

Tokyo averts a looming power crisis

MONZURUL HUQ *writes from Tokyo*

POWER failure is not what one encounters in Japan's busy and bustling capital. A metropolis with a population of more than eight million within its inner borders of twenty-three wards, Tokyo is also well known for housing the headquarters of some of world's best-known companies of different fields, as well as a significant number of industrial enterprises. Tokyo's hunger for energy, as a result, is something that can be easily termed as monstrous. And in high summer when the mercury keeps on rising well over 30 degree Celsius with the level of humidity reaching almost ninety percent, city's energy consumption reaches its peak as almost all buildings and facilities need the essential services of air-conditioning machines to counter the unpleasant summer heat that the Japanese call 'mushi-atsui'.

The principal provider of Tokyo's energy supply is Tokyo Electric Power Company, known in its shorter version as Tepco. The company runs a number of nuclear reactors, most of which are located far outside the perimeters of the capital. These nuclear reactors are vital in the sense that they usually provide up to 40 percent of Tokyo's power. But in April Tepco was forced to shut all its 17 nuclear reactors after last summer's revelation that it had falsified safety reports and eventually tried to cover up the whole thing. Although people in general and local administrations of the areas where

such reactors are located welcomed the decision of the authorities to force Tepco to go through detailed investigation on the safety of reactors, the result came as a shock to the inhabitants of the capital as they were informed of a possible shortage in electricity supply during the peak demand period in summer.

According to different estimates, a shortage of about two million

kilowatts of electricity generation is expected during the summer months of July and August. The amount of shortage is enough to power around 660,000 homes. Many people in Tokyo, as a result, expected that they would most likely face blackouts, which most of the Tokyoites never have experienced in their lifetime. Hence, preparation was on in many fronts to face the reality of the situation, and Tepco called on some of its biggest customers to come forward with energy saving plans that would help avert a crisis.

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A number of Japan's large-scale consumer product companies that have production facilities in and around Tokyo answered the call by taking various initiatives related to energy saving. Honda Motor Com-

pany, Toshiba Electronics and Kirin Brewery, among others, decided to shift production schedules and lower the consumption of electricity during peak demand times. Honda went further by signing an agreement with Tepco that would put them at the top of the list of companies first to lose power in case there is a shortage. In return Tepco offered Honda better rates for electricity.

plants closed at least for some time during the peak hours on working days.

Tepco is also urging its domestic customers not to use air-conditioners and also to turn off lights that are not in much use. For Tokyo residents the request proved to be a relatively easier one to comply with as summer this year has so far been a milder one and people are

hardly feeling the urge to turn on air-conditioners at home. The only thing that seems to be favouring the otherwise cornered Tepco is the weather. Has the summer been a suffocating one as is usually the case in Tokyo, electricity consumers of the region would have found it much more difficult to refrain from taking the comfort of their cooling machines.

As a result, the prevailing weather condition as well as measures and precautions that the electricity company along with its consumers is taking have proved to be helpful, and Tokyo is yet to face any serious shortage of electricity. By mid-July it became evident that the crisis that many expected might not be so severe as initially predicted. Tepco was later helped further by the deci-

sion of the governor of Fukushima prefecture to allow the company to reopen one of its nuclear reactors situated there. The company now feels that the worst might have been already over. Tepco has already reactivated the Fukushima reactor immediately after the governor announced his decision. It has now started generating electricity and resumed supply to greater Tokyo

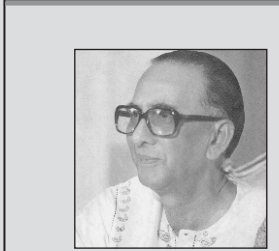
area. The Fukushima reactor is the third to be reactivated. Two other reactors already in operation are situated in Niigata prefecture and they resumed generating electricity in May and June. Although the rest of Tepco's 17 nuclear reactors still remain non-operative, the company is hoping it's now a matter of time for all 17 reactors to be in full operation.

It is also interesting to note that the impact of Tokyo's looming crisis of possible power shortage was not all negative. A particularly encouraging outcome was marked in country's electronics industry, where some of the leading manufacturers wasted no time to make dramatic strides in reducing the electricity requirements for some of their products. The latest model of one

particular brand of refrigerator that Matsushita Electronics, famous for its products under the brand name of 'National', has recently marketed, consumes, for example, 40 percent less electricity compared with a model released last year.

