# The Daily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. All

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## Let BNP Speak

We think it was wrong of presiding speaker. Rahmat Ali (a member of the panel of Chairmen designated to preside over the House in case of absence of the speaker and his deputy) to deny floor to the opposition members from BNP during the parliament session last Thursday. He said he was only respecting Wednesday's ruling of the speaker. Was there such a ruling? Whatever is the merit of that: it was at best applicable for the day. There was absolutely no ground for Mr. Ali to deny the opposition the floor on the following day.

The speaker felt offended for the way some BNP MPs behaved with him the day before. We shared the speaker's outrage and have expressed so in writing. But to carry that outrage to a vengeful retaliation is neither democratic nor a part of parliamentary practice. Are we to understand that BNP members are to be 'punished' till they apologise? Is the speaker running a nursery school, or is the House a place of people's representatives? As we have written, BNP was wrong to behave the way, it did. But that does not mean that the largest opposition party in the House is to be gagged till it does what the speaker wants it to. The prime minister's reference to the possibility of the speaker being killed is the type of hyperbole that we can really do without. It reduces PM's stature and robs it of credibility.

We strongly suggest that by the time the House resumes on Sunday this 'punish them' mentality should end. Speaker's ruling on what he wants to do with the people he has identified as being responsible for Wednesday's incident should be dealt with separately. It should have nothing to do with the normal functioning of the House.

May we remind the ruling party, whose influence on the speaker is becoming more and more apparent every day, that it serves nobody's purpose, least of all theirs, to force the opposition into a corner. Let them speak as much at they want. It is their right. In fact it is far better for AL that BNP speak inside the House because then the former can answer immediately. It is far better than street violence, not to mention hartals.

We must also add here that BNP should stop their obstructionist tactics and get to the serious business of the House. There are plenty of ground and opportunities to take the treasury bench on: There is no need to adopt unnecessarily offensiveand discourteous methods which result in disgracing the parliament as it did the other day, BNP must realise that its strategy of embarrassing the ruling party at every turn has done more harm to its own image than damage that of AL. Please res turn to the parliamentary norms and practices within which there are enough opportunities for fireworks of wit, logic and oratory. But of course one has to be capable of all that.

## The Fatal Booze

At least fifty are already dead and some more may also die. This is a toll being paid by some people in Gaibandha preferring a special booze in the happy occasion of the Pahela Baishakh. Among the dead are also women and among those still struggling for life after the fateful partaking of some inebriating drink is a municipal commissioner.

At the root of the massive death and suffering incident is drinking no country brew but rectified spirit bought from three homeopathic medicine shops. In a similar case in a Dhaka slum quite a number had died of poisoning caused by the same liquid chemical which the pharmacists keep and sell ostensibly for medical use. Reports so far received from Gaibandha do not specify clearly if the spirit was contaminated or that the tragedy orcurred because of imbibing the dangerous stuff-far beyond the safe measure. Without knowing for sure what caused the deaths and ailments, this will be foolish to look for ways to ensure non-repetition of such unnecessary death. We are gratified to know that an expert committee is already on the job of determining the causes.

Tragedies such as this shocks us into realising the inadequacy of the picture we have of our society. By and large the society keeps to the strong and almost puritanical peasant values. But trend setting is done by the middle class who live in a complacent world of values. Contrary to what we have loved to believe, a sizable population goes for drugs and intoxicating drinks. And not all of them are derailed adolescents. In the present case, many of the victims came from the sweeper community and the sweepers all over Bangladesh are universally given over to drinking. But it is apparent that many besides sweepers drank the stuff. And Gaibandha is a case typical of all towns in Bangladesh.

It can be worthy social work to try to wean away the addicts from drinks and as drinking is prohibited by law, this wouldn't be tampering with human rights either. But that cannot be put forward as a measure preventing such unnecessary deaths. The pragmatic line should be if people must drink. let them drink safe stuff. How to ensure it? Proscription is being beaten everywhere and all the time. Drinking in the clandestine causes all the problems. The government will be well advised to take out some standard brews out of the banned list and let the poorly lovers of the booze have open access to these. If they can get, say, the ayurvedie brews in the open, consumption of both phensidyl and rectified spirit will surely go down. And government will, of course, have its way to control the

alcohol content of the delisted brew. Drugs and drinks are consumed on a much larger scale than we ever knew. It is a problem that will grow and there will be little chance of containing it effectively. Many pharmacies in the towns thrive on selling the contraband stuff. The goyernment must give the problem a serious thoughter

# Apparent Lessons from Awesome Woes

With a fragile financial sector — unregulated and unsupervised — a cut throat liberalisation of the economy

might tantamount to building a multi-storied mansion on a wooden structure. Today or tomorrow, the spectre

that visited East Asia could be waiting on the wings to visit us.

