

Can't Sweat So Much

Sweat-bath, Bangladesh-style, should perhaps be a part of the handbook on bathing. Thanks to the nocturnal preference of the ever increasing load shedding durations we have had a reduced feeling of welfare after each sleepless night. More than that, the garments factories in Chittagong alone are losing to the tune of Tk. five crore a day through unannounced disruptions in the power supply. Add the predicament of the whole range of export-oriented and import-substituting industries.

Pyrotechnics cannot obviously alter the objective situation in the power sector. If they could, we have had the least need for paying audience to the choicest epithets being hurled all around for the load-shedding. From passing the buck to suspected sabotage, from MOUs galore to barge-mounted climbdown, from a ministerial exit to PM's self-effacing admission of lack lustre performance in the sector, we have seen some hot air blowing around with nothing tangible to write home about.

We have never tired of asking the government one question: what are you immediately going to do to meet the power deficit when projects for electrical plants involve at least 2/3 years of gestation? In other words, we wanted the government to give us a complete and well-sequenced picture of how it intended to bridge the gap between production capacity and supply requirements. Contrary to our counsel for adopting a well-thought-out plan of action what the energy ministry did was to hurriedly announce target dates to improve things and allowed them to pass with blinkers on.

Our daily power shortage is 300mw. Whenever there is an elemental strike on the network like a thunderbolt disrupting a 132kv Bhairab gridline on Friday, the deficit could overshoot the 400mw mark. This is quite a gap to fill in. The repair works have hardly ever kept to any time-table. More importantly, there have been lapses in routine maintenance, to say nothing of timely precautions against accidents. The setting up of barge-mounted plants has been inordinately delayed.

In spite of all these, it has been calculated by the ministry itself that 300 mw of power can be saved from what is now pilfered through systemic weaknesses. The methods would be to install computerised meters on high and low tension lines to the industrial and commercial houses. As part of the saving strategy, authorities are planning to install meters on *busbees* and have the shopkeepers abide by 7 or 8 pm time-limit. We suggest prohibition of unnecessary illumination.

Let the government announce the steps and implement them on top priority basis.

More Than Mere Politicians

One may have the feeling President Shahabuddin is again at his pet pastime of politician-baiting. No. When reminding on Friday the politicians and their parties of their possible big role in cutting down on our population growth rate, he was only underlining their importance. In fact, every time he had found something wanting in the politicians or their parties, he had betrayed great expectations of them.

With their lives of whole-time exposure to the public politicians indeed have a signal influence on the society in the crucial matter of containing the population race. Bangladesh has lately been doing rather well on the population front, chalking up an enviable 2 per cent or very near about. But the President very rightly feels ours should be a zero growth country, populationwise. To achieve that politicians could indeed be instrumental. They can help and influence not only as leading individuals having great following. It is equally, if not more, important that they can get their parties to take up family planning as a top-priority item on their political agenda. If the parties got down to the work of motivating their constituency miracles could happen.

President Shahabuddin, speaking to a Lions meet on Friday, gave a touching picture of the helplessness of the man in the village, specially the rural youth. The government alone cannot pull them out of the present impossible morass. The politicians as social leaders and the political parties as the biggest organisations touching the whole of our population, could have an effective role in helping the situation improve there. Pressure on land and unemployment have combined to make life a hell out there. Couldn't the politicians and the parties do anything about this?

We add to the President's expectations one that has long been felt by all thinking people over the last so many years. The parties could go out for achieving universal literacy as a priority job on their agenda. No other single accomplishment could transform our society so surely and make a museum piece of poverty.

A Hospital Trifled With

It beats commonsense. A hospital not commissioned three years after its completion? That too in a country where modern medical facilities are so much of a rarity! Well, rueful though, that seems to be the reality with the sprawling complex on a three-acre land at sector six Uttara. As a leading Bangla daily informed us yesterday, funded by Kuwait the construction work of the 350-bed hospital began under the auspices of Public Works Department in 1993. Finished duly and formally inaugurated by a Minister of the Kuwait government it has remained anaesthetised since then.

