

Powerless Port

The power crisis that has gradually taken a stranglehold on the country over the past several years, is showing few signs of abating. The country's power generation capacity has not improved much, despite the recent addition of 100mw to the national grid from the Khulna Power Company.

Chittagong is a special area and successive governments have pledged to give the city special treatment. The reason for these pledges is the pivotal role Chittagong is expected to play in the industrialisation process. Chittagong does not only contain the major seaport of Bangladesh, it is also the second-largest industrial zone after Dhaka and its surrounding districts.

One argument may be that Chittagong has to share the burden of power shortages along with other parts of the country. This is fair enough. But given Chittagong's central position in the country's trade, commerce and industry, it would also be fair to suggest the port city be provided with adequate power supply even during bad times.

Task Before New Governor

We greet Dr Mohammad Farashuddin on his assumption of office as Governor, Bangladesh Bank, a job to which he brings the insights of an economist besides those of an administrator. That done, we would like to share our crystallised views with him on what we consider to be his pressing agenda as the central bank's helmsman.

Setting that aside for the time being, we owe him a professional duty to point out that he has his job cut out in three particular areas at this juncture: pursue big loan default cases to their hilt and show results on them; help restore administrative and financial discipline in a banking sector gone completely haywire over time; and stem trade unionism rot in the central bank to regain an authority over its internal decision-making process.

Although banking reform and financial accountability are intertwined, the latter cannot be a matter of deferred attention insofar as the recovery of outstanding bank loans goes. The four-member investigating team of the Finance Ministry has lately found out that only 92 big loan defaulters have expropriated a whopping Tk 3000 crore from four Nationalised Commercial Banks of the country.

If as proteges of ruling parties they did so with impunity in the NCBs, it is the directors of private banks on the other hand who had siphoned off big money from their own institutions giving a hell to the depositors. The closely competing statistics speak for themselves: public sector banks' default figure is 32 per cent while that of the private sector stands at 39 per cent. By contrast, foreign private banks have eight per cent default.

What is of central importance is that the banking sector's hands are so tied with arrears loans amounting to Tk 15,000 crores that it is not in a position to lend money to genuine entrepreneurs at low interest rates, which is hurting the economy badly.

Mr Lutfur Rahman, the former Governor, Bangladesh Bank had boldly and energetically pursued the big loan defaulters during his tenure. He has left enough material for Dr Farashuddin to pick up the threads from and bring a speedy and satisfactory conclusion to that test-case of an accountability exercise.

How Eco-friendly is Govt

Nothing belies the myth of governance more than the open sale of wintering Siberian birds on the busiest roads of Dhaka. This has been continuing for so many years that for many the touting and vending of these birds on the best exposed joints of the capital city herald the winter. This is illegal and the offence is punishable. If catching, selling and killing the guest birds is a crime, the eating cannot be otherwise. Smoking injures health but is not a crime barring on specified spaces. You can indulge in smoking both at your pleasure as at your own peril.

The guest birds fetch a high price. The eaters of these are as such people of high social and economic profile — not quite indigent ignoramuses. They know they are abetting in crime and themselves are committing crime. Still they care not. This can happen only in a highly criminalised society. Although there hasn't been many vendors facing police harassment, that task is hard to succeed. The poor vendors can always shift to newer markets. Most effective will be nabbing some high and mighty ones redhanded with the birds.

If the government does not take the small trouble of either catching the black smoking cars or the guest bird vendors it can hardly be called eco-friendly.

Protectors Cannot be Predators

Police cannot kill anyone without proving his crime in the court. False encounters by the dozen in UP are not defensible because the police have no powers to punish on its own. This has, in fact, brutalised the force. The police are important for the society but its capacity to do good is as much as its capacity to do harm.

But his tenure was too short. Home Minister L K Advani had no choice. He had to get the report processed because the Supreme Court had directed government to do so following a writ petition by two retired police officials.

