

The Power Problem: Then and Now

by Quazi Azher Ali

The present situation in Bangladesh is definitely much better than that was prevailing in 1974-75. We have got local and foreign currencies for repair and rehabilitation. A large number of experienced engineers and many responsible contractors are now available in the country. It is, therefore, not understood why the government has been taking such a long time to solve the power problem.

REPORTS appeared the other day in newspapers that electricity offices in different parts of Dhaka city were attacked and burnt, rail and road transports were stopped and damaged by angry citizens and police had to open fire to disperse them. Due to stoppage of electricity, water supply was affected in the city. The continuous hardship in the absence of electricity and water has caused frustration and anger among the people.

State Minister for Energy recently stated in the Parliament that solution of the present power crisis will take two to three years. The shortage of power over the last few years has seriously affected the economy of the country including local and foreign investments. The unprecedented power shortage and the resultant loadshedding have hampered production, employment, export and import, academic pursuit, social order, and what not.

Power is not only used for domestic purposes but it is more urgently required in industries, trade and commerce, institutions and public facilities. Students use electricity for their studies and to prepare for examinations. Last year the Prime Minister stated in the Parliament that while 85 per cent of the population did not get electricity, all the cities were being on behalf of the remaining 15 per cent. It may then be understood that the economy of this country depends more on this 15 per cent which consume electricity.

It may be noted that this time the Minister for power was relieved from his responsibilities in 1998 and the charge of the ministry was taken over by the Prime Minister himself. People were hopeful that their problem would be solved. But after one year, the situation has further deteriorated instead of improving. Who will be the Scope-goat now? People are now apprehensive of the policy, motive, inefficiency and also corruption of the sector.

Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) was established by an ordinance in 1958. The departments of Irrigation and Electricity were transferred to WAPDA by the then government.

After liberation, WAPDA was bifurcated into two independent Boards namely Water Development Board (WDB) and Power Development Board (PDB). The Minister-in-charge of the Ministry of Power and Irrigation became the chairman of both PDB and WDB.

During 1972 to 1974 Bangladesh was dependent for electricity on Kaptai (two units) and Ashuganj (one unit). Dhaka city including Gulshan Diplomatic Zone used to experience 7-8 hours of load shedding daily. Mymensingh town had 3 a MW supply before liberation from local generators. After liberation, only one MW electricity was available and each third of the town could get electricity by rotation. There was very little electricity in the West Zones as most of the small power stations were not in operation.

The power crisis became acute due to bombing of Ashuganj and Siddhirganj Power stations during the liberation war which could not be immediately rehabilitated for want of spare parts. One unit of Ashuganj Power Station was brought under operation by cannibalizing its 2nd unit. Shahjibazar Power station was also shut down for want of spare parts. The newly independent country did not have adequate fund in the budget and foreign exchange for purchasing spare parts and to pay for experts. The communication network, e.g. roads and bridges were also disrupted during the liberation war and the movement of heavy machinery and transmission materials from Chittagong port could not be effected as Bhaibrac Bridge, bombed during liberation war, could not yet be repaired.

The Power System was in the private sector till 1960 when WAPDA started taking over small generators managed by private owners located at different district and sub-divisional headquarters. The small generators were uneconomic and could not meet the local demand. The cost of operation,

maintenance and fuel was also very high. As gas was available in the eastern zone of the country, gas based large generators could be established in the 60s at Ashuganj, Shahjibazar and Siddhirganj. Ghorashal Power Station was started by Russian experts in 1967 but it lagged behind till 1975.

Mr A R Serinabat, Minister, was a pragmatic and farsighted gentleman. He realised the necessity and urgency for a full-time Chairman of PDB for the rehabilitation and expansion of the power sector. An ex-CSP officer was selected by him and posted as Chairman. He brought back discipline among employees, organised a good team of Engineers and inspired them to devote their sincere services in the cause of the nation. He went to Germany to meet the five manufacturers of the different types of spares for Ashuganj Power station and convinced them to supply spares and technical experts on credit for immediate repair and rehabilitation of the power station to save the economy of the newly independent country. Ashuganj Power Station was repaired and rehabilitated in three months and power supply was resumed

in full capacity. Similarly, the USAID was approached who brought spares and technical experts from the General Electric Company for rehabilitation of Siddhirganj Power Station. Spares were also brought from Fiat Co in Italy in the same manner to rehabilitate Shahjibazar Power Station.