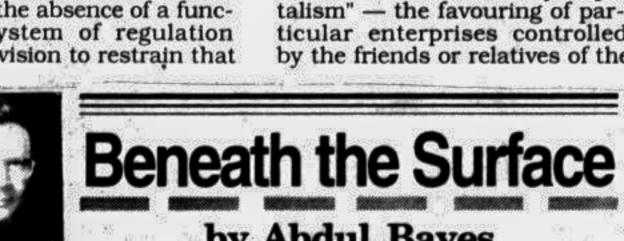
FTER holding the lead as a replicably ideal model for Andeveloping countries, East Asia's recent financial turmoil - engalfed by severe economic crisis - placed them flat to face several odd questions. The consequent-castigation from the financial bush-fire that swept the region, seemingly, brought into forth three principal and pertinent questions. First, it is being proclaimed that the East Asian miracle that we are informed of is nothing but a mirage: They ran affer it and in return received nothing but deceived themselves; second, critics tend to argue that the problems arainly sprang from non-adherence to free market orthodoxy, greatly espoused but hardly practised by these countries; and third, the crisis is the creation of the west - and definitely a deliberate one — to sabetage The region's progress of an enviable height. In fact, all of these three reasons dominate the analysis hovering around the haunt of the villain of

John Williamson of World Bank, South Asia Region attempts to address the above mentioned issues of mind boggling concern with such unseen severity that hit the region. He detects a pattern in which countries fell prey to the crisis but starts with a note of good news for South Asian economies that remained, more or less, far from the financial frays. "We

were relieved that no South hazard which such guarantees Asian country succumbed in a create. As a result borrowers tend to borrow as they like in serious way; we were also surprised because all the countries the absence of any check and balance while the creditors of South Asia are weaker than those of East Asia in terms of foresee their losses being sowhat we have been accustomed cialized. This notion breeds to thinking of as the fundamen-

more investments and the banks, in the absence of a functioning system of regulation and supervision to restrain that

the East Asian crisis can legitimately be laid at the door of those in the west (including in the international organisations) who pushed for rapid, unconditional and complete liberalization of capital account transactions"; (3) 'crony capitalism" — the favouring of particular enterprises controlled by the friends or relatives of the



moral hazard, go unabated in acquiring too many risky assets. (Even Bangladeshi policy makers could draw a lesson from this phenomenon: adequate regulation and supervision are key to a sustainable and strong banking system); (2) the second policy error relates to premature liberalisation of the capital account of the balance payments. Unless a liberalised domestic financial system is in place, any attempt to liberalise the capital account might rock the boat. "And I concede that a part of the blame for

by Abdul Bayes politically powerful - is considered to be the third contributor to the crisis. Access to credit market was determined by the access to political, rather than economic or financial muscle that an enterprise usually has

> vault. Williamson strongly feels that the miracle was no mirage. In terms of per capita income

> to live with. The solvency of the

banks thus eroded substan-

tially, the cronies fled away

without making appropriate

arrangements for the loan

money to come back to banks'

growth or poverty alleviation the achievements of Korea and Thailand - between 1970 and 1995 - are indeed miracles that happened. The fact that the financial fire broke out in those countries could be said to have burnt only the fingers, if ever so, but not the whole body. "Suppose that poverty doubles in Indonesia as a consequence of the crisis which is surely an extreme assumption. It would still be less than half that in South Asia, even though poverty rates in the two regions was similar a quarter century ago. The miracle involved in building productive assets and teaching people how to make a good use of them and those investments in skills are not going to evaporate because of financial crisis, no matter how