The committee, which Advani constituted under the chairmanship of JP Ribeiro, former Director General of Police of Maharashtra and Punjab, to examine the NPC recommendations, has submitted its findings. They have been lying with the Home Ministry for more than a month now. One only hopes, that the findings will not accumulate dust as the original report did for 20 years.

The main thrust of the Ribeiro committee is on the strengthening of thana (police station), the lower rung in the police set-up. It has strongly urged upon government to let the thana function independently. At present, it is buffeted by the winds of pressure from all sides and it can hardly do its primary task either investigatory or preventive.

The Ribeiro committee has, however, conceded that it is not politically feasible to appoint the state security commission, which the NPC had recommended to entrust the control over the police cadre to a committee, consisting of the chief minister, the opposition leader and a few others. But the committee has proposed the formation of a board to supervise transfers. Indeed, the transfer is one weapon, which comes in handy to chief ministers to punish independent hands in the force. In most states, the three-year tenure of the district

innocent, who too enjoy human rights, cannot be condoned in any situation. Militants tend to become vengeful.

The recent case is that of Tara Singh Hare, a newspaper editor, who has been murdered in Vancouver, Canada. He is a victim to militants' anger over his unrelenting fight against the pro-Khalistan elements. They attempted to kill him a few years ago. But he survived, although he remained confined to a wheelchair. How can this type of militancy be justified? A few days before his death, he told me on the phone (I was in Toronto) that he would win the gurdwara elections in Canada and constitute an independent Shiromoni Gurdwar Prabandhak Committee so as to set off its connection with the SGPC at Amritsar. It is not surprising that neither SGPC chairman Gurcharan Singh Tohra nor Akal Takht chief priest Ranjit Singh has condemned the dastardly killing. Many murders of this type were committed in Punjab during the days of militancy. The police were equally involved. One hopes that the unofficial People's Commission under Justice Twitia will bring out the truth.

No doubt, militants exploit human rights organisations because they point out the excesses. Still police cannot kill anyone without proving his crime in the court. False encounters by the dozen in UP are not defensible because the po-

lice have no powers to punish on its own. This has, in fact, brutalised the force. The police are important for the society but its capacity to do good is as much as its capacity to do harm.

Communalisation of police has deepened over the years because no action has been taken against those who have committed crime against the minorities. This happened in Delhi against the Sikhs and in Janshedpur, Meerut, Bhagalpur and Mumbai against the Muslims. Neither the NPC nor the Ribeiro committee has found an answer to this challenge. A mixed force may provide some remedy. But the force on the whole has to be above parochialism. How can protectors be predators?

One of the recent intelligence reports assesses the situation correctly. Tensions arising out of political extremism, communal and caste antagonism and religious, ethnic and linguistic factors add to the burden on the law and order machinery. The terrorist violence becomes more vicious as the militants increasingly take to targeted attacks on the security forces especially in J and K. In Andhra Pradesh, the Left wing extremists likewise have become more daring in resorting to landmine attacks and ambush against the armed police. Such assessments should convince the government more than before that the mere law and order approach will not do. Solutions to the problems are political. In any case, the police have to serve the law, not partisan or punitive politics.

Anti-terrorism laws need to be rescinded, as do laws prohibiting the free use of language. The government should compensate displaced villagers, and Kurdish political parties which honour the territorial integrity of Turkey should be allowed to participate in the political life of the country. PKK soldiers need to be granted amnesty. Perhaps with this kind of pre-conditions, Ocalan's declaration of ceasefire and halt to terrorism could be transformed into a useful and long-term peace prospect that Turkey's political leaders and not its military should be persuaded to accept by an international forum led by Italy.

It would also be an opportunity for Turkey to convince its European friends that its objective to join the EU can be supported. And this it can only do by demonstrating a genuine effort to address the Kurdish issue politically, and with benevolence not violence.

lages destroyed by the Turkish military, creating over 3 million refugees. The Turkish government lays the blame for this squarely at Ocalan's door. But there are many related issues that need to be sorted, issues that touch on basic human rights and the need for justice on both sides which can only be solved at a negotiation table.

