

## Crunch Time for NGOs?

IT may sound like a bombshell that foreign funding of NGO activities in Bangladesh may diminish in the near future. But, in truth, there is hardly any surprise element to it, if one were to recall the backdrop to it. In broad terms, this comes as a natural corollary to the drying up of the aid climate on a global scale which has already affected the flow of foreign assistance to the government sector in Bangladesh. Now it seems to be the turn for the non-government sector to face the crunch.

Not long ago there had been an express donor preference for funnelling increased resources through the NGOs to a country in appreciation for their signal contribution to its socio-economic development. But lately, without altering that basic policy thrust they seem to have grown actively averse to the misuse of donor funds by not a few NGOs in Bangladesh. In the assessment of the World Bank, according to a reliable source, donors have reduced their funding of several NGOs because of the latter's failure to use the money for the purpose it was taken.

The implications of this crunch are two-fold: first, some of the NGO might have to wrap up their business while those who are planning to open new NGOs hoping to run it with foreign funds may have second thoughts. In a way, this could act as a blessing in disguise. The mushrooming of NGOs will hopefully be discouraged with the survival of the fittest taking place through self-propulsion in monetary terms. There is already a certain genre of NGOs like the BRAC for instance to say nothing of Grameen Bank, which generates a very large proportion of its management, operational and revolving fund costs in addition to ensuring gains to their programme participants. They are role models among the NGO community.

The flow of foreign assistance to NGOs has been on the basis of time-bound projects so that there was an element of uncertainty as to renewal of funding which made some of them fend for themselves anyway. Self-reliance is the best proposition in the book.

In any case, their commercial considerations should not outweigh their commitments to the society.

## Power Supply Irritant

FEW cities in the world can match Dhaka city's frequency of power blackouts in peacetime. Load shedding of electricity reflecting an unbridgeable gap between generation and supply of power has suddenly hit a new high in recent months of 500 megawatts plunging innumerable households into total darkness and industrial units in despair for unusual lengths of time, that too on a daily basis. We have had stories and explanations galore about the steep deterioration in the supply and generation of power and plans taken for improvement and then bungled.

Given the restive political atmosphere and difficult law and order situation in the country, how are we going to woo foreign direct investments in the country with this deplorable management of power? It is one of the most vital considerations for any investment, not to speak of foreign one.

The readymade prescription for this vexing problem has been to buy a generator. But why should the citizens spend money on generators when they pay taxes for state amenities? And then how many can afford to buy them and disturb the neighbours with the sound and air pollution in densely populated areas of the city? Since the situation started deteriorating from 1997 all we have heard are accusations against the previous government and delayed target-dates for completion of projects couched in unrepentant idiom.

The present situation it has been claimed, is likely to improve by the 10th of this month when some units of Ghorasal power station start functioning but the people are fed up with the long history of shifting dates for improvement in the power supply position. The power and energy sector with its powerful ministers and bureaucrats appears to be nobody's responsibility. People's suffering is mounting and during the last four years no tangible efforts were made to establish big power stations in the country to tide over the crisis. This goes to suggest that people's sufferings are not foremost on the priority list of the government. Are we to believe that nothing will move in this sector unless the persons responsible are affected every day by power cuts?

## A piece of Thuggery

FIRST, they surreptitiously dug up a road that was in reasonably good condition in the darkness of night. Then, they spread around the news that the municipal corporation had begun renovation works. Later, they told the business community and local residents that the municipal corporation had run out of funds and if they wanted to have the road fixed they would have to finance the repair job themselves. The total cost involved, they said, was five lakh taka. Innovative way of toll collection, isn't it? The irony is that although people in the Ukipara neighbourhood of Narayanganj know the men behind the heinous ploy, they cannot complain against them. The reason: these individuals are members of a notorious terrorist group.

Interestingly, the municipal corporation claims to have had no knowledge of the incident. Nevertheless, it has been considerate enough to form a probe body with the superintendent of police Narayanganj heading it. The committee, upon first-hand inspection, has ordered the Narayanganj police station to intervene. Effective police intervention may not take place very soon and the possibility that local traders and residents could actually be forced into paying their 'due' still remains.

Whichever way the affair ends, the reality now is that nearly 40,000 users of the road have been inconvenienced by this act of robbery. In case of medical emergency, people wouldn't be able to call in ambulance even. Besides, hosiery business in the locality risks substantial losses if the road were not repaired before the peak season, which is a few weeks away. Then there is Durga puja coming.