So where lies the snag? The concerned ministry has, of course, given a set of reasons for this inordinate delay. But they are unconvincing and smack of ministerial inefficiency. We fail to understand how the government of a friendly country which could take the trouble of setting up a hospital at its own expense can contribute to the delay in having the thing go into service. We suspect the Public Works Ministry has not pursued the case with the kind of urgency it deserved. Chances are that the Foreign Ministry might have dragged foot too. We wonder what the Ministry of Health did all this while. May be the issue does not involve it technically. But doesn't a potentially good hospital interest them as a valuable addition to our health-care system?

Bangladesh just cannot afford to be deprived of new establishments in the health sector due to the professional incapability of the authorities or bureaucratic bottleneck. There are far too many patients compared to the number of locally available doctors and medical facilities. Just have the facility humming without any further delay.

Nuclear India: Already a *Fait Accompli*?

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

BARELY within a week of India's de facto entry into powerful nuclear club after her defiant N-tests in Rajasthan desert, the indignation and anger of the international community are on the wane. Following an initial spate of shocks, surprises and concerns the voices of protests are obviously dying down. So far, the punitive measures are few and far between. The sharp reactions have ended up only with the condemnations for the ominous tests.

Those who threatened India with dire consequences have been cautious enough to stop short of that. The G-8 leaders at Birmingham summit dispersed without unanimity on sanctions. None has been serious about it except the United States and Japan. The big powers were much more pursuing and threatening to India's nuclearisation during the long years of debate on NPT extension and CTBT but after the recent blasts this seem to have exhausted their power to deny India her hard-earned nuclear credential. Have they then come to term with the reality of a nuclear India?

On the other hand anxieties on the part of great powers have been pronounced for Pakistan's likely retaliation with the blast of her own nuclear device.

Bill Clinton was, in fact, more worried about Pakistan's response to Indian blast, than the Indian blast itself. Almost in the same breath he condemned India and also cautioned Pakistan not to follow the suit. Not only the US emissary is already in Islamabad to placate her concern the US is now offering to provide F-16 aircraft which Pakistan was refused under Pressler amendments even after Pakistan's full payment for them in hard currency. Japanese high level delegation is also in Pakistan with both carrot and stick. India's nuclearisation is now a secondary matter as compared to international pressure being mounted on Pakistan not to carry out its retaliatory blast.

In the meantime, a buoyant India is behaving like a nuclear upstart crudely reminding the past adversaries about her newly-acquired power. By sending across tough warnings to Pakistan — particularly on the question of her alleged involvement in promoting militancy in Kashmir Valley — India is not only intimidating her foes, she is, in fact, seeking to establish a new power equation with Pakistan. India is also taking a hostile posture vis-a-vis China by calling her the most potent threat to India's security. Both are re-opening settled or shelved border issues thus generating fresh tension in their relationship. The BJP-led government of India seems to have been awakened by a plethora of insecurities around it and is leading the country to a dangerous course of confrontation with the neighbours.

Armed with nuclear devices India now seeks to reestablish its power relations with five other NWS (nuclear weapon states) and other major players of international politics particularly the G-8 countries. Emboldened by the waning stridency against the nuclear tests and an apparent division in the ranks of great powers on the question of sanction she is wooing new friends and reviving her links with the members

of Non-Aligned Movement. She seems ready to face the sanctions to be imposed by some countries — at least for some time. Given the limitations of multiple loopholes inherent in a sanction regime she is counting on the poor prospects of the sanctions. It will be a novel experiment to impose of sanction on a vast country like India and Indians are hopeful that the market-crazy private companies, if not the government, of the sanctioning country will be found cooperative. In any case the sanctions, even if imposed, will have to be terminated at a point of time due to variety of factors in international relations thus paving the way for the country's economic rehabilitation, but its nuclear potential is going to stay there.