Anti-terrorism laws need to be rescinded, as do laws prohibiting the free use of language. The government should compensate displaced villagers, and Kurdish political parties which honour the territorial integrity of Turkey should be allowed to participate in the political life of the country. PKK soldiers need to be granted amnesty. Perhaps with this kind of pre-conditions, Ocalan's declaration of ceasefire and halt to terrorism could be transformed into a useful and long-term peace prospect that Turkey's political leaders and not its military should be persuaded to accept by an international forum led by Italy.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

superintendent of police does not go beyond one year because of political pressure or the chief minister's whims. One has a nagging feeling that the Ribeiro committee's findings will go the NPC report way. Used to handling the police for political purposes, the states may not agree to give up the power they have usurped over the years. Even the proposed act to replace the existing police act of 1861 may not find acceptance because it seeks to limit the scope of political interference and various nefarious activities. The centre will need

people as it has happened in Kashmir and the Northeast. Maintaining law and order is of great importance. But what about the excesses? There has to be a system, which can ensure that the police are accountable to the society and that their purpose is legal rather than political. It does not mean that militants should not be dealt with firmly. When they take law and order into their own hands, they have to be punished. However loud they may be in their protest against violation of human rights, the murder of the

A Kurdled Issue: Ocalan vs Europe

Year 2001 has been called the year of dialogue and EU needs to take an active role in bringing Turkey and also Iran to the negotiation table with the Kurds. The Lausanne Treaty of 24 July 1923, signed by major European powers denied Kurds the right to their own state. Perhaps now it is time for Europe to fulfil its moral obligation and put an end to 75 years of oppression of the Kurdish people.

an awaited German request for extradition which may not materialize Ankara, stung by Italy's refusal to comply with its request for handing over its most hated enemy of state, has spat recriminatory words in the direction of the Italian authorities, creating a diplomatic and economic impasse.

All of this week, we have been barraged with other words and statements from all fronts: passionate appeal from Ocalan in a newspaper pleading, "Italy do not betray me!"; defensive words from Germany refusing extradition fearing reprisal from its substantial Kurdish and Turkish population; diplomatic but empty words from the Pope's spokesman in response to an appeal by Ocalan to the Pope; hot words exchanged between Turkey and Italy; soothing but non-committal words from the European Commission to Italy; nosy words by the US and finally strong words from D'Alema who at last spoke about the one word that is most relevant in this row: Dialogue. This was to reinforce the new position of Ocalan who made a public statement renouncing his former acts of terrorism and his desire for seeking a political solution to his case. In the Italian daily La Repubblica he was quoted as saying: "I ask Italy to mediate between us and Turkey

for a political solution to the Kurdish issue. We are ready for dialogue with Turkey, Europe and US. We have abandoned terrorism and are ready for an accord of peace."

He also ordered the almost 10,000 of his followers to go back to their jobs and homes all over Europe and to conduct themselves in a law abiding manner, to which his followers responded with obedience. But Ankara has as always, rejected

also brutal repression, torture, assassination of opponents, illegal imprisonment and all other forms used to stifle freedom." One wants to applaud this kind of plain speaking in an European leader where others have kept a wary silence knowing well that the radicalization of the Kurdish struggle in Turkey lies in the 75 years of repression and genocide policy of the Turkish state, depriving Kurds of their language and cul-

bringing Turkey and also Iran to the negotiation table with the Kurds. The Lausanne Treaty of 24 July 1923, signed by major European powers denied Kurds the right to their own state. Perhaps now it is time for Europe to fulfil its moral obligation and put an end to 75 years of oppression of the Kurdish people. Numbering over 26 million, the Kurds are one of the largest nations in the world without a state. According to them their homeland lies in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, with smaller parts in Syria, Armenia and Azerbaijan. About 13 million Kurds live in Turkey where they comprise 20 per cent of the population. Until recently they were forbidden to learn to write, publicly speak Kurdish under Turkish laws.

