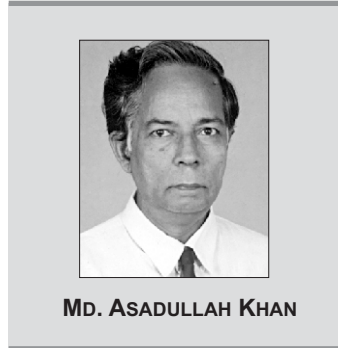


## Caught in the rut



Md. ASADULLAH KHAN

WITH due apologies to the 17th century mathematical genius, Sir Isaac Newton, his three laws of motion can be modified to describe the state of functioning or non-functioning in the government today: 1. Most ministries and departments are at rest unless acted upon by a crisis; 2. The acceleration of work is inversely proportional to the need for that work and directly proportional to the lobbying for the assignment; 3. For every attempt to do a task, there is an equal and opposite reaction to stop it.

Blame minister's inaction, blame coalition politics or the highest decision making cell in the government, whatever may be reasons, the government's decision making has been acutely paralysed over the last one and half years. Barring opening of some bridges on the national highways not a single important decision or a development project has either been taken or implemented by any ministry of the government since the beginning of the last fiscal year.

Reports published in the newspapers in the recent past indicated that the Finance Minister M. Saifur Rahman in a meeting with the high officials of the Finance Division and Planning Commission on review of mid term budget framework expressed his resentment and unhappiness over the reckless spending of public money by the ministries. Citing an instance that Tk.4000 crore was spent in just five days ending June in the last fiscal year he termed it as an example of how public money was wasted. Shockingly indeed, funds lay idle throughout the year and spent recklessly in the last five days of the fiscal year.

Perhaps the Finance Minister or, so to say, the Finance Ministry whose job it is to keep a tight control and strict vigil on wasteful expenditure has failed in its job. And even if the minister tries to suppress his worries while admitting belatedly that the financial health of the nation is not okay, people all over the country have felt the crunch of price hike of food grains and essential commodities

ties just after the announcement of the dream budget and implementation of the new pay scales. With the sharp depreciation of home currency against dollar, fiscal deficit ballooning for pouring subsidies in PSUs, as well as gradual rise of oil and food grain price in the international market bringing in its wake a difficult balance of payment situation, the country, it appears, is heading towards a bigger crisis.

Budget is not only the occasion for the government to throw open its account to public audit, it is also the moment for it to speak its mind on economic policy to draw the road map for how government, industry

meet the import demand that grew by 26.4 per cent. To add to this worry, a 16 per cent remittance growth and a significant inflow of foreign assistance coming as budgetary support were overshadowed by the import surge and the resultant foreign exchange crisis. Surprisingly the Finance minister has not created an environment that will promote middle-class consumption and lead to an economic growth that will indirectly fill the government coffers. For any government to reap economic success what is needed more other than a team of officials and public leaders imbued with the qualities of head and heart, integrity, efficiency and com-

set up over 100,000 MW of additional capacity and it will invite private entrepreneurs to do so. Bangladesh as it is learnt from Power Development sources, produces about 3,300 MW of power against a requirement of 4,000MW. But in order to put the country on the road to progress and development, it needs another 4,000 MW of power. If all of this additional capacity will be the responsibility of the public sector, then obviously the Finance Minister's dream budget envisioning a prosperous Bangladesh will remain a pipe-dream.

The Finance Minister may not be an economist but because of his long

weak, incomplete and flawed that the river Jamuna, now in full fury, washed out the settlements on the bank rendering more people homeless. This is how public money is wasted without proper supervision and monitoring. Sand bags and cc blocks reportedly placed on the eroding bank of the river have been washed away without any true account of them being available. Suspicion is lurking in public mind, as some reporters of the national dailies allege that money was paid for the work that was never done. So the real problem of Bangladesh is not always of money but of management -- utter uselessness, insensitivity and inertia of the administration particularly in times of crisis.