Air conditioner is one appliance that consumes a lot of power. Japan's leading electronic companies are also eyeing on reducing the energy consumption of air conditioners. Mitsubishi Electric Corporation's top model now comes with two additional infrared sensors that measure temperature inside the air conditioner to help the machine cooling down relatively warm parts individually. According to Mitsubishi, addition of one such sensor cuts the air conditioner's power consumption by 20 percent, and adding two sensors reduces it by 30 percent.

Despite the easing of the looming crisis largely due to unexpected weather condition and the start of a third closed reactor, the Japanese government is still concerned about possible power shortage in the capital in coming days. Official estimates suggest Tepco needs to have eight to ten reactors back to operation to be sure of covering peak summer demand. Negotiations, therefore, are underway with the local governments of Niigata and Fukushima to expedite the process of security clearance for rest of the closed reactors.



MUHAMMAD HABIBUR RAHMAN

MV Nasrin -1's watery grave and Abeda Begum's burial at Omrabaz

Bengal delta is the most difficult one to manage and run. The country and its people are in continuous convulsion. Alluvia are followed by diluvia, and an avulsion is followed by a reformation, as if in repentant revulsion.

There is a deep whirlpool very near Chandpore, One hundred fifty feet away from its shore. That is the Bangladeshi's Bermuda Triangle Where the Padma, the Meghna and the Dakatia wrangle.

After dusk MV Nasrin-1 was to carry passengers not more Than two hundred ninety four.

But she carried, no body knows, three or five times more. And she was overloaded with rice, salt and sundry other cargo. For the launch owners that was very difficult to forgo.

Could this happen in the air with an aeroplane? But where do you point that out and complain?

Was the ship issued the certification and registration. After proper survey and inspection?

Had the design, construction, certification and maintenance, All the four stages, the proper supervision?

If the boat is at all river worthy, whether She could withstand a turbulent weather?

At the helm whether she had a boatswain or a captain, A serang or a mere seacunny, no one could ascertain.

Suddenly on the bank of the river the dogs barked. The owls ominously hooted and the swans cackled. For the failure of another vessel's motor engine

The passengers of that boat crushed in to MV Nasrin. And the latter capsized, but for three days only a few enquired.

At long last on the fourth day the Minister appeared. Visibly inconvenienced with the heavy stench in the air, He flared up when asked whether he would care

To resign for his failure to take appropriate measures For preventing and punishing successive boat disasters.

Only a naive or heartless man could be sardonic To remind and refer to the tragedy of the Titanic:

"Where the Titanic could not be saved, why For MV Nasrin you should unnecessarily cry?"

None of the leaders of the Coalition Government or of the Opposition

Visited the place for getting personally briefed Or for saying a few words consoling the grieved.

Five days after Parliament woke up shaking off its indolence And passed a resolution of condolence.

Anger of the people took long time to simmer down. Exhausted hearts at long last, however, quieted down.

But the touching epilogue of this tragedy must be told. Those who have survived the calamity must be consoled.

While Abeda Begum was on the boat She had never thought In her wildest dream

That she would soon float obedient to the stream Quite a few miles down the south Towards the Bay of Bengal's mouth.

Gently the waves brought her home with great compassion. To her husband's village home at Omrabaz of Char Fashon.

Abeda Begum had a heartfelt and mournful funeral. Let God in His infinite mercy bless the lady, and all

Those who had a mere makeshift funeral And those missing souls who had no funeral at all.

Muhammad Habibur Rahman is former Chief Justice and head of caretaker government

Merits of indigenous knowledge

HASNA J MOUDUD

NOT often does a highly successful diplomat turn to folk sayings in the oral tradition probably by an uneducated, female named Khana. Both Khana and Dak are attributed to be two women poets of ancient period who lived in eastern part of Bengal, now Bangladesh, composing proverb like *Bachans*, which survived to this day due to their wisdom and lyrical charm. Muhammad Zamir has recently compiled an anthology of Bengali proverbs and *Bachans* published by Bangla Academy. It is an attractive book, 228 pages, with contents written in Bengali with English translation and transliteration. Author also provides useful comparison between Bengali and English calendars since the *Bachans* and Bengali farmers follow Bengali calendar. Also a bibliography has been provided.

It is a unique book as the author himself puts, "The collection of adages are in Bengali, with transliteration in the International Phonetic Script (to facilitate the reading of the proverbs by readers who do not know Bengali), with meaning in Bengali and translation of the common meaning in English." I also congratulate Bangla Academy for introducing fine specimen of Ben-

gali oral tradition for our own people as well as foreign scholars. Often more foreign literary materials are available in Bengali rather than translation and introduction of specimen of our cultural heritage into the outer world.