Even today anyone discussing the issue of Kurdish identity is accused of supporting PKK and faces imprisonment under anti-terrorist laws. The south-east of Turkey, where many Kurds live, has for long been a region at war. In the last 13 years, the death toll has been over 25,000, with over 3,00 vil-

lages destroyed by the Turkish military, creating over 3 million refugees. The Turkish government lays the blame for this squarely at Ocalan's door. But there are many related issues that need to be sorted, issues that touch on basic human rights and the need for justice on both sides which can only be solved at a negotiation table.

Anti-terrorism laws need to be rescinded, as do laws prohibiting the free use of language. The government should compensate displaced villagers, and Kurdish political parties which honour the territorial integrity of Turkey should be allowed to participate in the political life of the country. PKK soldiers need to be granted amnesty. Perhaps with this kind of pre-conditions, Ocalan's declaration of ceasefire and halt to terrorism could be transformed into a useful and long-term peace prospect that Turkey's political leaders and not its military should be persuaded to accept by an international forum led by Italy.

It would also be an opportunity for Turkey to convince its European friends that its objective to join the EU can be supported. And this it can only do by demonstrating a genuine effort to address the Kurdish issue politically, and with benevolence not violence.

POSTSCRIPT

Neeman A Sobhan

any talks with Ocalan even if PKK lays down its arms. The other day, The Corriere della Sera published a letter by Premier D'Alema whose contents read: "It is a pity that the Turkish authority have not yet taken this opportunity to find a peaceful solution to this long and bloody conflict following the examples of N Ireland and the Basque countries." He also warned the Turks about human rights abuses on their part: "It is not only PKK terrorism which is tearing apart the Turkish state, but also the systematic violation of human rights by the Turkish security forces. Europe fights terrorism, but

Most European countries like Germany and Austria and the US as well, are fully aware of the extent of the human rights violation against the Kurds. And they also realize that the only solution to this dilemma can be in bringing Turkey and the Kurds behind the negotiation table. Ocalan has for the last 6 years asked Turkey to agree to talk. Falling this one more time will bring more and more refugees to Europe and help violence and terrorism to flourish among the Kurds.

Year 2001 has been called the year of dialogue and EU needs to take an active role in bringing Turkey and also Iran to the negotiation table with the Kurds. The Lausanne Treaty of 24 July 1923, signed by major European powers denied Kurds the right to their own state. Perhaps now it is time for Europe to fulfil its moral obligation and put an end to 75 years of oppression of the Kurdish people. Numbering over 26 million, the Kurds are one of the largest nations in the world without a state. According to them their homeland lies in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, with smaller parts in Syria, Armenia and Azerbaijan. About 13 million Kurds live in Turkey where they comprise 20 per cent of the population. Until recently they were forbidden to learn to write, publicly speak Kurdish under Turkish laws.

Even today anyone discussing the issue of Kurdish identity is accused of supporting PKK and faces imprisonment under anti-terrorist laws. The south-east of Turkey, where many Kurds live, has for long been a region at war. In the last 13 years, the death toll has been over 25,000, with over 3,00 vil-

Recalling Mohan Mian

by Nabil Wadi

DEATH is not the end for people like Yousuf Ali Chowdhury, popularly known as Mohan Mian. He is still remembered and revered, especially by the people of Faridpur, 27 years after his death for his contribution to the cause of the down-trodden. On this day in 1971 as the country eagerly awaited independence, Mohan Mian passed away. A massive heart attack silenced a man who lived his life for others.

Born in 1905 in the zamindar family of Khan Saheb Moyouddin Biswas, Mohan Mian had to give up his studies at Ihsan High School when he was 18. He had no other choice but to run the zamindari even at that young age. It was because his father died in 1923 and his elder brother Lal Mian was busy with Congress politics.

