

Power supply outcry

Urgent solution is warranted

THE erratic power situation with frequent countrywide outages and low voltage supply has brought into sharp focus the government's extremely limited capacity to resolve the crises. Unless the government devises something extraordinary and urgently too, the country is in for a shocker, with the people facing the prospect of continued physical misery and the economy the ill consequences of ruptured power supply network. And the ludicrous utterances of some government leaders have demonstrated their nonchalance and complete insensitivity to public sufferings, thereby increasing their agonies.

One is at a loss to comprehend the power generation policy of the government and if indeed there is one at all. If there is one we fail to see the results, and the only assumption is that there has been no serious effort by the government to keep pace with the yearly and long term requirement of electricity in the country. And in meeting the demands of some so-called priority areas, the rural area has been neglected giving rise to a discriminatory situation, demonstrating, in the essence, lack of governmental ability to manage a vital utility service.

It would not be remiss on our part if we were to ask what has the government to show in the four and half years of its rule by way of any addition to electricity output. One recalls the criticism by the coalition government, after assuming office, of its predecessor's effort in this sector and the promise it made to the nation to add substantially to power output. In fact the projection is that, by the end of its five-year tenure, the government will have at best added very little to the current output and only half of what is required to be produced yearly to meet the serious gap between demand and supply by the end of the next decade.

One is therefore not surprised that the government has fallen back on the plans formulated by the previous government, something it had discarded, to tide over the current shortages.

We feel that more than stopgap measures are required to get over the current power deficit and to meet the long-term requirement in the sector. Urgent action, not bound by ulterior partisan motives, is what is required of the ruling coalition.

Resounding verdict in West Bengal

Election Commission role impeccable

THE electoral victory of the Left Front in West Bengal for the seventh time in a row is definitely a triumph of the progressive and secular forces in India. The Front has emerged as the consistent arbiter of the state's political destiny. And Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya can duly claim to have led it to an unassailable position that no other party or alliance ever enjoyed in Indian politics. That democratic practices have taken roots firmly in Indian society was manifest in the conceding speech of Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamul Congress, which was worth taking note of.

The Front's success is largely attributable to its pro-people stance reflected amply in its land reform and village panchayat scheme, that have benefited the vast majority of rural people. Above all, the clean and well-organised image of the Front has helped it retain its grip on power. The people of West Bengal have clearly rejected the BJP, while the Congress could not match the Front's broad-based development plans for the state.

The state polls were held on five days under the strict supervision of the Indian Election Commission. The point to be noted here is that the state apparatus remained absolutely neutral and every party had to go by the rules. The Election Commission's assertive and efficient handling of the whole electoral process left no room for any adverse criticism. Even the avowed critics of the Front acknowledged that the elections were held very smoothly.

The lessons from the West Bengal elections are twofold. First, a ruling party or alliance can overcome anti-incumbency factor if it tries to fulfill its elections pledges with an element of consistency. Second, a strong election commission coupled with a neutral administration can keep the disruptive forces at bay.

The Front's victory has removed all doubts and speculations regarding its election strategy and tactics. It could also be a stabilising factor for the government of Manmohan Singh, which is firmly committed to secular principles of governance that the Left Front is supportive of.

Shanir dasha at Shanir Akhra



SHAHNOOR WAHID

IN Bengali, Shanir dasha is said when one is having a series of bad luck in life because of the ominous influence of planet Saturn. So, we have seen how Shanir dasha set someone on the run for life at Shanir Akhra recently (the name of the place is spooky enough for anyone to venture out there alone).

The ungrateful people of Shanir Akhra had the akhri (final) showdown with their representative and chased him down the road to oblivion. It must have been a sorry sight for the kins of the roadrunner (remember the comic?), but it surely evoked pristine laughter in the citizens. It reminded some amongst us of the childhood rhyme: "Humpty Dumpty Had a Great Fall ...". The king's men, the police in this case, tried to put Humpty together again, but it appears things have really

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

We reported in this column last week on semi-transparent beings standing in the line with mortal voters. Today we want to report on the doings of some mischievous dogs. According to our fact-finding reporting team, now dogs are being partially blamed for the flawed voters' list. It is alleged that some Election Commission officials have complained that in many houses they were scared to enter because of dogs. "Beware of Dogs" read the sign on doors in big bold letters.

taken a turn for the worse for him.

