

Wake up Power Sector

Chittagong WASA had a taste of consumer bitterness on Tuesday the like of which it must do everything in its power to avert in the future. Livid with anger at 15 straight days of water supply shut-down to several areas of the port city, a 1000-strong agitated crowd stormed the Ctg WASA office demanding an immediate redressal of their grievance. That women among them carried pitchers obviously added an extra bit of poignancy to the demonstrations. Only assurances of an early restoration of supply could calm them.

Now, we are against unruly behaviour in general, but would like to treat the cause-and-effect relationship here with some respect; because quite obviously it has to do with a legitimate civic grievance. What is extremely relevant is the fact that but for the frequent interruptions on the supply of power there would not have been the erratic supply of water we are having to suffer now.

So, the moral of the Chittagong WASA rumpus lands on the doorstep of the PDB, DESA, and above all, the Energy Ministry. It is a wake-up call for the somnolent energy authorities.

If Chittagong has been the unfortunate victim of load-shedding for days together despite being near the heartland of power generation it is evidently Dhaka's turn now to be facing the ordeal along with most parts of the country. Judging by the very high and most frequent incidence of power failures throughout Bangladesh we think the alarm bell is ringing too clearly to ignore anymore. The field situation makes a terrible reading: on Tuesday afternoon the newly built 5th and 6th unit at the country's largest power generation plant in Ghorasal went kaput, shutting off 420mw of power supply. In the last week Razuan 2nd unit had to be decommissioned reducing the supply by another 210 mw. The shut-down of these three major units had such a knock-on effect on Tuesday that a supply load worth 700 mw had to be shed by the PDB.

In the Dhaka Metropolitan Area, the load shedding on the night of Tuesday was a crippling 350 mw. To put it in the customary aphorism, the situation is likely to get worse before it gets better. Needless to say, water supply will be affected collaterally. Something that the energy ministry and PDB need to be equally wary of is the bad omen for industrial production to go down. What is even worse is that load shedding, and particularly voltage fluctuation beyond a certain band, can damage industrial machinery beyond repair.

Animal Market Goons

Hit them hard before they strike. Press reports have expressed apprehensions of widespread terrorism centering around stocks of sacrificial animals in the 'haats' meant for them. Before every Eid-ul-Azha a number of places in and around the city are leased out by Dhaka City Corporation for use as temporary 'animal markets'. Seventeen such markets have been authorised by the DCC for the city and reports have it that a ward commissioner has obtained lease for all these markets by using his influence.

The owners of these 'haats' have allegedly started hiring armed cadres and terrorists for helping them to procure sufficient number of animals by coercive methods. The areas of operation for these goons are the surface and riverine routes through which thousands of animals are being transported to these 'haats' of the city. With Eid only four days away their thuggery has picked up pace. It has also been reported that to improve the mobility of these armed goons, engine-driven boats have been made available to them. These cadres are already on the prowl to expand their area of influence and fears were expressed in the reports that blood spilling episodes like in the past may occur this year also. This is an alarming situation and it can not be allowed to go unattended.

Although arrangements are being made to deploy policemen and detectives in and around the animal markets, a strict supervisory surveillance has to be maintained and laws applied ruthlessly without fear or favour. Safety and security of all who will visit these places should be the top concern of the law enforcers.

An Example Set by PM

It's a noble gesture that comes as a bliss for the country's blind populace, and for that matter, for every citizen who cares for them. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina volunteered to contribute her "corneas" for posthumous transplantation while launching the Begum Fazilatunnessa Eye Care Project on Tuesday. The enthusiasm illustrated by the PM for a noble cause will certainly go a long way to encourage others to follow her example.

The major cause of blindness is cataract, a curable affliction. Bangladesh is agonised with fifteen lakh blind persons representing 1.2 per cent of the total population of the country. Of them, at least sixty per cent suffer due to cataract. This is absolutely curable through surgery if "corneas" are available for transplantation. Bangladesh National Council for the Blind has taken up the initiative to set up nation-wide camps to perform cataract surgeries in alleviating blindness. This should not at all be a tough task on part of physicians if they are assisted by donors willing to part with their corneas when they leave this world. Enabling a blind person to see is nothing short of an angelic feat. On the other hand, persons with corneas of others would feel sublime and lead a life that he or she never dreamt of.