> crisis passes. The crisis also does not seem to conform to the theory of sabotage by westerns as espoused by some quarters. "The saboteurs were supposedly the speculators who are presumed to have been responsible for causing the devaluation that initiated the crisis." The exposure of East Asian economies to

soon as the hartal is over,

Dark Suit sings out at the el-

please, I snap. Dark Suit looks

If I may have your attention

As you may have noticed, I

say bitingly, there is a hartal on

today. I have meetings to attend

this morning and I would like

to do so by rickshaw. What is

more. I would like to leave your

hotel in about five minutes, in a

rickshaw, with a colleague, who

is a guest at your hotel. I would

like to climb into the rickshaw

at the entrance to your hotel,

just as I would if I were climbing

We can't allow rickshaws into

"That will be difficult, ma'm.

derly man's scowling back.

at me.

into a car.

severe. The miracle was real

and the people of those coun-

tries will again benefit from the

assets they built up when the

the international market might have invited stockbrokers to gamble with in these economies through pouring massive portfolio investment but that in no way could be considered as advertent attempt to demolish those economies.

Over confidence and carelessness are the two unpardonable offences that seem to have added fuel to the fire. The prolonged absence of any macro crisis since these economies journeyed through the thick and thin of their macro economic management and high economic growth mostly kept them oblivious of any macro economic crisis and thus made them resort to injudicious use of exchange rates, credit policy and other macro economic parameters. For example, they hugely profited from liberalisation without reckoning the fact that a necessary counterpart to financial discipline is adequate regulation and supervision for institutions.

With the awesome woes of the East Asian countries emerging from the crisis, let us bag some lessons for our own economies. With a fragile financial sector - unregulated and unsupervised - a cut throat liberalisation of the economy might tantamount to building a multi-storied mansion on a wooden structure. Today or tomorrow, the spectre that visited East Asia could be waiting on the wings to visit us.

# Rickshaws and Dogs are Not Allowed

As we make our way to our meeting, enjoying the warm air, the empty, silent streets, the smell of grass, the absence of cars honking and buses hooting, I wonder why rickshaws get such a raw deal.

HAT is the worst that could happen, I ask J. J. them. If my rickshaw were to pull up at the entrance of your posh hetel, what would be so horrible about that sight? "Nothing ma'am," stammers

one of the many dark-suited, bland-faced, moderately energetic men who always hang around the lobby of Dhaka's leading five-star hotel.

There is a cluster of these dark-suited men in the lobby this hartal morning of Wednesday, April 15th and though their presence is not an unusual circumstance, they stand out more than normal because there aren't many guests or visitors around.

Indeed, I am probably the only woman visitor in the hotel lobby at the time. If am also considerably dishevelled, but if you have around Dhaka in a rickshaw as I have been doing this warm and humid morning, what else can you expect.)

If there is nothing horrible about it, why won't you let rickshows drive into your drive-

- I am angry and as always, I am louder than the stereotypical Bangah lady (if there is such a creature), and so in short, I attract some attention.

"A pair of foreign-looking men chatting in the lobby stop chatting and proceed to stare at me, while the waiter who is serving them looks up and smiles at me. I think he approves of my query. Perhaps he has tried to enter the hotel in a tickshaw and has been stopped at the outer entrance.

Meantime, the cluster of men to whom I have directed my question appears to be taken aback. They glance at each other, clearly at a loss for words. Have I mentioned a subject that bhadro-lok do not mention... I wonder? Or are they

surprised because they have never been asked to explain their policy vis-a-vis rickshaws before. Which makes me wonder, does this hotel have a policy vis-a-vis rickshaws, at all?

tals." The pattern posits that,

with one partial exception, all

the victims had three things in

common: (a) an asset price bub-

ble in the years preceding the

crisis; (b) large exposure to in-

ternational market (including a

large stock of short-term debts

dominated in foreign exchange)

and (c) a weak financial sector

where the weakness is pro-

nounced in the face of a large

volume of non-performing

loans. Notably, the countries of

South Asia appear to exhibit

only the last of the three fea-

tures listed above — namely the

weak banking sector - and

hence could save themselves

from the reach of the bush fire.

Williamson unveils three "pol-

icy mistakes" that, to him,

caused the crisis. I plagiarize

them: (1) the provision of ex-

plicit or implicit guarantees of

the liabilities of financial in-

termediaries without the cre-

ation of a system of financial'

regulation and supervision ad-

equate to restrain the moral

called a "new-style crisis."

Before I can ask them to explain, the cluster disbands, each bland-faced individual in a dark suit swiftly melting away into the outer reaches of the lobby. There is one young and helpless-looking Dark Suit left behind.