An Agreement was signed with the Asian Development Bank for the establishment of a 40 MW Power Station at Bheramara on emergency basis. Earlier another Agreement was signed between the Government of Bangladesh and erstwhile Czechoslovakia for setting up a 110 Megawatt Power station at Khulna and a 60 MW Power Station at Sikalaha in Chittagong. Bheramara Power station with a 40 MW capacity was established in eight months and the 110 MW Power station at Khulna was installed in one year. A smaller Power Station was established at Saidpur. The power generation problem could thus be solved within a short time of one year.

Simultaneously, it was planned to construct 132 KV Transmission Lines to connect districts and sub-divisions with large power stations. Communication between Chittagong

and the rest of the country was disrupted during the liberation war as Bhaibrac Bridge was bombed and broken. Spares and thousands of tons of materials were transported by water transports, truck and different indigenous means of transport including bullock and buffalo carts to complete the construction of transmission lines between Ashuganj and Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Kishoreganj and Netrokona in just eight months. It was previously estimated to require three to five years for the construction. Similarly, Ishwardi, Bogra-Saidpur-Thakurgaon transmission lines were constructed in 10 months time. Khulna-Barisal, Ishwardi-Kushitia, Faridpur and Khulna-Gopalganj lines were also constructed during this period of time. In two years, 29 districts and sub-divisional towns and 282 thanas were connected with the grid lines ensuring smooth supply of electricity. At this stage it was felt that it would not be possible for PDB to further extend electric supply to villages.

The Chairman of PDB approached USAID and convinced the Director to help set up a Rural Electrification Board. As the generation and transmis-

sion problem could be solved in a record time, the USAID helped bring NRECA to assist in establishing the Board. A memorandum of understanding was signed by the Chairman PDB with NRECA of USA for this purpose. Noticing the fast expansion of electricity in Bangladesh, the Government of the former Soviet Union came forward to help establish the General Electric Manufacturing Plant at Chittagong the plans for which had been shelved earlier.

PDB put, heavy pressure on the Russian experts to expedite the completion of the long delayed power station at Ghorashal. The Chairman of PDB took the Russian Ambassador by helicopter to Ghorashal and explained the urgency for immediate completion of the work. The Russians took one year to complete the 1st unit. For the 2nd unit they wanted two years time. It was felt then that Bangladeshi Engineers had meanwhile gained enough experience and could complete the installation of the 2nd unit within a much shorter period. PDB took up the challenge and sent back the Russians giving the Bangladeshi engineers full responsibility for the remaining work. They did an excellent job and completed the project in 10 months.

The electric power system was constructed and rehabilitated in a short time. Two national grid lines were constructed on two sides of the Padma and Jamuna which were later connected by an inter-

connector in 1979 with assistance from Kuwait, UAE and the OPEC. The large number of projects could be implemented in a short-time due to the cooperation of all the staff and engineers of the Power Development Board. They worked as a team and were dedicated to meet the challenge of national reconstruction and economic development. The Ministry of Power and the Planning Commission also extended full support and joined hands to solve the day to day problems regarding formalities and procedures.

The present situation in Bangladesh is definitely much better than that prevailing in 1974-75. We have got local and foreign currencies for repair and rehabilitation and a good communication system. A large number of experienced engineers and many responsible contractors are now available in the country. It is, therefore, not understood why the government has been taking such a long time to solve the power problem. Immediately after the winter season, the power system broke down. The people and the economy both are suffering. We are frequently hearing about decisions and directives with little progress in implementation. Some people think that it is due to the wrong planning, programming and priorities that the problems are not going away.

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Giving Priority to Child Development

by Dr. Reaz Mobarak

Child development has a close relationship with nutrition particularly in the context of Bangladesh where many children are undernourished. Deficiency in nutrition both in quality and quantity slows down both child's growth and development.