One after another, stories of his grabbing of land and other property in Demra and Shanir Akhra area are coming out in the media and the man is finding it difficult to explain how he got unabashedly rich within the last four years. Hmmm ... the boon of joining politics! But the latest scoop is the gentleman is now talking incoherently. Even his own party men are tense lest he says something highly damaging for them all! One friendly suggestion: Better keep him under sedation and wake him up well after the next election, what say?

Now that the Saarcpol is going to be created by the Saarc member countries it will be easy for us to "look for shatrus (enemies)" hiding in these countries and have them extradited without any hassle. The home ministers of the member

countries have reached an agreement on working in many areas, especially containing drug trafficking and terrorism.

Very good. But what about the gunadhar putras (blessed sons) of the MPs, chief whips, and ministers, and their gunadhar friends who are doing all sorts of illegal and anti-people activities within the country? Are they above the law just because their gunadhar fathers happen to be in politics? Most of the criminals hiding in various neighbouring countries allegedly maintain contacts with these blessed sons, brothers, and nephews of many of our high and mighty politicians. Will the concerned ministry and law enforcing agencies declare them as shatrus and go after them? So, when our case looks like "gharer shatru Bibhishon" (a line from the epic Ramayana, meaning when we

have enemy within) what good would it do to search for them elsewhere?

Many of us can hardly comprehend the ways the police, courts, and criminal laws work in this country. We see innocent people being harassed, arrested against no specific charges, physically abused and tortured to death by the police. We have even seen how some police officials gave enough leverage to some local goons to push an innocent girl to commit suicide.

On the other hand, we see hardened criminals being given jamai ador (VIP treatment) while they are in custody or being escorted from the police station to the courthouse. They get best accommodation and food and even cell phones inside jailhouses! And now we read in utter disbelief how the self-confessed bombers and killers of the judges,

policemen and common bystanders continue to deny the country's laws and courts (and thereby, the country's constitution) standing in open courts!

But these same persons are given the opportunity to counter question the prosecutors in a bid to create confusion in everyone! Only some days back, Shaikh Abdur Rahman said that he does not believe in the laws of the land, as these were man-made and thereby not Islamic. He openly confessed to giving orders for throwing bombs on the judges and policemen as they represented a corrupt system of governance.

What more do we need to put them on summary trial and see the back of them forever? Will the charade go on till the time comes for the caretaker government to take over and then the incumbents will heave a sigh of relief?

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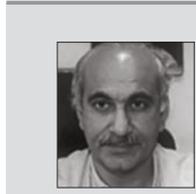
dogs. "Beware of Dogs" read the sign on doors in big bold letters. We wonder what had happened to the doorbells? If vegetablewallas, milkwallas, chickenwallas, and fakirs can ring the bells two hundred times in a day, why couldn't the young smart boys from the EC do so? It beats us, doesn't it?

Finally, the rainwaters are here and we need to buy kosha nouka (small boats) to go to office. You see, before the rain, rainwater comes first in Dhaka and refuses to go away. Roads go waist-deep in filthy water and everyday on TV channels you will hear various mind-boggling explanations given by the honourable mayor, the honourable LGRD minister, and many others.

You will also see, one of these evenings, eleven pumps pumping out water from one side of the road to inundate the other side with the mayor or the minister giving instructions. Why eleven, you ask. Actually there were twenty pumps, but nine conked out in front of the VIP guests. Happy wading in the rainwater for the next six months!

Shahnoor Wahid is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

The man who rescued dogma from dogmatism



M.J. AKBAR

B UDDHADEB Bhattacharjee has buried the ghost that hovered over Jyoti Basu's table for two decades - that his remarkable run of victories was tainted by rigging. It was an easy accusation to make, and an easier one to believe outside Bengal, precisely because India had never witnessed anything like the democratic miracle engineered by Basu and the CPI(M).

The facts of course did not quite justify the accusation. Marxist support was anchored in solid economic benefits for the underprivileged, and lifted by the unique charisma of Jyoti Basu, a charisma that magnetised the Bengali voter. But it was the only accusation that a hapless, and then a hopeless, opposition could make.