Undeniably true, with a little commitment, we could have solved many of these problems much earlier. Tragically, even after 33 years on to independence, we cannot provide our people basic amenities that most developed countries take for granted -- drinking water, schools, jobs, a roof overhead -- but we can afford thousands of luxury vehicles and apartments, air-conditioned shopping malls studded with high cost low utility items. Till now we tend to overlook the fact that countries like Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia used to be bicycle economies like our own but have become motor car economies in the past 20 years while we still largely remain a cycle-rickshaw economy. Their citizenry is mostly literate and lives with a few basic 20th century necessities like sanitation, clean drinking water and electricity. Most of our people, on the other hand, live in conditions that would have been considered horrific by the 19th century standard. Let me recall my pleasant memories and experience I had while visiting Malaysia some years ago as a visiting Commonwealth Fellow. Starting from the airports to all the places like the manufacturing plants, universities, tower buildings and the roads and bridges I travelled over I was fascinated to see the flawless work done in every place and the facilities created. On my questioning as to how this country reaped such excellent progress in the same span of time that we have been through with money, men and experience, my friend, a Malaysian university officer, told me that in Malaysia 90 per cent of the fund allocated for any project are actually utilised, while this may not be so in other places.

All these lessons keep us pondering where we have failed and if we can still turn this nation with a burgeoning twenty million unemployed labour force on the road to self-sufficiency, progress and development. Recalling the comment that renowned futurologist Alvin Toffler made in an India Today conclave about India sometime back, "If you don't combine strategy with agility, you could end up in Tokyo with your baggage in Timbaktou", the government must take all out measures to shore up the battered economy now. That's the thought worth holding on to for all of us.

Md Asadullah Khan is a former teacher of physics and controller of examinations, BUET.

## How to live without oil

AMORY B. LOVINS

In 1850, most homes in the United States were lit by lamps that burned whale oil. As demand rose, supply dwindled -- whales became shy and scarce -- and prices for whale oil climbed. Then alternative fuels such as smokeless, odourless coal-kerosene began to sweep the market. By 1859, when Edwin Drake struck oil in Pennsylvania, five-sixths of all whale-oil lamps had switched to the new fuels. The astonished whalers, who hadn't heeded the competition, ran out of customers before they ran out of whales.

Oil may now be poised to repeat that history. With prices exceeding \$50 a barrel, the world's oil habit now costs \$4 billion a day. Some experts warn that output will soon peak and prices will reach \$100, but nobody really knows for sure (94 per cent of reserves are owned by governments, which generally keep the data secret). Fortunately, it doesn't matter. With cheap oil-saving technologies and alternative fuels already at our disposal, the sooner we get off oil, the sooner we'll start making bigger profits.

That's right -- profits. The conventional wisdom is that \$50-a-barrel oil has made alternatives to fossil fuels economically viable. But the truth is that they were viable back when oil was \$25 a barrel. The arguments in favour of phasing out oil have now merely become overwhelming. That's true everywhere -- but nowhere more so than in America, the world's biggest oil consumer. It's entirely possible to cut projected US oil consumption in half by 2025, and eliminate it completely by 2050, without compromising rapid economic growth. Demand could be halved simply by using oil twice as efficiently over several decades; the other half could be replaced with saved natural gas and advanced bio-fuels. According to a US policy analysis we published last year at Rocky Mountain Institute ("Winning the Oil Endgame"), the cost of these changes would average \$15 a barrel. Even if, as the US government forecasts, oil comes down in price by 2025 to \$26 a barrel, the net saving in the United States would still be \$70 billion a year, and the rest of the world would benefit proportionally. Burgeoning economies like China and India have the most to lose from falling into a US-style oil trap, and the biggest opportunity to avoid it by making their vehicles, buildings, and factories efficient from scratch.

Doubling oil efficiency wouldn't be hard. A backlog of powerful ways to save and substitute for oil, amassed since the 1973 oil embargo, remains mostly untapped, even in the most energy-efficient countries. Automakers for instance could profitably increase fuel mileage to 66 mpg (3.6L/100km) for light trucks and 92 mpg (2.6L/100km) for cars. Doing so would cost an extra \$2,550 for a midsize SUV, but would pay for itself in fuel savings in two years in the United States and in one year in Europe.

This would require combining hybrid-electric propulsion with new lightweight steels or, in a few years, carbon composite parts that absorb



Wind power can be a good alternative

six to 12 times more crash energy per kilogram. New manufacturing processes could then make cars big, protective and comfortable with halved weight and fuel use at no extra cost. The US military could pioneer such ultra-light, ultra-strong vehicles to modernise its forces.