CHILDREN are the "future" of our country. But are our children developing properly? When we talk about a child's development we often confuse this with his/her growth. But a child has both a body and a mind. In fact there is a difference between "physical growth" and "development". Growth means to become physically growing up. It is more related to nutrition. It implies to increase in size of body tissues (quantity).

But "development" means both physical and mental development. In other words we can say "global development". In Bangla, we call it "bikash". Development is more related to function (quality). A child's development is broadly determined by maturation of his/her central nervous system, brain and sensory organs. We must know that the process of learning in a child begins at birth. Therefore lack of parental attention in the formative years may seriously affect the developmental progress a child is likely to make.

In our culture (which is now abandoned by many young couples) children live in a joint family. So, they receive attention from other members of the family (e.g. grandmother, grandfather etc.) as well as the parents.

A baby starts his/her developmental voyage through six ways such as visual (seeing), auditory (hearing), performance skills (holding, manipulating etc.), gross motor (steading head, crawling, sitting, standing etc.), intellect (IQ or "buddhi"), and language or communication (speech, gesture, body movement etc.). Behaviour is now considered very important for "shishu bikash" (child development) with the advent of finding out the functions of some special areas of brain. It means how a baby changes from a child's behaviour to an adult's one. Promoting child development means to augment child development.

Now the question may arise, "Do children not develop well in Bangladesh?" The answer is that there are a huge number of malnourished children in Bangladesh whose growth and development (especially psy-

chological and motor). But do we know that there is a huge number nonspecifically developmentally delayed children here?

Quality of life: Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries of the world. But is our culture poor? We have a glorious history, heritage and a rich culture. This is the only country in the world where people had sacrificed their lives for their "language". We have a prestigious history of liberation. Our children have been brought up in this country in their own context for centuries surrounded by sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandmas, grandpas and above all their parents. This is a unique culture where people love to live together. Then why do we need to promote child development? Why do we need to think about quality of life?

We are now passing through a very crucial phase where the western culture has been badly overpowering our young people, haunting their young minds. We think "West is the best". Many young couples are following the western rules of nutrition as well as child development. They are deviating away from the concept of unified old-fashioned family. They say joint family makes people dependent. But in case of child development we should not forget the roles of other family members. Can a paid maid fulfill the role of a grandmother? In fact, we must understand quality doesn't mean western value. Many western values are not contextually appropriate for our culture and socioeconomic conditions.

Now the question may arise, what is quality of life? Quality means good or bad in number or amount. We have lack of resources, wealth, food, education, opportunity etc. But I do not think that we have lack of quality. The existing social structure of our country is still one of the best in the world. We have to improve on it. We have to get rid of some of our superstitious, pessimistic outlooks, patriarchal values, and religious dogmas.

We are not even using our existing resources properly. We have enough vegetables and fruits in our gardens and fields.

We have enough small fishes in our rivers. We have enough milk to breast-feed our babies. But probably most of us do not know the utility of these things. We think imported canned vegetables are better, we think grapes are better than jujube, apples are better than guava, big fish and meat are better than small fish and pot-milk is better than breast-milk. We lack the concept of balanced food. Therefore the young mothers suffer from malnutrition and give birth to malnourished children. We need to change our outlook to restrict women's marriage before 20, we need to send more girl children to school, we need to give women their deserved rights. Some of our children are not given stimulatory toys or offered any stimulatory play activities. Many toys remain in the show-piece cupboard for ages.

How to optimise development: The vital factor in this country, hindering optimal child development, is nutrition. Our children are malnourished not only because of lack of food but also because of lack of knowledge of balanced diet. Researches on child development point to factors, which are not less vital, are maternal age and maternal education. The main responsibility of child development in this country falls on the mother herself. Most of the children under 18 years are not substantially knowledgeable or emotionally equipped. Besides child development she is also responsible for cooking and sometimes for looking after her mother and father in laws. A child can be a very good playmate for a child. But in this case the child mother also doesn't have enough time to play with her child. The grandmother mostly programs the nutrition and weaning of the child. Meanwhile some tropical bacteria, viruses and parasites make the life of the child difficult as well as the life of the young mother.