The criminal elements not only outnumber the law enforcers but also outwit them more often than not. What could be a more poignant testimony in this regard than the 'road repair' drama in Narayanganj's Ukipara neighbourhood?

## Voters Should Know More about Indo-Bangladesh Relations

by M. Rashiduzzaman

Where does India stand on the sovereignty and long term national interests of Bangladesh? Did any of the dire anti-Indian forecasts prove real? Is anti-Indianism a self-serving cynicism of certain leaders and groups or it stems from the deep-rooted contradictions in the Indo-Bangladesh relations that cannot be dismissed out of hand?

just another expression of the 'Muslim otherness' of the Muslim-majority Bangladesh. It happened in 1991 when the Awami League, faced with a whispering campaign as a pro-Indian (and anti-Islam) party, suffered a defeat at the hands of the nationalist BNP.

Bangladesh is very much a divided nation over India, and it may even be further divided over its powerful neighbour. Let's not forget that in the early years of Bangladesh, anti-Indianism was the main vehicle of opposition politics, and that legacy dies hard. But there is something redeeming--dislike for New Delhi is a more fearful perception in Dhaka than the live tension that prevails in the Indo-Pakistani relation except the periodic border disturbances. Bangladesh has no battle cry against India. But sometimes anti-Indian feeling expresses itself more as a frustrated rage. Generally speaking, the pro-Indian supporters are not numerically overwhelming, but they are politically influential and they look down upon the right wing animosity towards India. Although India is too big and too powerful to be baffled by the domestic turmoil inside Bangladesh, a change of government in the hands of the BNP and its right wing partners may sour the Dhaka-New Delhi relations. The strategic worry is that any future shifts in Indo-Bangladesh relations may affect Bangladesh more adversely than India. Because Bangladesh has fewer options against what India wants from Bangladesh.

Beyond the CHT, the Indo-Bangladesh relations deserve attention in the larger context of nuclear and mass-destructive weapons proliferation in South Asia. India is acquiring massive and offensive military capacity overtly to match China and Pakistan, two rivals who fought wars with India. Nuclear arms, missiles and other weapons in the Indian arsenal have a bullying effect on the smaller neighbours including Bangladesh; so Dhaka cannot afford to be an acquiescent validator of the spectacular arms race between India, Pakistan and China. Although New Delhi has not acknowledged it publicly, Bangladesh has become more important to India than ever before. What is possibly better known to the public is the fact that Bangladesh, already a 3-4 billion (US) dollar market for the Indian products from automobiles to fish, will continue to be even a bigger economic pot.

The security aspect of the proposed transit through Bangladesh is more driven by speculation among the ordinary people--the government of Bangladesh is yet to divulge the full implications of the proposed logistical facility that is snowballing as an anti-Awami League and anti-Indian campaign in Bangladesh. The au-

tonomy for the ethnic groups and moral reasoning generate bulk of those writings. Most observers ignored that the treaty itself contains the potential of further separation in the CHT whose future is linked with what might happen to the secessionist movements in the Indian northeast. Realistically, the CHT agreement has made Bangladesh even more dependent on India. To contain further insurgency in the CHT, Bangladesh would need even more Indian help both diplomatically and militarily.

While the politicians shy away from an informative debate on India-Bangladesh relations, the non-political forums are no less discouraging. The right wing or the so-called pro-Pakistani elements are routinely critical of India and vehemently oppose what is widely viewed as India's big brotherly insensitive bent. I can identify the following reasons for the Awami League, Bengali nationalists and the secularists to get what in the India-Bangladesh relations:

(a) Generally speaking, no matter what is the political stripe of those in power in Bangladesh, Dhaka would think twice before seriously going against New Delhi's wishes on bilateral matters.

(b) Except the right wing groups and leaders who demonstrate their anti-Indian proclivities, there are factions and individuals in the liberal and cultural establishments who believe that Bangladesh should work in close cooperation with India, and their views often prevail among the upper educated elite.

(c) Those who fought for

independence in 1971 and fled to India to escape from the Pakistani soldiers' rampaging of the country have a sense of gratitude to India and they are unwilling to veer away from New Delhi no matter what the right wing critics might say.

(d) The pro-Indian liberals generally look upon the criticism of India, in any substantive form, as a breach of secularism, and an infringement of progressive disposition in poli-

tics.