Now that the PM has shown the magnanimous way even the less courageous may feel spirited to emulate her example.

THE crisis in Kosovo appears to have reached the brink. The President of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic, seems to thrive on brinkmanship. He should not forget that Bosnia is gone forever and Kosovo is rapidly slipping out of his hands.

The former Yugoslavia started splintering shortly after the death of the last Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito. Armed with extraordinary prestige as the hero of the resistance fighter against Nazi aggression during the Second World War, he fashioned Yugoslavia—a queer ethnic mix of many nationalities of Europe.

It did not survive his death. The Yugoslavia of old is a memory, although not very old. In any case, there is no one to resurrect the ghost of old Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia has been splintering for more than a decade now. Slovenia had a relatively peaceful separation. Bitter war ensued over Bosnia-Herzegovina. The situation was compounded because in the heart of Europe was emerging a Muslim state. The Bosnians are the remnants of the Ottoman Empire, which ruled southern Europe, including Yugoslavia, for nearly six centuries.

In Bosnia, the Serbs of Yugoslavia unleashed their racial hatred against the Turks, who had ruled them for centuries. It turned out to be a murderous ethnic, religious war of the

The Kosovars accepted the Peace Plan and Yugoslavia rejected it. The only major power backing the Serbian position is Russia. Serbs like the Russians are Orthodox Christians. Russia has opposed strenuously and continues to oppose any military solution.

worst kind. The brutalities of the Serbs left a deep scar in the heart of Europe. The International Court of Justice at The Hague in the Netherlands is still trying to lay their hands on the war criminals among the Serbs.

After years of efforts and lot of bloodshed, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke brought about a settlement in Dayton, Ohio in the USA. Fortunately that deal has survived to this day.

The blood in Bosnia did not have time to dry when the world was confronted with a new bullying by Milosevic against Kosovo on the flimsy pretext that Kosovo was a part of Yugoslavia. Ninety per cent of the Kosovars are ethnic Albanians. Of course Milosevic's Serbian forces outnumber and outgun the Kosovars by a very wide margin.

There is no love lost between the Serbs and the Kosovars. The Kosovars have been traumatised by repeated Serb barbarism of the worst kind. We have witnessed thousands of Kosovars fleeing the snowy mountains of Kosovo and take shelter in neighbouring Macedonia.

The specious pretext used by the Serbs is that Kosovo is a part of Yugoslavia. Yet a nation

Crisis in Kosovo

is united by voluntary contract and once that is broken there is precious little to hold them together. The Serbs advance the argument that Kosovo is the birth place of Serbian nationalism. Yet memory of such events is growing dimmer by the day.

Kosovars have hardly anything in common with the Serbs. They are of Turkish origin and are Muslims. The Serbs appear to suffer from terrible

inferiority complex because of their past with the Ottoman Empire. Another remarkable feature of the Turks is that they do not lose their identity in foreign soil. They seem to retain their Turkishness although centuries may go by. Turks have not lost their identity although they have lived for centuries in Europe.

In the current phase of the Kosovo crisis, long negotiations have been held in Rambouillet, outside Paris. The meeting has been hosted by France and Britain. They presented a Peace

Plan, which stopped short of offering independence to the Kosovars but offered a large dose of autonomy.

The Kosovars accepted the Peace Plan and Yugoslavia rejected it. The only major power backing the Serbian position is Russia. Serbs like the Russians are Orthodox Christians. Russia has opposed strenuously and continues to oppose any military solution.

On the other hand, Yugoslavia is eager to impose a military solution on the tiny minority of Kosovars. She has amassed tanks, artillery and heavy weapons to teach the Kosovars a good lesson. In their plight the Kosovars have no choice but to seek refuge in Macedonia.