Modern aerodynamics, tires, engines, and materials can cheaply double or triple the efficiency of 18-wheel heavy trucks and jetliners, too. Boeing's new 787 consumes 20 per cent less fuel per passenger mile than its predecessor. Retooling the US car, truck, and plane industries would require a \$90 billion investment. That may sound like a lot, but spread over a decade, it's worth about three weeks of US oil imports a year. Other countries retooling would typically yield at least as handsome profits in both money and security.

Once the United States has saved half its oil, it can cost-effectively replace an additional 20 per cent with advanced bio-fuels, and the rest with saved natural gas. Bio-fuels (based on woody, weedy plants -- not corn) will need a \$90 billion investment, too, but they'll beat \$26 oil, revitalise farming, protect topsoil better, and preserve food crops' land and water. Harvesting bio-fuel crops, carbon credits, and wind power all from the same land, much of it now unproductive, can also double or triple net farm and ranch income. Again, details will differ in other countries, but the opportunities are broadly similar -- even in Japan, which lacks the Great Plains but is 70 per cent forested and could sustainably harvest both fibre and bio-fuels there.

Eliminating oil demand in the

United States would thus require a \$180 billion investment, half for efficient vehicles, half for advanced bio-fuels. By 2025, that would save \$155 billion every year, create a million new jobs, save a million current jobs and generate 26 per cent less carbon emissions. Benefits in Europe, Asia and Latin America are proportional or better. Even oil-exporting countries could benefit: oil may well ultimately be worth more for its hydrogen content than for its hydro-carbons.

Mandates, subsidies, and taxes aren't needed to implement these changes. What's needed are smart business strategies and enlightened government policies that remove barriers to adopting new technology. The most important would be to offer "feebates" -- a charge on inefficient vehicles that would be rebated to buyers of efficient ones, within each size class. Government would also play a role in helping retool car plants, retrain workers, scrap gas-guzzler planes and cars, and so forth. Customers would have more choices, workers more jobs, everyone more profits. In only two generations, oil -- once the foundation of our strength but now a source of weakness -- could become as obsolete as whale-oil lamps.

Lovins is co-founder and CEO of Rocky Mountain Institute, a nonprofit group in Snowmass, Colorado, and author of "Winning the Oil Endgame."

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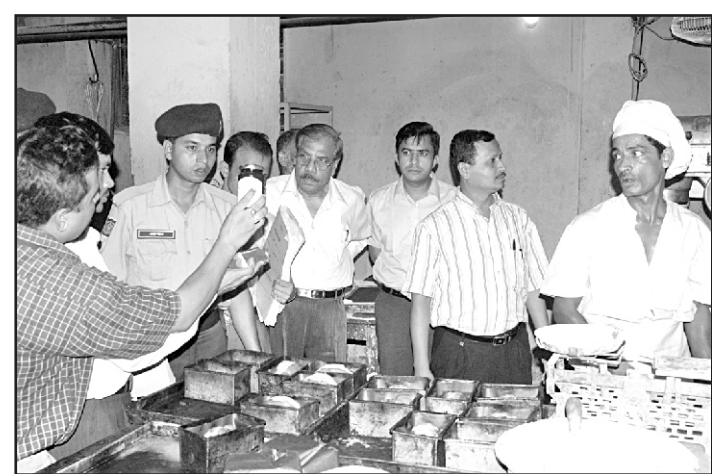
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## On relentless war against food-front criminals

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

SURIOUS drugs and food items in the market have been a perpetual menace and threat to human health. Packaged and bottled drinks, fruit juices and allied items manufactured with harmful chemicals and ingredients are being sold in the open market. Some are locally produced and some are imported. Manufacturing and expiry dates on these merchandise are often not indicated. Retail and even wholesale outlets are used to sell products long beyond expiry dates. Many of the dry food items, snacks, cakes, biscuits, chana-churs available in the market are being manufactured at awfully dirty places and in bewildering unhygienic locations. Rotten flour, and eggs, adulterated oil (with burnt mobile), and dangerously impure water, date expired imported powder milk and harmful clours and chemicals, essence etc have been the usual ingredients. The workers engaged at manufacturing these food items have no idea what cleanliness means. They do invariably add sweats, sputum to the dough and raw materials in their manual labour making the end products all the more dangerous for human consumption. The cheap hotels and the make shift road-side food providers to the poor working population present the self-same scenario to the detriment of health and hygiene.

