

Power Tariff

POWER tariff is up by five poisha per unit. Add to this the VAT, and you have a fairly sizable monthly electricity bill to foot. The Asian Development Bank is said to have recommended the raise in tariff to shore up the falling financial health of the energy sector.

Before zeroing in on our own bag of faults, let's briefly bring up the economic factors being adduced in defence of the power tariff increase. The price of gas, the main input for generation of electricity having been raised in December last to Tk 56 per unit (meaning 1000 cubic feet) from Tk 47.6, a 'pressure' was there to raise the power tariff.

Basically, we regard all these as specious arguments for the simple reason that the power sector's ill-health and its being perpetually in the red are of its own making. At the heart of the problem is the systems loss which is but a civilised expression for unauthorised connection, theft and pilferage of electricity.

If you raise the tariff do make sure that we have commensurate gains in terms of service. Do something about power fluctuations that damage appliances and machines and the load-shedding which upset work rhythm of citizens.

Dispersed Sex Workers

THE government's plan to rehabilitate the sex workers of the Tanbazar and Nimtali brothels in Narayanjan has gone haywire, so suggests the mad rush of panic-stricken inmates seeking some sort of refuge in the town's residential areas. However, it was almost inevitable, given the way it went about the task, putting more emphasis on evicting rather than rehabilitating.

From the very beginning, the plan and its subsequent execution have followed a flawed path. While sex workers who are willing for a change in their life-style have been accounted for, there seems to have been no well-defined strategy as regards the ones planning to continue with their profession, thereby engendering fears of repression in the latter group.

The government should have envisioned the consequences before even embarking on the drive to 'rehabilitate' the sex workers. For the time being, we suggest that the sex workers be allowed to go back to the brothels and stay there until the government comes up with a fool-proof plan for their rehabilitation.

Why in Ansar?

REPORTS say around 464 former outlaws will rejoin the ranks of Ansar. They were in the 'suspects' category among the 733 terrorists who surrendered on a call of the government which promised them amnesty and rehabilitation in the Khulna Division. These terrorists also surrendered the arms and ammunition they had used against innocent villagers of southern Bangladesh for collecting toll in the name of various banned political organisations representing the so-called ultra-left of the country.

But it is a wise decision to induct them in an otherwise disciplined force like the Ansar and that too only after training them for a month at the Ansar academy in Mouchak? These people have long been associated with the underworld and hence we are afraid that their psyche is totally different from that of people who have been leading a normal and disciplined life.

EVEN as sporadic artillery exchanges and last desperate fightings are still taking place in Kargil the guns will soon fall silent and a quiet descend upon its wilderness as a result of the deal struck between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan and the US President Bill Clinton in Washington early this month.

While nothing conclusive or definitive will emerge from such exercises the Kargil war has, however, proved to its hilt that the issue of Kashmir — far from being dead — is as alive as it was in 1947 and certainly more explosive than before with its nuclear dimension now. None of the arrangements like the UN imposed ceasefire in 1948, the Tashkent Declaration in 1966, the Shimla Agreement in 1972 and the Lahore Declaration of 1999 could suppress the passions and prejudices connected with the issue.

It is, nevertheless, a different matter as to how these reactions affected either of the two contenders for Kashmir. Pakistan could have bungled on diplomatic front and failed to evoke enough sympathy for her standpoint but much of her success or failure depends on her perception of it.

THE Indian election commission has announced firm dates for the next general elections which will now take place in several phases beginning September 4. The process of hustings began with the dissolution of the last Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) when President K R Narayanan had to dissolve it and call fresh election following the failure of the opposition parties to come out with a formula for an alternative government.

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To the Editor...

An Ombudsman for Bangladesh

Sir, I have seen lots of speculations about the appointment of an Ombudsman in our country. The present government has done many good things for the improvement of the people and for strengthening the roots of democracy.

While the persons whose names are being mentioned in different media are well-respected, we should, perhaps, think of someone who combines administrative experience, experience in working in posts where he had dealt with corruption, misuse or abuse of executive and financial authorities and also experience of working with the parliament.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica states, "as a result of the modern proliferation of bureaucracy, the Scandinavian countries established the office of Ombudsman. The Ombudsman can protect the constitutional rights of citizens against bureaucratic violations by forcing administrative offices to open to him — and through him to the public — the records of otherwise secret bureaucratic files and proceedings."

The Ombudsman was thus, appointed not to complement the courts of law in those countries but to serve somewhat a different purpose. He is required to be thoroughly knowledgeable about government rules, regulations and administrative procedures and at the same time must be conversant with the constitutional and parliamentary procedures because it is to the parliament that he submits his reports and through it seeks to redress grievances of affected public.