The status once gained cannot be arbitrarily reversed. So the nuclearisation of India has to be viewed as a permanent phenomenon. Whether it will do India any good or not is however a different debate.

India, being the largest democracy of the world, is certain to play her democratic card to extricate herself from the current imbroglio. She can conveniently build up a case for democratic India vis-a-vis an authoritarian China either of

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which will have to be chosen by the western democracies as their strategic partner in Asia-Pacific region. There is already an animated discussion in Britain's House of Lords where the peers have argued not to victimise India for her nuclearisation. To them there is nothing wrong in having a sixth member in a 5-member nuclear club. Except for its burgeoning economy and vast market the West have few inclination for China.

India has since been marginalised in international politics where since late 70s China enjoys an ascendancy. A simultaneous decline in India's stature made it possible for China, which was already a nuclear power and permanent member of the UN Security Council, to climb up this ladder both in prestige and global clout. From a democratic platform, a nuclear India now wants to compete with her. China is already far ahead of India in all aspect of potentials that constitute power. Whether India can at all catch up and then surpass China remains to be seen. But in India's calculation, mere competition will provide her respectability in global politics.

While India has been able to join a nuclear race with China how has she fared with her explosions with regard to Pakistan? India has since outstripped Pakistan in conventional military force. After 1974 nuclear test of India, Pakistan feverishly sought to acquire at least a nuclear deterrence for her security. Pakistan

is rapidly growing in power.

True, the sheer weight of power of the NWS will put them in disadvantage for a period of time.

But it will be virtually impossible to bend them to submission and make them abdicate their acquired status.

has been put off balanced once again with the last week's blast by India. Rhetoric apart Pakistan is at this point of time totally outclassed by India both in her conventional and nuclear forces. As a declared nuclear power, India now has edge also in her nuclear capability over Pakistan. Only week's before, Pakistan talked arrogantly over the successful testing of 1500-km Ghouri missile. Now knows what is up in their sleeve now, but for the moment Pakistan has been caught in a security dilemma never experienced before.

The choices are of extreme nature before Pakistani leaders. If they test, their devices they will be down to dump with draconian sanction. If they do not test it will be looked upon as unforgivable weakness of the leadership by Pakistani people and the military is likely to step in ensuring a period of political uncertainty in the country. Pakistani underwent restrictive measures also in the past, but with its state of the economy at this juncture, it will require nerve for anyone to defy the western pressure. Pakistani leadership is indecisive till date even if something invisible may be brewing up.

The last but not the least is the inherent discrimination and immorality of the non-proliferation regime which will help India retain its nuclear status.

Given the history of the acquisition of nuclear devices, India has only followed the tradition. Nuclear weapon is symbol of power and prestige and was never given on the platter. From the ashes of the Second World War the United States emerged as an unchallenged military power backed by 4-trillion dollar economy but it was the possession of her nuclear weapon during the closing years of the war which instantly catapulted her at the apex of the international power structure. The US very much wanted to hold the monopoly and even sentenced Rosenberg couple to death for passing on the nuclear secrets to Soviet Union.

Subsequently she however had to share it with Britain, France and Russia — her wartime allies — but certainly did not like to see more fingers on nuclear buttons. It was a shock to the western alliance when China exploded her nuclear bomb in 1964 because so long barring Russia it was confined to the community. Fearing that it will further proliferate the existing NWS bargained a Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) with NNWS (non-nuclear weapons states) which was signed in 1970 for 25 years in return of a promised disarmament by the nuclear powers. The NWS, however, did not keep their promise thus losing their moral authority to impose non-proliferation on NNWS for any further period of time. India has not signed either NPT or CTBT.

Any restrictive measure against India — and for that matter any other country aspiring to go nuclear — will only help the violating country gain more friends and sympathisers.

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Can BJP Hold on to the Euphoria?