So far, the mainstream media and the liberal establishments have failed in promoting an unbiased discussion on India and Indo-Bangladesh relations except periodically reporting the old border disputes raising their ugly heads, firing across the border and, of course, focusing on the terribly unfavourable balance of trade between the two countries. However, such reporting does not

penetrate into the strategic

questions that entangle the two

neighbours with a bumpy history of political distrust. New

Delhi has a reputation of skil-

fully obscuring what it really

wants from its neighbours. But

let us not forget that the Indian

newspapers' coverage on

Bangladesh is also few and far

between. I scan the Internet edi-

tions of a couple of Indian

newspapers--I don't remember

when did I last read something

serious on the New Delhi-Dhaka ties. Not even the in-

tractable questions of trans-

shipment, Ganges water, the

CHT accord and the sale of

Bangladesh gas are among the

hotly discussed topics of the

Indian media. In fact, the only

neighbouring country that

made headlines in the Indian

newspapers is Pakistan for its

refusal to accept what New

Delhi dictates.

Recently I attended part of

the Bangladesh Institute for

Strategic Studies symposium on

the CHT peace agreement.

What struck me there was that

(during the first two hours but I

don't know what happened later)

none of the participants

pointed out that the accord was

indeed a triangular partnership

between the Bangladesh govern-

ment, the Chakma-led

Shantibahini and finally India,

the absentee leader that had

apparently been the patron of

the CHT separatists. Needless to

point out that the CHT compact

symbolized a tilt towards India,

which gave New Delhi more

leverage with the tribal leader-

ship that would cooperate with

the Indian security forces by

not sheltering the separatists

from the Indian northeast

plagued by insurgencies for

decades. The plethora of writ-

ings triggered by the CHT treaty

will arguably help the ordinary

Bangladeshis to get a sense of

those supporting the agreement

as well as those opposing it. But

history, humanitarianism, and

autonomy for the ethnic groups

and moral reasoning generate

bulk of those writings. Most ob-

servers ignored that the treaty

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ly and militarily.

authorities in Dhaka should consider selling gas to India only if Bangladesh has a huge surplus over its visible need, but what is evidently an economic prospect has been heavily politicized because of the prevailing fear and suspicion about India's ultimate objectives in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is very much a divided nation over India, and it may even be further divided over its powerful neighbour. Let's not forget that in the early years of Bangladesh, anti-Indianism was the main vehicle of opposition politics, and that legacy dies hard. But there is something redeeming--dislike for New Delhi is a more fearful perception in Dhaka than the live tension that prevails in the Indo-Pakistani relation except the periodic border disturbances. Bangladesh has no battle cry against India. But sometimes anti-Indian feeling expresses itself more as a frustrated rage. Generally speaking, the pro-Indian supporters are not numerically overwhelming, but they are politically influential and they look down upon the right wing animosity towards India. Although India is too big and too powerful to be baffled by the domestic turmoil inside Bangladesh, a change of government in the hands of the BNP and its right wing partners may sour the Dhaka-New Delhi relations. The strategic worry is that any future shifts in Indo-Bangladesh relations may affect Bangladesh more adversely than India. Because Bangladesh has fewer options against what India wants from Bangladesh.

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at least from the 21 Nov 1971 onwards the more important part of his mission was to defend East Pakistan and to keep the Corps in being, by giving up territory if necessary.

We also find that it is not correct to say that the mission given to the Eastern Command was never changed, because the GHQ was given him through more than one message a clear indication that territory had become less important, and that the Command should fight for time keeping in view only territories of strategic importance.

The detailed narrative of events as given by us in the Supplementary Report, clearly shows that the planning was hopelessly defective and there was no plan at all for the defence of Dacca, nor for any concerted effort to stem the enemy onslaught with a Div or a Brigade battle at any stage. It was only when the general found himself gradually being encircled by the enemy who had successfully managed to bypass his fortresses and reached Faridpur, Khulna, Daudkandi and Chandpur (the shortest route to Dacca) that he began to make frantic efforts to get the troops back for the defence of Dacca. It was unfortunate then too late, the ferries necessary for crossing the troops over the big Jamuna river from the area of 16 division had disappeared and the Mukti Bahini had invested the area behind, making vehicular movement impossible. Orderly withdrawal of troops in time for concentrated defence was also made impossible by the unauthorised orders issued by Lt Gen Niazi that no withdrawal was to take place unless cleared two up and without suffering 75% casualties.

In the absence of contingency plans for the withdrawal of troops into the Dacca triangle area behind the big rivers to prevent the enemy breakthrough and to deal if need be with the known capability of the enemy to heli-drop troops behind our lines after it had acquired mastery of the air by either eliminating or neutral