Muhammad Zamir who was my class friend at Dhaka University in English Department represents a generation of English department graduates who have at a later stage taken to Bengali literature and heritage as a passion and have served mother tongue well with their knowledge and professional expertise in English. I salute them. Zamir has taken up *Bachans* as subject for his first book and therefore deserves our felicitation rather than criticism. On the other hand if I do not criticise his work I am doomed to be labeled as partial.

The only point I could find is that the historical treatment of *Bachans* and contemporary literary scene may not be accurate. In the absence of written records or commentaries this is naturally an obstacle. Bengali oral tradition is old and from time to time has gone under the shadow with the introduction of classical Sanskrit language but the important fact is, it has survived. From 10th and 11th centuries onward many compositions were oral but preserved well in the memory by the reciters. From

Book Review

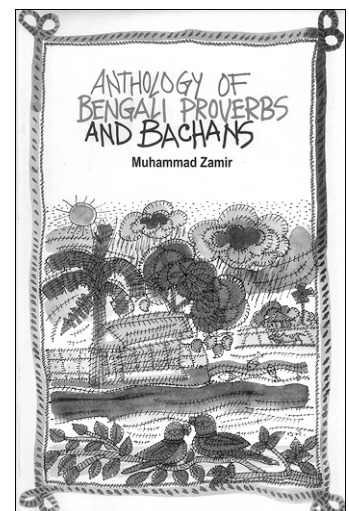
Anthology of Bengali Proverbs and Bachans by Muhammad Zamir

Published by Bangla Academy, April, 2003

Cover designed by Rafiqun Nabi

14th and 15th centuries onwards we have seen more written compositions and records. In the absence of written Bengali most of the compositions were mainly in Sanskrit 'prakrit abhatta' or 'orbachin abhatta' scripts. Local literature and music in Bangladesh was composed in Bengali and practiced in the oral tradition. It was not considered good enough to write it down in Bengali as Fundits point out. Therefore *Bachans* by Dak and Khana, folk tales, *brata katha*, although were composed at a very early stage they were carried by oral tradition and therefore have gone through natural linguistic and cultural changes.

These sayings have been preserved from mouth to mouth and are living examples of cultural continuity. Oral tradition which may be a thousand years old is likely



to be composed in the existing Buddhist tradition such as the *Doha* or *charyagitii* songs composed by the siddhahs. Some of the proverbs and *Bachans* have esoteric quality, some are philosophical and some mundane. In this context Zamir mentions that Sushil Kumar Dey's book on Bangla Probad has identified 10,600 Bengali proverbs.

It would have been very satisfactory if Zamir would have identified

his sources for the present collection. We are interested in the proverbs and *Bachans*, which are representative of and still exist in Bangladesh and whether any district or area is particularly noted for the types of proverbs, which may or may not be composed by Khana or Dak.

It is very interesting to note that sayings of Khana are found in other parts of the region such as Nepal, Assam, Bihar, Orissa and Tripura, which support the idea that the sayings are a part of our common heritage with regional variation. In search of *charyagitii* I have also traveled to Nepal and Bhutan. There I have come across many *charyagitii* or new *charyagitii* composed later than 14th, 15th centuries in Bengali scripts. These collections may throw light on historical and other important literary aspects of a common heritage.

It is generally believed that Khana was born in East Bengal during the period of King Vikramaditya. Khana's *Bachan* are considered to be pre Vaishnava literature while astrological publications have references to Khana from 14th and 15th century astrological publications. This is no doubt valuable information.

The author has classified into

broad categories the present collection of 139 proverbs. 1. Social Adages and Proverbs, 2. General Adages, 3. Khana and Agriculture, 4. Adages on Agriculture. The main features of Khana's *Bachans* are agricultural wisdom or advice. Khana also included livestock and dairy farming as important tools for agriculture and livelihood. She gives a lot of importance to paddy as the most important crop then and now. She also was an ecologist and encouraged the merits of local fruits rich in food nutrients such as banana. To this day her sayings and advice have not proven wrong in spite of so called agricultural advances made. The present book will throw light on ancient folk literature and merits of indigenous knowledge.

Khana has been known also as an astrologer herself. Khana's husband Mihir was also a well-known astrologer of the time. '*Purba asharey dakhina boi, shei batsar bannya hoi*,' has proven to be right. It is refreshing to note that the recognition and respect paid to Khana and Dak are reflection of talents of women in this region. Rightfully so, the book has been dedicated to Khana the seer and Nasrin, Zamir's very talented wife.