Since the Yugoslav leadership will not pay heed to reason, the West led by the USA has amassed considerable weapon, including aircraft for a massive

crippling blow to the Yugoslav military establishment. The US

negotiator Richard Holbrooke, acting on behalf of President Bill Clinton and the West, has delivered an ultimatum to Slobodan Milosevic.

In a stark message he has stated that he had come not to negotiate but deliver a message. The message is that either Yugoslavia accept the Peace Plan or face massive military strike. Long talks have been held between Holbrooke and Milosevic and finally it has ended inconclusively.

The West appears ready to unleash military strike. President Bill Clinton went before an American TV audience and explained in great detail the stakes involved. He made out a forceful case for intervention. For he pointed out that the US and the world had to pay a heavy price in Bosnia for long inaction. President Clinton has to carry his Congress with him in a major decision, which is bound to involve US troops, a prospect dreaded by US lawmakers.

Slobodan Milosevic has to face the bitter truth. His Yugoslavia is a vanished dream. His Yugoslavia has splintered irretrievably. His Yugoslavia is waiting for a decent burial. He has also to take account of the forces in presence. On the one hand there is the massive mili-

tary presence of the West, united and ready to strike and on the other a seriously enfeebled Russia crying hoarse against military action.

The outcome is not difficult to predict. The most important aspect of the drama is that the contract between the Serbs and ethnic Kosovars have been broken forever. The right of self-determination of peoples is the battle cry of the twentieth century, which is rapidly coming to a close. The tide is too strong and there is no force on earth, which can stop it.

Yugoslavia will do well to bow to the inevitable and spare people of both Serbian and other origin the agony of further bloodshed. Therein lies statesmanship. On the one hand there are Serb forces ready to impose their will on a defiant minority, which has broken all links with Yugoslavia and on the other the massive western forces, whose primary duty is to avoid bloodshed. The sticking point so far appears to be the stationing of NATO forces within Kosovo, if not Yugoslavia. Given the track record of the forces of Milosevic, no other credible measure appears to have any chance of success.

The die is cast. Slobodan Milosevic has to choose peace or utter ruin of his country. On the threshold of the twenty first century in the heart of Europe, it is a grim prospect indeed. Let us hope sanity will prevail.

The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman



On the other hand, Yugoslavia is eager to impose a military solution on the tiny minority of Kosovars. She has amassed tanks, artillery and heavy weapons to teach the Kosovars a good lesson. In their plight the Kosovars have no choice but to seek refuge in Macedonia.

Since the Yugoslav leadership will not pay heed to reason, the West led by the USA has amassed considerable weapon, including aircraft for a massive

crippling blow to the Yugoslav military establishment. The US

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Fences Do Not Make Good Neighbours

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

Of the three major countries in the subcontinent — Bangladesh, India and Pakistan — none is sure if the other two are happy with their borders. More ominously, they worry whether their neighbour covets their territory. Such explosive mistrust makes for jittery and suspicious neighbours.

officials at Dhaka airport, clearing passengers bound for various Indian cities?

American and Canadian professional sports teams do not recognise international boundaries. National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL) and Major League Baseball have teams from both Canada and the USA; teams from Canada and the US visit each other's home arena to play home and away games. Why is it foolhardy to imagine football clubs from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan forming a single premier league?

Of course things are not as simple as they seem. They never are, although it has no territorial design on Canada, the United States dominates Canada in every way. It owns most of the Canadian business; 80 per cent of the Canadians live within 150 miles of the US border. Occasionally, Canadians do complain to the Americans about acid rain and the American fishermen's over-

fishing in Canadian waters. What makes it all work is that the Canadians do not resent the Americans. Canadians, with the exception of the Quebecois, believe that in terms of cultural and religious heritage, they are identical to the Americans.

There is no such belief in the subcontinent, although we have so much in common. Of the three major countries in the subcontinent — Bangladesh, India and Pakistan — none is sure if the other two are happy with their borders. More ominously, they worry whether their neighbour covets their territory. Such explosive mistrust makes for jittery and suspicious neighbours.