The young mother needs a

very good support for optimising child's development. She needs to know about balanced diet for herself, weaning diet for her child, utility of breast-milk and also stimulatory materials e.g. contextual and age appropriate toys and play activities for her child. But who is going to tell this young child mother all these? Possibly our generic play therapists and development therapists can tell them (Shishu Bikash Kendro at Dhaka Shishu Hospital has been training generic therapists in collaboration with Institute of Child Health, London).

Shishu Bikash Kendro-Dhaka Shishu Hospital: The Child Development Centre (Shishu Bikash Kendro) at Dhaka Shishu Hospital, established in '92, is the first of its kind. The aim of the centre is to provide services to children with developmental disabilities and neurological impairments as well as normal children both in the outpatient clinics as well as inpatient department. A multidisciplinary team of professional comprising of developmental paediatricians, psychologists, developmental and play therapists, nutritionists, ophthalmologists provide key services to the child and he family. Different professionals from different disciplines work together here without considering hierarchy and ego. The long-term goal of the program is to improve functional skills and adaptive behaviour in children. Fifty per cent of the children come from Dhaka and the rest come from outside. The services of the centre includes outpatient neuro-developmental screening, inpatient care of acute neurological cases and follow up, community projects for the adjacent Agargaon slum, general assessment clinics, epilepsy services, developmental therapy clinics, low vision clinics, retina clinics, psychology clinics, feeding and dietetic clinics, and orthopedic clinics (for seating and positioning).

Developmental examination of young and disabled children: Improving present skills

The art of developmental examination includes hints on making and maintaining a social relationship with a young child, encouraging her to give the best under experimental condition. Stages of developmental examination includes a) history of pregnancy, puerperium, family, milestones and parent's own view of development, and b) tests of language development, performance skills, hearing and vision and gross motor development. Causes of slow development include a) conditions inside the head (i) brain small or not complete and (ii) damage to brain, and b) conditions outside head (i) one kind of disability (e.g. visual impairment) makes doing and exploring things more difficult and (ii) lack of full use of brain (e.g. not enough stimulation).

A week long training course on "Developmental examination of normal and disabled children" was conducted in February this year at the Bangladesh Protibondhi Foundation Special School. The participants of the course were from various disciplines of developmental paediatrics e.g. doctors, psychologists, therapists and special schoolteachers. The participants came from Dhaka Shishu Hospital Child Development and Neurology Unit, Kalyani Special School, BIRDEM, ICDDR, B and Chittagong Shishu Hospital. The course was a joint venture of Child Development and Neurology Unit, Dhaka Shishu Hospital and British Council, Dhaka Link Programme. Dr. Patricia Sonksen, a noted British developmental paediatrician from the Neuroscience Unit, Institute of Child Health, London, UK, conducted the course.

This training program was highly valued as because these trainees will be training hundreds of professionals in course of time. They will go to their workplaces and disseminate the information learned. They will also go to the rural centres to train the mothers and other family members of the rural children. They will work also to create a pressure group to change the attitude of people towards disability.

Nutrition and Development: "Feeding is a learning experience"

Child development has a close relationship with nutrition particularly in the context of Bangladesh where many children are undernourished. Deficiency in nutrition both in quality and quantity slows down both child's growth and development. A poorly nourished mother, if continued to be fed poorly during pregnancy, gives birth to small and premature babies. Poor socio-economic condition affects growth and development. Our subtropical climate encourages some diseases to affect both mother and child development. Young mothers are confused by the propaganda of canned milk products and weaning cereals. Nowadays most mothers use "pish-pash" or "khichuri" for their child's weaning. We have mentioned before that for a child, "feeding is a learning experience". During each meal a child explores new ideas form his/her food. The colour of the food, smell, texture, size and shape, and taste of the food are new ideas for the child. They learn the difference between two food materials, with colour difference, taste difference that is important for the development of her brain. Pish-pash or khichuri or cereal meal cannot help the child with this.

These food items could be highly nutritious which is good

for their physical growth, but not for their psychological development. The same food everyday is also boring for a child. The mother finds it easier to feed the child without giving any cue or any time to let the child swallow the food matter and also to realise its taste. During this type of hurried feeding, some children are choked. Some mothers deliberately do not show the food to the child apprehending that the child is not going to take the food. Sometimes the meal plate is very bleak and flat without any coloured painting or materials, without any stimulatory toys for children.