Mohan Mian was not a zamindar like many others that one comes across while digging history — he was different, rather opposed to every aspect of the system. "The sooner this bloody system goes, the better," he told the law-makers who were debating whether the system should stay with the Muslim League in power.

Although the subcontinent was divided to ward off apprehension of any subjugation, yet the then government drifted away, proving those pronouncement a rhetoric. Mohan Mian protested against all the injustices inflicted upon the people of the then East Pakistan by the rulers of the West.

His political talent was quite considerable if one takes cue from Moulana Akram Khan's comment during the Pakistan Movement: "If there were 28 Mohan Mians in 28 districts, we would have reached our goal much before." Formerly a Muslim League and an activist in Pakistan Movement for historical reasons, Mohan Mian was first dismayed and then in 1952 could not ideologically agree with the Muslim League high command on the point of state language. He also wanted Bangla to be the language for the Bengalees.

For example, although he played a leading role in framing the 1956 Constitution, Pakistan's first, yet he was the only MNA who refused to sign it on reasons that the constitution did not reflect the rights, hopes and aspirations of the then East Pakistan properly. This is still acknowledged by his contemporary political personalities.

In charity, he was one of the best followers of Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar: Yousuf Ali Chowdhury made large donations for the society's advancement without thinking about his own materialistic interests. As the chairman (for long 17 years) of Faridpur District Board, he had taken the initiative of sinking 20,000 tubewells which was unthinkable in the backdrop of '40s and '50s. In the 1930s, he founded Khademul Ihsan, a philanthropic and missionary organisation for the needy (who were the majority). Mohan Mian understood what 'education' really meant for the majority, and that was the reason why he established a couple of educational institutions of repute in (greater) Faridpur like Moezuddin High School, Halima Girls' School etc.

His achievement, among others, that he along with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Ataur Rahman, Shah Azizur Rahman, Husseyn Shaheed Suhrawardi arranged refuge for some people who were sure-targets of the sequel of Calcutta riot. He even given shelter to hundreds of Hindu families at his Mahutull residence.

Yousuf Ali Chowdhury foresaw that Bangladesh was bound to be a reality, and that was why he tried to advise the erstwhile West Pakistan authorities to be democratic and thereby hand over the state power to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who won the election in 1970 with people's mandate.



To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Traffic control in the city

Sir, We are happy to see that the traffic in some areas of the city has been brought under control, jointly by the traffic police, army and navy personnel. This was a long outstanding issue which has been solved at least in some points of the city.

An excellent example has been set in some areas like — Mohakhali, Banani, Kemal Ataturk Ave. and some parts of Baridhara area. We are surprisingly charmed and very happy to see the Gulshan-2 circle area so clean and trouble-free. Whereas, few weeks ago, there used to be hundreds of rickshaws and baby-taxis moving around the streets haphazardly blocking the whole area and creating a mess. But now the whole area is clean and the traffic can move so easily because of the restrictions introduced by the army police and the traffic police.

Now we would like to bring to your kind notice the traffic situation in the school area, Road No 27 (old), Dhaka, Residential Area, Dhaka, during the peak hours (between 8am to 9am and from 12:30 pm to 2:00 pm). The traffic is unbelievably chaotic during the hours mentioned above. People who regularly drop their kids to schools in that area, face the most frustrating traffic jams on a regular basis for hours.

The reasons due to which the traffic jam occurs have are: right turns, U-turns and scattered vehicle movement. This constant problem needs to be solved immediately.

We suggest to put a divider all the way from Mirpur road to Satmasjid Road. So that all motorised and non-motorised vehicles can move one-way on both sides. If this does not permit, then timing must be fixed to make the whole of Road 27, one-way during the peak hours (8 am to 9 am and again 12:30

pm to 2:00 pm) either starting from Mirpur Road side towards Satmasjid Road (east to west) or from the Satmasjid Road to Mirpur Road (west to east), whichever is found appropriate by the authorities concerned.