It is hard to feel optimistic about the future of India-Pakistan relations. Only less than a year ago, Pakistan matched India's live atomic explosions, "blast for blast." Pakistan's best chance of getting the whole of Kashmir was in the aftermath of partition, when India was not prepared. They would have probably captured Kashmir had

not the Pakistani soldiers gone on a looting and raping spree. After the initial opportunity was squandered, Pakistan's only hope was foreign pressure on its militarily superior neighbour. With the USSR's constant veto in the UN Security Council against the plebiscite in Kashmir, India survived the crucial first years.

After 50 years, no one expects Pakistan is interested in revisiting the Kashmir issue. It is unthinkable for Pakistan's mightier neighbour to lapse into unprecedented moral remorse, do the right thing and relinquish a part with its territory. If it has not already done so, Pakistan

should give up its dream of ever snatching Kashmir by force. If Pakistan continues to insist on the solution of the Kashmir problem as a precondition for normalising relationship with India, peace will continue to be elusive.

Closer to home, apprehensions have been expressed regarding the Dhaka-Calcutta road link. The leader of the opposition went so far as to say that this could result in loss of sovereignty. If a link is not, the loss of sovereignty, it is difficult to imagine how road link could be. As a matter of fact, we are all linked; by the air we breathe, and the ground we stand on. The whole world is a solid mass, with the heights what we call the mountains, and the depths the oceans.

Some day, when the world truly becomes a global village, the people of the future will wonder how the people of the past could have been so primitive; how they could set up artificial barriers to keep the people of the nations apart, and fences to keep neighbours at bay.

OPINION

Looking at Cultural Trends

Abul M Ahmad

Those who govern have to filter the advice from the advisors carefully, in public interest. Other interests are subordinate. The expertise, neutrality and moral courage have to be relied upon when basic differences of opinion arise. Sycophancy has to be monitored carefully. In some, there is a tendency to express what the bosses wish to hear.

Later, the field propaganda must be credible to the majority of the citizens, and should not be focused upon one section of the society, regardless of party interest. Vague accusations at generalised opponents with 'conspiracy' and 'anti-national' cooked-up hypotheses and pre-emptive charges to impress after some time, unless backed up with needed information, data and evidence.

Here the public is not easily allowed to make its own judgment without coercion. This role of judgment cannot be transferred to any group, as this tool is not transferable. A party to a dispute cannot sit over judgment. Public decisions are always open to public criticism, and have to be tolerated in a decent manner, without getting furious. This is not happening in Bangladesh today. National support and party support are quite different issues.

Spoon-feeding may not be successful in changing quickly basic attitudes. The country-indanger bogey has been overused. Of course the party can assert the 'conspiracy' is against the party itself, and not against the country — that is perfectly understandable.

A citizen's basic loyalty is to the state, not to a party. But in this 'developing' society, the party comes first, whether in power or in the opposition. The credibility factor of a propaganda campaign is low. Enthusiasm is to be discouraged, as it might misfire — as it does frequently.

The present leadership appears to have unleashed more than the maximum quota of controversies into topical issues, making the situation worse confounded. A confused 'supporter' is unreliable; a point not to be overlooked.

Even granting that relaxation could be tolerated to bridge the gap of couple of decades, there appears to be a tendency to introduce, or reintroduce, certain 'isms' too hurriedly after such gaps.

The new generation, brought up in a topical environment, is more difficult to convert, as they don't 'feel', but have to 'rationalise' any proposal with historical background. History is two-dimensional, while feeling is three-dimensional, hence the 'hammering' has to be carefully planned to soften the resistance. Sufficient time has to be provided for such exercises for self-debate, for arriving at a

personal decision to support a movement or not; or even remain neutral. History reveals that coercion never pays in the long run. Many come with dedicated agenda hurry, and spoil the broth.

Neutrality and dissension have to be respected; it is an individual's right in the restricted sense of personal and individual freedom guaranteed by the UN charter.

This neutral stance is an essential ingredient of social life in the community, and this freedom to choose should not be ignored by the pressure groups, whether for or against a movement.

Unfortunately, in Bangladesh today, neutrality is neither respected nor patronised. The self-seekers and the opportunists see 'popular' trends which erode, it encroach upon, individual liberty, and encourage 'tribalism' politically and socially. Today the citizens are in the grip of political tribalism. This will bring neither peace nor stability.