The nuclear explosions have changed the scenario in favour of the BJP-government and also took the oppositions like the Congress and the United Front off the guards, but for how long ...?

SEVERAL days after five nuclear tests carried out by India in two installments, the question that is being asked by the political opponents there and the political commentators both in India and abroad is that whether the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government can hold on to the favourable image caused by the explosions.

Undoubtedly, the nuclear tests on two days in quick succession came as a big boost for the fragile government and it suddenly bolstered the image of the 17-party coalition to dizzy heights but this is likely to fade, and in fact is fading as pressures are growing for delivering other election promises made by the coalition.

Although the government is made up by so many political parties, in essence, it is the BJP that calls the shots in most cases barring the sensitive issues like those linked with secularism and religious fervour because the secular parties in the government would never like to be seen as a partner of the BJP in those agenda.

The nuclear explosions are seen as mainly the success of the BJP although other coalition partners deserve some of the credit. Some non-BJP smaller parties like the "Samata Party" has influential position in the government in the form that its leader George Fernandes is the defence minister. Hence the party will certainly seek to derive credit out of the tests as the defence ministry is inextricably linked with this even though it is a matter of science and technology. Other partners in the government including those which caused sufficient irritation for the nascent administration of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee till the other day like the AIADMK of Ms Jayaram Jayalalitha are also trying to extract their piece of the cake out of the success story of the nuclear explosions.

Still, the game was essentially of the BJP and it is also doubtful how many of the coalition partners knew about the tests which were kept secret. However, the prime minister has said that the explosions were part of the programme of the "national agenda" formulated by the constituents of the government.

Why was the BJP-led government driven by desperation to explode the bombs which India had devised way back in 1974? If this was meant to achieve two main objectives, then has the government accomplished the tasks? The government was walking tight rope because of its razor-thin majority in the lower house of the parliament and was constantly facing the risk of being coming close to collapse due to the fulminations of one or two coalition partners. Has it overcome this situation?

Can the Indian people be carried away by the euphoria of the nuclear explosions for a long time to come or the government must get down to brass tacks to deliver goods so that common people can feel a government is working for their benefits! Or the "valour" demonstrated by the government within a short span of time of coming to power will take it comfortably to face the oppositions which are eagerly and anxiously awaiting in the wings to see the fall of the BJP-led coalition. Certainly, the nuclear explosions have changed the scenario in favour of the government and also took the oppositions like the Congress and the United Front off the guards, but for how long this condition is going to last? These are the issues that are being hotly discussed by concerned quarters in the aftermath of the Indian nuclear tests.

Admittedly, few could even remotely imagine that a multi-party government that was fighting to maintain its existence with heterogeneous and ambitious persons being in it, would go for a dramatic and explosive measure like the nuclear tests within two months of coming to power. This exercise was not carried out by previous governments in last few years when a Congress government led by P V Narasimha Rao was in office for full five years and later two successive UF governments were in the helm, each for nearly one year. However, leaders of these parties are now saying they could have done it and also thought of the explosions but other considerations dissuaded them from conducting the tests.

The BJP, undoubtedly, wanted to take the people by surprise and give them a melodramatic development that would look like giving the country and the people a new pride or identity. It knew that the life span of the government could be curtailed any time because a revolt by either

Ms Jayalalitha or firebrand Mamta Banerjee of West Bengal or even "Samata Party" of Bihar could jeopardise the existence of the government and may help the opponents form new government if any of them sides with them.

Such fears were already there before the nuclear explosions since Ms Jayalalitha and the "Samata Party" were demanding the dismissals of their political-rival state governments in Tamil Nadu and Bihar. BJP has come to power practically for the first time since its earlier stint for 13 days in authority in New Delhi in 1996 was primarily exhausted in exploring possibilities of survival of the government with supports from others but the efforts had floundered.

So the top and matured BJP leadership wanted to go for something that would phenomenally raise the image of the government and the BJP overnight and at the same time could also effectively stop the bickering the coalition. In the process, this would also halt the opposition criticisms about the "non-performance" of the coalition government.