What's going on, why are you hotel folk so difficult? Why can't I come up the driveway in my rickshaw?

"It's hotel policy ma'am. We don't allow rickshaws into the driveway," Dark Suit replies, swallowing hard so I can see his Adam's apple. (I think they've left him behind to face me because he looks young and help-

less. Clever ploy.) Do you have any idea how many people ride rickshaws in Dhaka, I ask him, belligerently, Il haven't a clue myself, but then neither does he - or anyone

else, I dare say!) "Ma'am, well, I'm not sure but there must be thousands of rickshaws in Dhaka," he says, trying his best to pacify me. Thousands? Only thou-

sands? You must be joking. Don't you people have any idea what is happening outside the air-conditioned walls of your domain. I mean, talk about living in an ivory tower, you fellows really don't have a clue,

"Well, there may be about a lakh, I'm not sure. I think there are less than a hundred thousand rickshaws with a legal status, the others have fake papers. That's what we are told,

Coming Home . . .

Almas Zakiuddin

ma'am." Listen young man. According to one estimate, there are approximately two hundred and fifty thousand rickshaws in Dhaka. I don't care if they are licenced or fake or if their papers come from Santa Claus.

People use them all the time. Why can't they use them to come into your hotel? "You can, ma'm. You can come to our hotel in a rick-

They are out there on our

streets. People ride on them.

shaw," Dark Suit insists, swallowing hard once again. Sure I can. I can come to your outer hotel entrance in a rickshaw. Tknow that. In fact, I did exactly that. I arrived at the largest and most well-known and, I might add, most pleasant five-star hotel in this city in a

rickshaw. And do you know what happened, young man? "I'm not sure, ma'm, what

happened...?" The guard stopped us at the entrance, told me politely that I would have to walk the rest of the way, shouted at the rickshaw driver to leave immedi ately, turn around or back out of the driveway, and watched while the rickshaw driver and both complied. I muttered and protested; the rickshaw-walla went quietly, he's used to being pushed around, I dare say.

being at Bhuapur, major traffic

of BBB is likely to pass through

Uttara to Dhaka and other

southern and north-eastern

cities. So, Azampur crossing

(already a traffic jam area) will

face huge traffic pressure from

rapidly growing Uttara, Uttar

Khan, and inter-district traffic.

Amazingly, over bridge/

passenger shelter, built here.

have now even obstructed the

on going road expansion project

Keeping future traffic growth

The authority can easily ex-

amine benefits of a roundabout

against a traffic light system by

placing a make shift round-

about of sand bags at suggested

spots, pending actual one. But

the authority must take neces-

sary steps for Azampur Inter-

section, as space is yet not used

up and BBB formally opened.

Otherwise, time saved by bil-

lion-taka-bridge would be

in mind, it would be wise for us

to build a traffic circle at

Azampur with an over-bridge

for BBB traffic.

(as one at Jatrabari).

"As he should be!" interrupts an elderly man. He is a complete stranger to me but clearly a resident of the hotel because Dark Suit grins and fawns in

his direction. "Keep 'em all out. These rickshaws are a b... nuisance!" exclaims the elderly man, glaring at everyone in general as he stomps by me and stares at the cars parked outside the hotel. "You will be able to drive out

the hotel, it's against hotel pol-Yeah, yeah. You are pathetic. in your car in an hour, sir, as

running late for our meeting. I let it go. And so, eventually, my col-

Dark Suit says nothing. I am

league and I head out towards the outer entrance of the hotel. We walk to the nearest rickshaw and begin a ride that is really quite enjoyable. As we make our way to our meeting, enjoying the warm air, the empty, silent streets, the smell of grass, the absence of cars honking and buses hooting, I

a raw deal. "I like rickshaws," my colleague says at the end of our

wonder why rickshaws get such

So do 1. I like rickshaws and what is more, I think we ought to treat rickshaws with respect. Not turn them out of our posh places like stray dogs who might sully our clean lives.

Shameful, is it not that Dhaka's largest five-star hotel does not agree with either of us.

## **OPINION**

## Can BJP-led Government Tame Activities of RSS?

Barrister Harun ur Rashid

Although BJP Parliamentary Party has jettisoned its official right wing and ultra nationalist policies to agree on a "National Agenda" to keep the allied parties within its fold, the BJP party stalwarts have taken a unique position in recent days that policies of BJP government is different from those of the BJP Party. That means BJP party stands for its official policies, the cornerstone of it is based on "Hindutva"-one religion, one nation and one people.