This is a disturbing trend, and has to be handled carefully, to achieve a minimum level of national consensus, which is lacking today, since 1971. Political 'hurdles' should not be too long for poking! And the baton is not a political weapon.

Thus one relevant question arises: how far the 'intellectuals' have free and independent minds to take individual stand in approach and appraisal on different issues, without seeking group conformity under political tutelage? Is it necessary to belong to some camp to be noticed (the musical chair syndrome, a topic frequently discussed in the drawing rooms)? What are the trade-offs in lieu of self-liberty and personal freedom from the dictates of regimented or collective thinking? (This is not a revolutionary statement!)

That these basic types of questions are being raised in the mind of even a single citizen of the country is not a compliment to the leaders of our society. It means we are still debating at the core or root level. British India was partitioned; then Pakistan broke up; and now some sections of our society are looking through glass walls. We have to make up our minds and choose the main national priorities without any basic option. It is not a one-party game.

We have been debating and playing deadly games with these options for three decades; and some of these movements are seen as conspiracies and anti-national trends. Why old issues never end and new issues are always cropping up, and some issues are kept pending decade after decade? Such relevant questions cannot be side-tracked. The politicians should be facilitators, not the arbitrators.

To the Editor...

Poor politics

Sir, The way the political differences among the different political parties are increasing. I am afraid, it won't take much time to reach a complete breakdown of our national economy and moral and cultural standing. Unfortunately, the vested groups are actually taking advantage of the situation while sufferings of the common and law-abiding citizens are crossing all limits.

May I fervently appeal to all our 'esteemed' political parties to take initiatives for reducing their differences through holding dialogues.

M Zahidul Haque
Associate Professor
Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka-1207

Lessons for leaders

Sir, I would like to draw the attention of our Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader to the recent gathering of almost all the world leaders at the funeral of the late King Hussein of Jordan. If our two leading leaders did not watch CNN or BBC then they have missed something even though, I doubt that by watching they really would have learnt anything.

Well, it was shown that President Clinton arrived at Amman accompanied by three former US presidents in the same plane. Two of these former presidents happened to be from the opposition Republican Party which was trying desperately to impeach Clinton from presidency. The British Prime Minister came in the same plane accompanied by opposition MPs. This only shows that on a common cause they are all together.

Now I ask the PM and the Opposition Leader who cannot come to any consensus about anything what will happen to our children who have to study in this country to make a future for a living? Who will console us, the parents of all these children of this unfortunate nation?

Mohammed Abdullah Mamun
House#27, Rd#122 Gulshan #1 Dhaka

"The most innocent programme"

Sir, While announcing the BNP opposition alliance's call for 72-hour hartal from February 23-25, BNP SG Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan answered some of the questions asked by the journalists present there.

Asked whether he is apprehending any loss of life during the hartal, Bhuiyan said, "Hartal is the most innocent and democratic programme" (as reported in *The Daily Star* on February 19).

At first I must thank Mr Bhuiyan for taking the trouble of explaining what hartal is. Well, if hartal is the "most innocent" programme, as Mr Bhuiyan termed it, then I wonder which or what is the "most violent programme". If disruption of the normal life and complete shutdown across the country causing sufferings to the common masses appear to him "most innocent", then I wonder what appears "not so innocent" to Mr Bhuiyan.

Again, he has claimed hartal as "democratic programme". Does democracy give a party or parties the right to put barricade on the individual's freedom to do thing as he or she wishes? In democracy, as a man or a party enjoys the right to express his or her opinion, at the same time another has the equal right not to comply with it. The latter cannot simply force the latter to respond to his call as there is no room for exercising 'force' in democracy. So, hartal cannot be in any way a democratic practice as it is bound to curb the liberty of one individual or the other in one way or the other.

Shamim Ahsan
64/M R K Mission Road,
Gopibagh, Dhaka-1203

Unauthorised constructions

Sir, I was very surprised to read a news item that Rajuk is going to dismantle and destroy 225 unauthorised constructed buildings in Dhaka city, in the first phase!