The strength of BSTI must be expanded all over the country to effectively monitor the situation continuously with provisions for follow-up actions. Parallel to that the public health department of the government must also launch mass awareness programmes and publicity so that the dishonest traders of food products can be kept under continuous mental and moral pressure so as to refrain from the evil practice of adulteration.



Inspection team at a bakery

ing of the raid some of the newspapers had catered reports on contaminant food products, snacks etc, rotten fish dipped in poisonous formaline, selling of dead poultry meat, chemically ripened mangoes to the unsuspecting consumers. Yet those reports were not heeded. The traders continued with their dirty and insidious gamble with human lives. The raid brought to surface many instances of such unabated mischiefs rendering the children and people of all ages veritable hostage to their criminal acts. They are literally selling poison for human consumption and as an inevitable consequence the hapless consumers are suffering from different diseases with untold complications and threats to life.

From the raids launched against adulteration we have enough revelation to affirm that there is hardly any food product in the market which can be considered safe for public health. There is no scope to be assured of absolutely pure products from any outlets irrespective of their social and popular standing. The restaurants, mostly for the commoners, reportedly cater of dead fowls, rotten fish, use frequently burnt mobil for cooking. Other edible oils, ghee, butter oil etc are not free from

contamination. Iodized salt has no iodine content, fruit juices are full of poisonous hues and without any existence of fruit claimed on the package, date expired ice-creams are being used for new ones. The picture so far available is a very insignificant part of an abhorring ghastly totality. And that has turned out to be enough to shatter the confidence of consumers.

As very usual in such cases, the traders, home-based producers and suppliers, devoid of health ethics, have expressed their resentment against such sudden raids. Like the illegal occupiers of public property during eviction, they too branded the lawful intervention as 'harassment'. Some even resented the raid being without 'prior notice'! So, at the first instance, they had a two-day strike on last Wednesday and Thursday (3-4 August) followed by a mass rally. They have also asked for 'redress' against the alleged 'harassment' failing which they would put up agitational programmes successively. Curiously enough none of their leaders could, till now, specify any instance which could be construed to have been 'harassment' in their words. Still then the general members of the public have had no difficulty to understand where the shoe pricked.

Their right to protest the apparently imaginary 'harassment' has invoked large scale public condemnation. It was reasonably contended that instead of putting down their shutters for 48 hours they could wash out the ugliest part of their rendezvous with adulteration. And they could start afresh upholding the desired moral values so as not to use the inhuman death traps for their brethren and fellow citizens, the children and the consumers at large. The two-day strike had, on the other hand, reflected more visibly their brazen faces and mental upkeeping to mint money. It is yet to be known if they will someday ask for a legalised 'right' to adulterate.

The conscience of the whole nation must have been wondering whether it shall continue to be the destiny of the people of Bangladesh to see for long the whole health system of the country kept in perpetual jeopardy rearing within their ill-fed stomach complicated diseases and to die in harness. The long list of adulterated food items is enough to suggest that the diabolic demons have already extended their long hands down to the root of the system. Such a vicious onslaught, if allowed to continue, will very soon lead to a limping, diseased generation incapable of ever severing its dependence on hospitals. And that's how one can imagine the severely ripped health fabric in the coming decades.

To forestall such a catastrophic scenario the present preventive and punitive measures must continue as long as it is needed. The strength of BSTI must be expanded all over the country to effectively monitor the situation continuously with provisions for follow-up actions. Parallel to that the public health department of the government must also launch mass awareness programmes and publicity so that the dishonest traders of food products can be kept under continuous mental and moral pressure so as to refrain from the evil practice of adulteration. The government can also arrange periodic motivational programmes for the traders and issue documentary guidelines with legal provisions for their strict adherence. The welcome and wholesome augury set in by the city corporation must not be abandoned halfway. Let it reach its complete goal to save the citizens.

Kazi Alauddin Ahmed is an industrial consultant.

## The marauding rains of Mumbai

GOLAM KIBRIA

On the 26<sup>th</sup> July, the sky over Mumbai opened gates. When the rain started at 2-30pm, no one thought there was anything special in it. Mumbai was passing through the rainy season and it was raining intermittently since June 15<sup>th</sup>. Some of them were quite heavy. But the rain of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July was unlike any other that the Mumbaikars had witnessed in life. And they would know it in few hours time.