It appears to be a very clever strategic move by the BJP party to keep the party faithfuls happy and disciplined as the BJP parliamentary party had toned its much heralded ultranationalist policies to form the government with the other parties. It remains to be seen how BJP government handles this issue within the structure of Westminister parliamentary system where the party supports invariably the policies of its government.

It may be recalled that BJP was constituted as the political wing of RSS. Most of the party's senior leaders including the Prime Minister Vajpayee are members of RSS. It is interesting to see how the BJP party will conduct itself with the BJP led government on the sensitive issues of building a temple on the site of Babri mosque and reclaim of whole Kashmir.

It is reported that in its annual report only released recently, RSS claimed that the guerilla activities in the eastern states of India, in particular in Mizoram, had its origin from the active support of Christian missionaries. The missionaries advocated, according to the report, the benefits to be obtained from conversion to Christianity. It also said that 23 Hindu temples were burnt down in 1997 in the state. Eastern India has borders

with Myanmar and China. Un-

derstandably the Indian government restricted activities of the missionaries in 1970s and even barred foreigners to the sensitive border region. It is noted that Christian missionaries have been active in this region since 1950s. Though they are engaged in social and humanitarian activities, State governments look at them with suspicion. The majority of people in this region are Mizo tribals, literate and non-Hindu. They belong to separate ethnic race. They hardly find any unifying force with the rest of the non-tribals. Furthermore, this area, though rich in natural resources, is in neglect from the Union Government. Discord and even despair reigns supreme among the young peo-

The tough stand by RSS on India's 30 million Christian minority does not auger well for the BJP led government. It is

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reported that the Christians were subject to harassment and even attack in Gujarat and Maharashtra states. There is also a campaign by RSS for reconversion to Hinduism from Christianity and it is reported that "camps for reconversion" are being set up by RSS in many parts of India.

Assault on Christians by RSS will instil a fear in the minds of other minorities, in particular Muslims in India. The attitude of RSS towards Muslims in India will have a grave impact on the Muslims of Pakistan and Bangladesh. If BJP led government departs from its policy of secularism, the political consequences will be serious indeed, leading to tension and instability in the sub-continent. It is reported that Pakistan

is actively pursuing experiment of "Ghauri" missiles as a counter to India's "Prithvi" missiles.( History tells us that a Rajput Hindu prince Prithivraj defeated the Muslim ruler Shahabuddin Ghauri.) The names of the missiles which point to the old rivalry between the faithfuls of two religions is not a happy trend at all.

We all hope that BJP led government will be able to tone down the activities and rhetorics of RSS and BJP party for the peace, prosperity and progress of the peoples of the sub-continent.

## Motivation Campaigns

A Zabr

BTV showed the minister at site supervising the repair work of an electrical installation. It was a surprise inspection all right, but on the negative side it revealed that the professionals cannot be entirely relied upon in view of the high systems loss in that particular department; and senior level policy makers have to come down to field level to lend a hand in executive work! This will happen if bad precedents are not firmly nipped in the

The minister urged that the systems loss in the electrical power sector be brought down to around 12 per cent, which is an acceptable figure, instead of the current figure of more than 33 per cent, now down from over 40 per cent. The technical loss can be calculated and visible remedial measures taken. The human systems loss is invisible and indirect. Even good quality

control is visible. The country's greatest weak-

workers at all levels, especially in the public and semi-autonomous sectors. How motivation and the sense of duty are measured? It is not an amusing statement; the time has come to come down to brass tacks. There are too many extra-curricular activities going on during work or duty hours. Start from the top or from the bottom? Let the leaders decide.

als and technocrats do not know their jobs or lack experience. The human systems loss (HSL) is sapping the efficiency in all sectors, and the administrations and the government are grappling with the situation in a rather helpless manner due to lack of motivation in all camps comprising the full team to undertake this gigantic task.

This high loss continues in spite of changes of regimes. Therefore it is extra-political due to corruption and nepotism, and lax supervision and moni-

There is an additional nega

tive load imposed on the already bad system, and that is the new-fangled political polarisation in almost all offices, including the civil service When established institutions break down, what role the individuals can play, and how? This issue has to be addressed at high level meetings, instead of accusing others all the time.