If each building is worth Tk 30 lac minimum then the total loss is Tk 67.50 crore. Is this not a national loss?

Recently I visited Calcutta, Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) has destroyed many those buildings which have been made on government's land or other's land or the buildings are technically defective or risky; constructed without proper approved plans. If buildings had been constructed by the legal owners of the land and the constructions were done according to existing rules, except the approved plans of the CIT, the CIT may impose fine/penalty and approve the plans. If the constructions need some modifications, CIT advises the owners to follow the same and then only

the plans are approved with fine or penalty. Under no circumstances CIT takes any blind decision to destroy each and every building.

Let us remember that everything belongs to the country and the nation. We are just trustees. If 225 buildings are destroyed the nation as a whole loses 225 buildings and Tk 67.50 crore. This will be big loss to the owners in particular.

M Sulaiman
46 Imanganj, Dhaka.

Disorder looms

Sir, I read two articles — one by Mr Mahfuz Anam 'Dak from Dhaka' in *India Today* of 8th March and another, 'Hartal and national cohesion' in an English daily by Dr Sabrina Q Rashid. Both the writers have rightfully expressed their anxieties regarding current political deadlock. I wonder, did our elders fight for this? Our country has become hostage to the whim of two leaders because their stubbornness. It is hurting to read that their dislike for each other is so glaring that they cannot even spend five minutes to discuss the problems of our country. (Tit for Tat, *India Today* by Mahfuz Anam).

Dr Sabrina pointed out the good effect of hartal in polluted Dhaka. I agree with her. Nowadays it is a treat to be woken up by the chirping birds, smoke and noise free environment, but at what cost? Like Dr. Sabrina, I believe factional fighting is one of the reasons disorder.

Shikha Mansoor
Road No/House F25,
Banani Dhaka.

Troubled traffic

Sir, Mismanagement and faulty planning are main reasons behind the unbearable traffic jam in Dhaka city. The reckless permission granted for construction of multistoried buildings, shopping complexes, health and educational institutions without a cohesive planning structure and adequate facilities for parking has turned the city into a dangerous urban jungle.

A well-designed city should have 25 per cent road-area of its total land, whereas the Dhaka city owns only 8 per cent having few alternative routes in most cases. Besides, on street parking contributes to the city transport problem (reducing roadway capacity and creating heavy traffic jam), particularly in the busy areas of the city.

Moreover, normal traffic of vehicles and pedestrians is hindered due to the presence of temporary authorised market on the footpaths or along the roadsides and thus the whole system is beyond our control.

Co-existence of a mixed mode traffic system (motorised and non-motorised slow-moving vehicles in the same roads) is a great reason behind the jam and excessive environmental pollution (air and noise pollution) in Dhaka city.

The traffic rules of 1939 are still in force with slight modification in some cases. The traffic control system of our country is still fully dependent on traffic police. But the traffic police-population ratio in Dhaka city is so disproportionate as to leave a void in traffic control for such a growing city. Considering the problem itself, in view of an unusually increasing population of the city together with the increase in the number of vehicles, the existing traffic department is heavily understaffed.

By the year 2000, Dhaka city's population will be approaching 10 million. But how will this city deal with her mega problems during that time? What is the remedy? And how would the environment be saved? It is possible to push the hundreds of thousands of rich shaw-pullers and their families back to their rural homes? Of course, not. We have to remember that whether motivated by a humanitarian, public health or economic concern, there are several prerequisites for sound and effective traffic management programme. These essentially call for a response based on a scientific analysis of the problem, not one based on judgement and emotion or used to be said, one based on prejudice, hunch, opinion and guesswork. So, then? Priority must be given to mass-transit (BRTC city service, large buses and double-deckers, premium buses, proposed light rail etc.) instead of para-transit (auto-rickshaws, rikshaws, maxies etc.) and suitable environment must be ensured by applying appropriate technologies and efficient management.

Saidur Rahman Milan
3403, Shahid Smriti Hall
BUET, Dhaka-1000