The decision for the explosions was a master stroke that achieved all the objectives. The erring coalition partners have, for the time being, refrained from bringing potentially dangerous issues that could put the unity of the coalition in jeopardy and the main oppositions have also commended the tests in varying degrees because they did not want to remain mum in a matter of national progress. They questioned the timing of the decisions and criticised the government for not taking them in confidence but had to fall in the line for the time being in lauding the scientists and, in a way, also the government.

But the scene is changing now and the government is coming in for pressures to deliver on other fronts. The BJP had in the elections manifesto certainly spoken about the options in the nuclear capability but the promises were more catchy and sound about issues like

providing accommodations for the millions of homeless and bringing food prices within the reach of the common people. No doubt, it was basking in the adulation being poured on it for being "bold" to bring India out of the nuclear closet and set it at the group of select possessors of the power but people are asking for services that would benefit the common people.

Where is the explosion in the food front? asked former state minister of external affairs Salman Khurshid of Congress. Former defence minister Muylam Singh Yadav said the BJP wants to hide its failures in running an efficient government under the glory of nuclear explosions. The leftists while praising scientists are saying that the explosions will carry little meaning for the poor and on the contrary spark off an arms race in the region although they criticised the West for their "double standard" in imposing sanctions on India.

The BJP has to act and act quickly in the home front where people can feel that its explosions device was not meant to exploit entirely domestically. The people who have supported the nuclear tests have been asking the government to come out with implementing the elections promises.

No impact, however big, lasts long unless a government deals with "Roti, Kapda or Makhan" (Food, clothes and shelter) and more so in countries like those in this region or the developing world. The euphoria may fade away fast. Mrs Indira Gandhi took enormous credit for the nuclear explosions in 1974 which was for the first time for India and that too was entirely a Congress party government credit. Nevertheless, within three years of that development she had to relinquish power because excesses in the emergency and failure to live up to the expectations on the economic front.

Mr Vajpayee, the BJP and the government are now facing mounting pressure to deliver elections promises. Otherwise, the success may turn bitter and show that the exercise was for domestic compulsions — for individuals, party or government. Besides, a leader like Mr Vajpayee, known for his moderation and leadership vision, will be seen as under the influence of "hawks" and that will not improve his image. Furthermore the impression about "patriotism" by a section of the BJP will only come to the fore if the government fails in the economic and other important areas.

LETTER FROM AMERICA Despite American Sanctions, BJP is the Winner!

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

The current international willingness to punish India will lose steam fairly quickly... but America has enormous stakes in India. It has heavily invested in the world's most populous democracy...

riahli intransigence has repeatedly demonstrated, America does not like to punish its errant friends.

BJP is right. The storm will blow over. The G-8 nations meeting in Birmingham, England, have refused to follow the American lead and impose sanctions on India. India, like China, is too important to American business interests to be abandoned to competitors for more than limited amount of time. Pakistan, were it to follow in India's footsteps, may not be so lucky.

Seinfeld Seins off

THE much-hyped last episode of the enormously successful sitcom on American television, Seinfeld, aired on Thursday, May 14 on National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC). Over 76 million viewers watched. (Legendary crooner, "Ol' Blue Eyes" Frank Sinatra died the same night.)

Seinfeld, the nine-year running "Jewish" show was about nothing. Three of the four main characters (except Michael Richards or "Cosmo Kramer") are Jewish in real life.

A recent survey showed that Kramer is the favorite of 54 per cent of those surveyed. With his unannounced entries, unpredictable body gyrations and screwy logic, he was the kids' favorite as well.

Jerry Seinfeld was the favorite of only 12 per cent, not much ahead of Julia Louis-Dreyfus ("Elaine Benes") and Jason Alexander ("George Costanza"). The episodes were usually brilliantly written by Jerry Seinfeld, and equally brilliantly