For answer, the politicians have to be faced for analysis, to resolve the issues arising thereof; as they have to create a congenial atmosphere for reintroducing the concept of working at national issues with the spirit of consensus.

As a nation, we stand divided, but have to hear paeans of unity in divided meetings! Only the national spirit can push the nation forward, not first priority party agendas, regardless of the name and identity of the party or parties. Who are wasting the nation's time the people, the professionals or the politicians?

Sutia river bridge

Sir. Construction work of the above bridge started more than five years ago back on the Sutia river at Mahmudpur-Mukhi ferry ghat. The distance by road between Bhaluka and Kishoregaonj district HQs via Gaffargoan. Hossainpur, Pakundia is only 18/19 miles which is one-forth of the same via Mymensingh. The importance of the bridge cannot be neglected. It is unfortunate that the construction work of the bridge has been suspended since the last two years.

It is now in a deserted and forlorn condition. Both the sitting MPs of Bhaluka and Gaffargoan thanas are from the futing party. One of them is a state minister. They are not unaware, we think, of such delay in construction of the bridge. The bridge needs to be constructed without further delay before the ensuing rainy season to avoid people's hardship.

Ahmed Ali Vill: Mahmudpur PO: Nama Mahmudpur PS Bhaluka, Dist: Mymensingh

## Natural gas or fertiliser?

Sir For the last few weeks ve have been reading views of experts and policy makers on the future of our natural gas reserve vis-a-vis export of gas to neighbouring countries. It has Turther been emphasised by some that the future of our natural gas as fuel is not stable if we take the example of coal. Due to finding alternative fuel coal is no more in high demand resulting in closing down of mines around the world. As such some say we should maximise our use of natural gas as fuel, if required by exporting. So long its demand remains high we can harvest immense benefit rather than sitting on useless reserve of gas in future and cursing our past policy

makers for their blunders. I differ with them on this. Natural gas is a fossil fuel which formed billions of years ago by decomposition of microscopic plants which dominated the earth at that time. This nat-

ural gas is used as fuel for domestic and industrial purpose as well as power generation. In power generation the crux of the problem is to rotate massive turbines. Once the turbines start rotating, power generates. These turbines are rotated by water in hydroelectric plant, by steam by using coal or natural gas or furnace oil as fuel or generating heat for producing steam in nuclear plant. There are many alternative fuels in generation of electricity but the point is that there is no alternative to natural gas as ingredient for production of fertiliser.

For continuous production of fertiliser we should optimise the use of natural gas as scrupulously as possible whatever may be its reserve. In this regard I recall a report published in the TIME magazine a few years ago wherein the experts had stressed that as there is no substitute, natural gas should primarily be used in production of fertiliser.

Javed Mortuza Sher-E-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka

Traffic Circle at Azampur

Sir, Town planners always provide Traffic Circle at intersection. Besides discouraging street corner vendors, adding beauty to nearby buildings, it works as a landmark too. But mainly, it regulates vehicular traffic at crossing in an uninterrupted way, keeping all vehicles in one direction on entry till exit to desired direction. So, at a Traffic Circle, jam is not that unmanageable compared to a traffic light controlled crossing. Traffic flow becomes intermittent for red and green signal and all accumulated vehicles often can't get-through at green signal. These halt and accumulation vehicles are prone to logiam and accident. Differences can be seen at Circles of Gulshan-1 and 2, Saat Rasta and traffic signals at Mohakhali, Kakoli etc.

Though Uttara is the largest model town, with a busy hi-way passing through it, yet no roundabout has been planned or placed here. Besides, east-end. of Bangabandhu Bridge (BBB)

wasted due to traffic jams. A R Choudhury Uttara, Dhaka

Sir, There has been an enormous improvement in the electricity sector - at least as far as the people living in Uttara, Banani, DOHS, Gulshan and Mohakhali areas are conitems in the DS saying that a drastic change is far from being possible — then what we see of fate or hard work from the energy ministry.

by the opposition.

will happen to the Barge Mounted projects Madame Prime Minister?

Masroor Ahmed Deepak Dhaka

### Encouraging, but ....

cerned. Though there were news here must be a remarkable twist

We all hope and pray that what ever the reason behind this improvement is, having an uninterrupted supply can improve the face of the government and cut down issues made My next question is what

ness is the low efficiency of the

It is not that the profession-

toring (due to collusion).