By 5-30pm, the rainfall was 94cm. The average rainfall in Mumbai for a whole rainy season, from July to September, remains at 200cm. Half of that 3 months' total rain fell within 3 hours. The rain created a solid screen of downpour cutting the visibility to zero. People looked outside the windows and saw nothing but the incessant flow of droplets of water. The neighbourhood, and the building next block was impossible to see through that solid sheet. Its effect was both disorientating and debilitating. And it caused such havoc that it would possibly remain beyond the imagination of someone who did not witness such a thing in life.

The rainfall is a record in hundred years or any number of years, so say,

because there has not been any recorded history of rainfall surpassing this. In the whole world's rainfall records, it is one of the 6 most intense ones. 94cm in a flat 180 minutes, the highest ever in a day in India.

The various ways that it took people's lives is also mind-numbing. First came the landslides. In the picturesque district of Raiged, around the town of Mahad, about 180km from Mumbai on the Mumbai-Goa highway, landslides claimed over 100 lives. In the city itself, a small hillock near Sakinaka in Andheri collapsed killing another hundred people's. Then came the drowning and snake bites... There were people falling in manholes, getting washed away and so on.

But the most tragic were the cases where people died trapped inside their own cars. It happened in many places, on the western highway close to Santa Cruz, on Andheri-Kurla road and at Chakala. When the rain started, within no time traffic came to a standstill. Those who were in private cars did not have moving soon. But it did not happen as they hoped. The rain came in with such force that the rise of water was much faster than what they anticipated. The

more complacent passengers who rolled up the windows and tried to doze through the rain did not notice two things -- one, water was rising very fast around their cars and two, they were breathing less and less oxygen as their cabins were closed off. Some of them woke up to see water splashing outside the window shields. They tried to open the doors and get out. The hydrostatic pressure outside the doors made it impossible. Then they tried to roll down the windows and escape. But those having powered windows could not do that as water got into the electricals and damaged the circuits. As they fought to escape, the fear and lack of oxygen caused them to collapse soon. Eventually when help arrived next day, they were all dead.

A man told me a horrific story. He saw three people, two men and a lady in a car, dead. Hours before, they saw their hands on the windshields and window glasses. Everyone thought they were clearing the mist on the glass to have better visibility. But they were actually trying to break out of the car which they could not do. One of the boys wrote a letter describing his last minutes. It was most pathetic of all that I heard or read or saw in this rain.

Amidst all this, a supports ship

collided with ONGC's oil platform named Bombay High North, about 160km inside the Arabian sea, rupturing the gas pipeline and setting it on fire. There were over 300 people on work and it was feared that only few survived. But finally when the rescue was complete, the death toll came down to much less in number.

The final tragedy of this Mumbai rain is the stampede in Neheru Nagar at Juhu and Nirmal Nagar at Bandra and in Guregaon area. Someone shouted "Tsunami, Tsunami..." sometime at night and people, already distraught by 72 hours of sleep and food deprivation and witnessing the most dreadful downpour of the century, started running out of narrow lanes in the darkness: 18 died in Neheru Nagar, 3 in Nirmal Nagar and 2 in Guregaon in the hysteria and subsequent stampede. A second rumour about bursting of Powai dam set off another panic in the mob. The whole city was on edge and things were only happening from bad to the direction of worse.

Though the rain had stopped, there were occasional relapses. One afternoon it rained quite a bit flooding all those areas which cleared of water the previous day. The situation was still very severe.

I would quote The Time of India to convey the gravity of the situation. It is about the suburban township of Kalyan.

If London earned the sobriquet of the City of Black Death after it was devastated by the great plague of 1665, this mini township of Kalyan could well inherit the title days. today. Afloat with tones of garbage and hundreds of carcasses of humans and buffaloes, casualties of flood that have turned this township into the stinking drain, Kalyan has gone without power, drinking water and basic commodities for the last four days. It is a miracle that the 500,000 people living here are still surviving without any grave illness...

Mumbai Mirror has published a picture showing Amitabh Bachchan almost in tears. His villa 'Jalsa' got deluged and his valuable collections got destroyed. Leaving his shooting schedule, the actor spent two days salvaging his favourite articles from the basement office. No one was spared from the engulfing havoc that rattle the city for few days.

Golam Kibria is an Auditor of BVQI, currently under training in Mumbai.



The normal monsoon rain turned fatal in hours to the extreme shock of Mumbai residents.