Kashmir: Back from the Brink?

There is no place for complacency even if the war in Kargil is going to be over. At the slightest instance another Kargil can be enacted in the valley at any time. It is not surprising that the peace in Kargil is heralded by the worst ever militant attack on a paramilitary camp near Srinagar.

in 1966, the Shimla Agreement in 1972 and the Lahore Declaration of 1999 could suppress the passions and prejudices connected with the issue or put a lid over the cauldron called Kashmir. It has once again exploded the myth that Kashmir is a settled issue and an integral part of Indian territory.

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Purely from military point of view Pakistan-backed mili-

tants did extremely well in Kargil. Starting from the occupation of the strategic heights in no-man's land to holding them against the waves of attacks from Indian troops they gave good account of themselves. An Indian Army division supported by jet fighters and helicopter gunships fought off few hundred of intruders who played havoc with Indian troops causing high casualty in men and materials.

As usual Pakistan could not garner much benefit from her military advantages. With her chronic lack of overall strategy she did not know what to do with her military gains at a point of time. Everytime she started her war over Kashmir without ascertaining the country's ability to economically

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MATTERS AROUND US

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

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and diplomatically sustain it till the war's objectives were achieved. Starting her Kashmir wars impulsively Pakistan always gambled for any positive results and could seldom carry them to the point of fruition.

Nothing illustrates the point more starkly than Kargil. Militarily Pakistan's Kargil operation was spectacular and a breakthrough of sorts. But its timing — soon after Lahore Declaration — could not have been worse and its international repercussion more disastrous. She could hardly hide her involvement in the war and then defend her role.

As usual Pakistan could not garner much benefit from her military advantages. With her chronic lack of overall strategy she did not know what to do with her military gains at a point of time. Everytime she started her war over Kashmir without ascertaining the country's ability to economically

tant groups headquartered in Pakistan may soon spin out of his control.

For Pakistan worse still is Kashmir's impacts on domestic politics. Pakistani politicians feel that they can win over the common citizens by appearing to champion the Kashmir cause. The opposition of the day which is already in arms against the establishment makes full use of it to destabilise or at least embarrass the incumbent government in Islamabad. After the government, for its part, has to appear to be doing something on Kashmir and uses the official media to portray its 'achievements' on the issue.

Obviously, the Kargil war has shaken the confidence of India. Her recurrent theme of Shimla Agreement, obstinate claim of Kashmir as a settled issue and myriad arguments woven round Kashmir as an integral part of the country could not save India from its recent disaster in Kargil. There is no place for complacency even if the war in Kargil is going to be over. At the slightest instance another Kargil can be enacted in the valley at any time. It is not surprising that the peace in

Indian Elections

Process of Polarisation in Politics Resumes

The Indian political scene before the coming polls is still unclear as last-minute changes and adjustments are being made before filing the nomination papers. In a country where no political party or alliance in the recent past had succeeded in securing absolute majority, most political forces are evolving 'effective' strategies.

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OPINION

Blame it on the Women

Tazreena Sajjad

I have pondered long and hard over the Mr Abu Imran's article "For the Sake of Healthy Homes" and have carefully weighed the pros and cons of responding or ignoring to the issues raised in it.

This write-up is not a forum for opening a discussion on what women are capable of achieving. I believe Mr Imran acknowledges the fact that they are decidedly no inferior to their counterparts in the professional world.

From his write-up, I could not glean if Mr Imran wished to portray the man as a hapless, helpless figure deserving our sympathy when alone with his children, leading to the obvious conclusion that wives have total control if they remain within the confines of the homes.

The social system seems to be entrapped by the systematic degradation of the woman on one hand, and the glorification of the woman on the other, which actually means imprisoning her within certain defined boundaries beyond which she cannot function.

The issue is not about them being in the job market. The issue is whether the social system, starting from the husband and the educational institution giving her the support she needs to be a mother, a wife, a woman and an individual. The availability of the mother aged 24 to 27 does not ensure an aware mother able to deal with growing children and their problems effectively.

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Kargil is heralded by the worst ever militant attack on a paramilitary camp near Srinagar.

The Kargil war was likened by Mr Jaswant Singh, India's External Affairs Minister to a mere cut in the finger for India. But as the cost of the war kept soaring, casualties mounted and the losses sucked in more troops and ammunition, Mr Singh's assessment proved grossly inaccurate.

But how long can India ward it off by keeping the Kashmir issue unresolved? If there is no war along the line of control how can it be stopped within the valley? There is a never-ending war of varying intensity in the valley where it is fought by more than half a million Indian troops almost permanently stationed in Kashmir.

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