten told me in London in 1971 that if the Princes had not been so "foolish" as to reject the federal idea, India would never have been partitioned. This is strange because what were these Princes without British might? They were merely marionettes in the hands of London. In fact, when Congress intensified the independence movement in the states. Linlithgow himself wrote to the King of England: "When they are attacked we are bound to give them countenance

and, if necessary, protection." Linlithgow and, for that matter, the viceroys before and after him, treated Jinnah on a par with Gandhiji; this impressed dissenting Muslim opinion. Here, not only the British but the Congress also was to blame because both Gandhi and Nehru again and again held talks with Jinnah and wrote to him to find out what the League wanted and what its grievances were.

The more the Congress leaders gave him importance, the taller Jinnah grew in stature. much to the exasperation and detriment of other Muslim leaders whom Jinnah was denigrating as "showboys" of the Hindus. Another factor that weighed

with the British in giving im-

portance to Jinnah was that

they "did not want to see the

break-up of the Muslim League"

dated January 25, 1941, in Linlithgow's papers, saying: "Jinnah and his Pakistanis are beginning to be almost more of a menace (than Congress) and to have lost all sense of realities .... If there is to be a Pakistan, Kashmir will obviously have to belong to Hindu India and the Nizam would probably have to clear out bag and baggage. The whole future of his state and dynasty, as in the complementary case of Kashmir, depends

on India remaining united and

on a basis of compromise be-

tween Hindu and Muslim."

After failing in his efforts to get the Congress and League leaders in his advisory committee. Linlithgow tried his best to exploit the differences between the two parties to prevent any devolution of power. However, Churchill, then the British prime minister, was under great pressure from America to associate the Indians with the war effort. He suggested the constitution of an Indian Council of Defence which would represent India at the Peace Conference at

the end of the war. He even wanted to fly to Delhi to disclose it directly to the Indians. But Linlithgow, with the help of Amery, had the project scotched. He did not want his flock, the viceroy's nominated council members. to lose face. This was in February 1942 and it was evident that till then the British government was thinking of an arrangement, however defective in substance, for India to remain as a single entity.

But Whitehall changed its mind very quickly. In about a month (March 29) Stafford Cripps, a cabinet minister, sent by the British government to win over the Indian people's support for the war in exchange for some say in the administration, presented a scheme which looked like sowing the seeds for the partition of India.

While seeking to transfer substantial powers to India, the scheme envisaged that "any province that was not prepared to accept the new constitution" could "retain its existing constitutional position" and that

cord to "a non-acceding province the same full status as the Indian state itself" and the right to frame its own constitu-The Cripps scheme did not mention Pakistan specifically

Britain would be willing to ac-

but its essential ingredients were there. Within two days of Cripps's arrival in New Delhi Amery sent a cable to Linlithgow (March 24) to say: "Jinnah, should have thought, will be content to realise that he has now got Pakistan in essence : whether as something substantive or as a bargaining point though no doubt the purely provincial delimitation will want a good deal of adjustment so as to create what he calls 'Zones'

# Provocative leader

Sir, I agree with your editorial of January 12 (Unhelpful Even Provocative). SK Hasina has a penchant for making provocative statements in and out of season; the latest on the threat of going for by-elections if BNP do not return to the JS. The fitting reply came from BNP, challenging AL to go for a full general election (in less than a year).

The question is : why we voters are supporting this dubious standard of politics in our country? A man can marry only a woman (and nothing else); and only politicians can run a state. So it looks like we do not have much of a choice.

There is — the people (who are fed up now pampering to old style political leadership) may go for a third-force political leadership. We have to came out of the vicious political environment. How?

A Husnain Dhaka

### "Consensus on Bangabandhu"

Sir. I would like to respond to Mr Mahmud Al Masum's letter (Star, Jan 14) on Bangabandhu. I agree with him 'not to confine Sheikh Mujib only as a party leader'. But Awami League appears to be projecting Bangabandhu both as a party leader (political) and as a leader of the nation (above politics). AL is reluctant to give up its self-defined role as the custodian, manager, arbitrator and judge about Bangabandhu; leaving little scope for non-Awami Leaguers to take any initiative or play any contributing role. If the latter are denied that role. however minor, then there is no

sense of participation. This psychological block has to be delicately examined by the Al leadership in its strategy for obtaining a national consensus. The political beliefs of an individual citizen, even indirectly, goes beyond reason and logic, and is built up based

partly on faith (as in religion). There are two approaches thrust, or persuasion; and there are two target groups: the other political or activist parties, and the 'neutral' or 'nonpolitical' citizens. The resistance or acceptance levels in these two groups are different. In the cultural field (ours has fortunately a homogeneity), this type of conflict is absent or minimal.

To place Bangabandhu in the right place or pedestal, the convenors must have national consensus, and not based on oneparty initiative. Will Awami League respond to this line of thinking?

A citizen Dhaka

# Global science

Sir. Most scientists take pride in their objectivity Curiosity is an essential driving force for all good science. The scientists, researchers and technologists should be encouraged to find ways to reach out to the public and the scientists should open out their world towards non-scientists.

Majority of the Chinese population are enthusiastic and optimistic about science and technology and trust scientific workers and institutions. President of the Chinese Academy of Science believes that a golden age for China's scientific development is coming and great developments will take place as the country continuously improves its scientific and technological conditions.

The Clinton administration announces its own list of broad research areas that relate to national goals. Research opportunities allow undergraduate students to experience the passion for discovery that motivates good scientists and that is the ultimate source of the US's success in science and technol

ogy. The US scientists communicate to the public how that passion contributes to education and to the generation of newer technologies.

International cooperation is essential for the advancement of science. Regional cooperation should also be encouraged. Mentionable here is Japanese contribution to build up strong research activities in the Asia Pacific region. The Japanese science community was puzzled by US requests for contributions to the Super-conducting Super Collider (SSC) after the plan and design had been fixed. Prof Kazi Nakai, an eminent scientist of the KEK National Laboratory of the Tsukuba science city in Japan said that a proper cooperative project could only be established if it had been discussed by all parties at the planning stage. He believes that instead of making a contribution, which covers only a small fraction of the US of European projects, it is much more important for Japan to build a facility in the third region of the globe. The 14th International

Conference on High Energy Accelerators was held in Tsukuba Science City where I had a scope to talk with Prof Kazi Nakai. Many researchers from different countries of the world were working in the centre, but there was nobody from Bangladesh. I asked Mr Nakai the reason, and he replied that neither the Bangladesh government nor the Embassy did try to contact them. Almost all the embassies in Japan have their own science and technology advisers who are responsible for arrangements of those scopes for their fellows. Unfortunately we don't have any Japan has a key role to play in strengthening Asia Pacific research activities. We need to approach them in the proper way to avail the opportunities

Md Lutfor Rahman Dhanmondi. Dhaka