Qazi H Hafiz Dhaka

Gas and petrol price

Sir, Now that we have discovered huge reserves of gas in our country and have also started extracting it, its price ironically has increased, instead of decreasing. Does that mean that before, with less gas supply we were better off? What kind of economics works in our country? It defies all rules of Economics! For according to it when the supply increases the price goes down, demand remaining constant. That is supply and price are inversely proportional to each other. But in Bangladesh economy all the great economists have been proven wrong! I think we need to write our own Economics books!

The reason given behind the increase in price is to bring it to the international level as demanded by the donor agencies (so the papers say). Don't the donors know that our people are one of the poorest in the world and that is why we need donors and their donations? Certainly not their advice to break the back of already poor people. Why don't they give a positive advice to the government to bring the salary of everybody in this country to the international level first? Then only they can pay the gas and petrol bills at international price, not before that. Why this unfairness to the citizens of this country whose per capita income is one of the lowest in the world? They can barely make their ends meet, already.

The price of petrol was almost doubled for some reason or other. But when the international price came down ours

never did. Why? If you want to keep up with the international price, do so both ways. Not just one way, to get as much out of the public as possible! Do other states also subject their subjects to such unfairness? We'd like to know.

The price of electricity should also go down now, as should the price of all the industrial products which use gas for energy. Since we have the second largest gas reserves in the world, we soon should be heading towards prosperity and development. Instead we get a push backwards by the price hike of almost everything starting with the gas itself! Will an economist explain that please? For we find ourselves absolutely in the dark regarding what's going on around us in the market or rather the free market.

Dr Sawar Q Rashid Dhaka

Voter's ID card

Sir, We are very glad to see the news item in the DS titled "EC resumes issuing voter's ID card Nov 22," on 19/11/98. But we apprehend that some persons may destroy its operations due to the following reasons:

1) The metropolitan cities have not been properly surveyed and taken proper list with names of everybody by the respective authorities. Because, on due date I did not find the person concerned from the EC at his room to submit my application forms like others.

2) Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet divisional headquarters should be ensured for voter ID cards. Because, ID cards serve many purposes.

3) If the EC can issue ID cards of divisional headquarters, we may ensure fair election in the country without a caretaker government.

M Ali Dhaka

Time in the JS

Sir, We have heard that it costs Taka 16000 per minute during the JS session time which is a lot for a poor country like ours. If every minute has been utilized for the welfare of the country, then it would have been worthwhile — but we have seen that most of the time pass

by hurling abusive words to each other by the ruling party and the opposition blaming each other, some times opposition stage walk out and some other times opposition 'boycott' the parliamentary session complaining that they are not allowed to speak in many instances. But they have been elected by the people and as their representatives to speak on their behalf.

I heard about an amusing incident concerning Parliamentary Session. The students of a school in Dhaka were invited to attend one of the sessions. One small boy was reluctant to go, his mother coaxed him that he must not miss this opportunity as he might not get another chance and he will learn many things from the learned persons.

So he complied and went — but a very disappointed boy returned and annoyingly said to his mother, "Why did you send me, what could I learn except quarrelling, which they were doing all the time."

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad Chittagong

Save our haors from chemical aggression

Sir, Once Hakaluki haor was full of fishes. Hundreds of cows used to graze here. Guest birds from Siberia were happy to have enough snails. Hial roots were appropriate places for shrimp breeding and the roots gave shelter to the fingerlings. They could grow. Trees and water created fantastic habitat for the birds.

Those old golden days are gone. Fertilizer, pesticides, weedicides and fungicides from the tea gardens in the vicinity, massive use of chemical fertilizer and pesticides in HYV agriculture, garbage from the Fenchugonj fertilizer factory, paper mill across the border etc., are flowing down to the haor, killing the fish and destroying their breeding ground. River water gives bad smell and fishes are not of normal taste. Now the haor is fish free. Current jals/kapar jals are being used to collect small fingerlings by the reckless.

Mohammad Zakria Dhaka