Many middle and upper middle class mothers leave this important and "boring" job to housemaids. We must think to stop pish-pash, khichuri or cereal culture, which has been affecting the development of our children's brain. For centuries our children have been eating seasonal fruits and vegetables e.g. mango, jackfruit, black berry, shak-shak (a kind of potato), sweet potatoes etc., and have gained both nutrition and pleasure out of it. Can't we revive these practices again?

Seating and feeding of young children: For both a normal and physically disabled child positioning is important during feeding, otherwise the child cannot eat properly. Proper seating also encourages the child's other pathways of development e.g. communication. A two-day course on "Seating and feeding of young children with disabilities" was held from 26-27 February, 1999 at the Bangladesh Protibondhi Foundation Special School, Kalyani auditorium organised by Shishu Bikash Kendro, Dhaka Shishu Hospital sponsored by British Council Link Programme. Allison Wisbeach, Chief Occupational Therapist, Great Ormond Street Hospital conducted the course for Sick Children, Institute Child Health, London. The participants came from Dhaka Shishu Hospital-Child Development and Neurology Unit, Kalyani Special School, Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP), Savar and Chittagong Shishu Hospital.

Learning from this course our therapists, nurses, psychol-

ogists special schoolteachers and doctors are going to disseminate this information to the mothers. Varieties of both normal and disabled children in Dhaka and outside. Feeding and seating are two vital events in a child's life. For a child these two tasks are very important. The caregivers should not compromise with these two items while taking care of a child or she will seriously jeopardise the developmental progress the child is likely to make.

Conclusion: Shishu Bikash Kendro or Child Development Centre at Dhaka Shishu Hospital is a centre where a child either a normal or disabled is assessed and treated through a holistic multidisciplinary approach. Varieties of both normal and disabled children in Dhaka and outside. Feeding and seating are two vital events in a child's life. For a child these two tasks are very important. The caregivers should not compromise with these two items while taking care of a child or she will seriously jeopardise the developmental progress the child is likely to make.

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Towards Gender Development: An Example

by Zafrunnahar Shelly

Although women have been officially recognized as key in the process of development, they are hardly represented at national level in formulating development policies, programmes and projects. Women's representation in national politics, government organisations and ministries is also very limited.

Institution Building: Women participants form groups and once the groups are formed workers help them develop group discipline, such as fixing a week day for meeting, forming a management committee, monitoring rate of savings etc. Group leaders and members also receive different types of awareness and skill development trainings.

Social and Economic Activities: Women often suffer repression and legal measures need to be taken. The organisation has legal aid facilities for women. Usually they try to solve the problem locally through "Village Salish" and also mutually. If that fails the organisation's lawyer provides legal help to socially repressed women. Women groups have stopped teenage marriage and all of them send girls to schools. Women are now involved in family based economic activities. They get training in homestead gardening, nursery, fisheries and livestock raising. Some of them use the loan money for some non-traditional trades.



Women in a Pabna village observing International Women's Day: Growing awareness.

Action Committee: As a strategy to work on gender, the organisation formed two women action committees in two villages, each with 20 members from the beneficiaries. The women action committee is working like a watchdog in respective working area. The activities of the committees are: i) to conduct salish at the village level; ii) to ensure edu-

cation for female child; iii) to resist polygamy; iv) to work against dowry; v) to work against torture and violence against women.

As yet, this committee has solved 70 cases and there are 6 on-going cases. Besides, this committee has registered 17 cases about different types of women torture in the local court.

Education Programme: Education is the key element of effective community development. Thus the organisation has been implementing gender equity based education programme from its inception to

create an illiteracy-free society. It has been implementing functional education programme, non-formal primary education programme, mass education programme and reflect education programme for adult and children where female got special priority with the assistance from DNFE (Bangladesh Government), BRAC, Bread for the World (Germany), Novib (Netherlands) and Reflect coordination unit to Action Aid, Bangladesh. Presently Samata has been operating 50 schools for female students.

Human Development Programme: Human resources are

the main strength of all development activities. With this idea in mind the organisation holds a series of human development training programmes for female staff and female group members. Besides it also organizes different types of skill development training programme such as plant nursery, kitchen gardening, fisheries, livestock rearing and as women are half shareholders of the agricultural land they do receive some training in land use, land management and crop agriculture and non-traditional trades.

Health Programme: Samata has been providing health service to the poor especially women and children for a regular payment of Tk 5 per month. Beneficiaries mostly get advisory services, a prescription and a small quantity of medicine. Health advocacy includes advice on use of sanitary latrine and drinking water from tubewell and on general household sanitation.

Credit Programme: The organisation, as part of its programme, has been operating the RLF. It has been operating to extend credit support for creation of income and employment opportunities for poor group members of whom 80 per cent are female. Last year it disbursed a loan of Tk 90 lakh to support agricultural and small non-traditional trade initiatives.

Establishing Women's Land Rights: The organisation recognised huge amount of public property in its working areas and started movement for recovering and distributing this property by organizing the

landless poor. From the beginning, women have been actively involved in the movement. They have given the lead in some cases and have suffered torture. But when Khas lands were recovered, women did not have any ownership in the distribution due to existing laws. After that Samata started mobilising women to create public demand to establish equal share for men and women on khas land. As a result of its persistent lobbying with the government, the government adopted Land Reform Constitution in 1986. Samata is the first NGO in Bangladesh to implement this law. As yet, it has distributed 1705 acres of khas land among the landless poor. Among them half are women.

Empowerment: For the empowerment of women, Samata provided necessary support to 17 female candidates from its area in the last Union Parishad Election '97 where 15 have been elected. Besides, to ensure their activities in the Union Parishad, it has formed two thana based "Elected Female UP Members Forum" at Santia and Sujanager thana in Pabna district and two more are in the process of being formed.

Housing Programme: From this year Samata has started housing projects in six thanas of Pabna district with assistance from Housing Fund of Bangladesh Bank. Under this project 600 houses (500 per thana) will be built for poor rural women and women. It will transfer these houses to the husband and wife with joint-ownership. Wives will have half the ownership of these houses.

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ESPIRE recent indications of some improvement, poverty in Bangladesh still remains overwhelming and ubiquitous. According to recent government figures, about half the population of Bangladesh is poverty-stricken. The proximate causes of widespread poverty are lack of productive employment opportunities, insufficient and narrowly based growth of the economy and, more importantly, highly skewed ownership of productive resources including land and an absence of pro-poor policy regime. Added to this are frequent occurrences of natural calamities of severe magnitude and scale which erode resource bases of the affected people. The benefits of growth is yet to appreciably trickle down to the poor. Initiatives for capacity building of the poor through education and skill development, training and institutional credit facilities are largely inadequate.

In our society, which is overwhelmingly male dominated, women are subject to deep-rooted discrimination and deprivation. Discrimination against women is not only widespread but also institutionalised in patriarchal ideologies, laws biased against women and age-old customs. Patriarchal ideology influences and shapes the sexual division of labour. In our country gender inequality not only impedes economic and social development through limitation of access of half the country's population to economic activities, but also promotes injustice and domestic violence against women. Women are often viewed as powerless and depen-

dent on men not only for livelihood but also for social protection and security. Although women have been officially recognized as key in the process of development, they are hardly represented at national level in formulating development policies, programmes and projects. Women's representation in national politics, government organisations and ministries is also very limited.

Since its inception in 1976, Samata, a non-governmental local development organisation of Pabna has been working to alleviate poverty and for empowerment of the poor through creating unity and solidarity among them. It believes in equal rights of both men and women and that real progress could not be achieved in Bangladesh without female participation in development activities. Resource is the main component of development and there are three kinds of resources in our country — human resource, natural resource and power sector's resource. In developing human resources, Samata puts the focus on gender rather than on women as it is the responsibility of both the sexes. It focuses on gender so that needs of women are not neglected.

Women have less access to power, skill, education and other facilities so they are very poor. So the poverty of women can be faced through coordinate gender activities which will promote the legality of the issue of disadvantaged men and women.

Samata has been implementing the following activities to alleviate poverty and for empowerment of the disadvan-