This charge was essential to the self-esteem, and therefore survival, of the Congress and the truculent child, the Trinamul. Without self-esteem you cannot offer hope; without hope, you cannot have a cadre. Mamata Banerjee can sustain her individual self on a diet of negative and near-hysterical cacophony. But why should the young, or even the old, person in search of a political career invest in her if all she can offer is forty years in the wilderness?

It is a fair bet that, after Moses, the Congress family in Bengal is the only leadership that offers forty years in the wilderness and hopes to survive. The journey to nowhere began in 1977. For 29 years the Congress family has been staring at a lost horizon. Buddhadeb

BYLINE

We must not lose what we have achieved through economic reform. But it is equally true that the next phase of economic growth is going to be impossible without a far greater commitment to equity and social change. If the first phase of economic growth was sustained by a Right Front, then the next phase will need a non-dogmatic Left Front in power. The only political party with any credibility among the poor within the democratic ambience is the CPI(M). The CPI(M) can seed a Left Front that re-establishes Delhi's equation with India. Step forward, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

Bhattacharjee has now set course for at least another eleven years. We shall check horizons again after the elections of 2016.

And Buddhadeb Babu has done it in style. The Election Commission pulled out all the stops in its determination to prevent any rigging. This election was as clean as it gets. The results were as overwhelmingly one-sided as possible. The difference was so huge that even the opinion polls could not get it wrong. Every government tries to use state machinery to its advantage, but no government has been able to change the course of a tide.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's great achievement is that he corrected the course of the tide when he found that it just might go the other way, and set about this task almost from the moment he inherited Basu's extraordinary legacy. He introduced the dialectic of change into Marxist terminology. Like any Marxist, he is a child of ideology, but he rescued dogma from dogmatism.

He was ahead of the youth curve.

The biggest danger for any establishment is to run adrift of the shifting perception of the young. Every generation rewrites the rules of economic aspiration, within the context of new technology and emerging opportunity. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee saw the future in the Chinese model, but not quite in the way we imagine. There was a subtle variation, even as he under-

stood that Communism had to integrate with market forces. He realised that the Chinese Communist Party could survive a Tiananmen Square because the system was essentially despotic. But in a democracy such an upsurge would have been sufficient to unseat a government in the subsequent election. His responsibility and challenge therefore was to prevent disillusionment, and ease the anger of the young before it erupted.

He did not succeed in isolation, as is sometimes made out to be. He was not a voice outside the party's Politburo. The CPI(M) is now led by younger men and women with a vested interest in the future. And they are going to find that future with the steely determination of the generation that has provided them with an invaluable legacy. Till yesterday, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was a chief minister of Bengal. Today he has become a leader of his people.

Obviously he has been helped by the fact that the Trinamul and Congress had nothing to offer except emotional, non-intellectual, and often unintelligible mishmash. Mamata Banerjee is the headmistress of the tired school of cliches. She confuses street theatre with politics. Bengalis may love jatra but they don't vote for drama queens. And as drama queens go, Mamata Banerjee is no Suchitra Sen.

But she also emerges from a political tradition in Bengal. Marxist historians must never forget to

thank three Bengalis for the rise of the CPI(M): PC Sen, Ajoy Mukherjee, and Pranab Mukherjee. Sen was Congress chief minister after Dr BC Roy, and led his party to defeat almost as surely as Dr Roy led his party to victory. Sen fell in the elections of 1967 to a United Front crafted by Ajoy Mukherjee, the ageing Congress rebel, Pranab Mukherjee, the rising young tactician, and Jyoti Basu. (Pranab Mukherjee is an ageing tactician now, but still a tactician.)

1967 marked the beginning of a decade of struggle and trial for the Marxists: through the fires of Naxalite havoc, Congress repression in the state, and then the nationwide Emergency. In 1977 the Emergency was lifted and the mood of the north was passionately anti-Congress. Sen, now leader of the Janata Dal, did the Marxists an unparalleled favour. Basu offered an alliance. Sen arrogantly rejected it. The Left Front swept to power in 1977 in Bengal. No one has discovered the means to remove it in three decades.

A historic blunder (the phrase is Jyoti Basu's) in 1997 prevented the Marxists from taking a quantum leap forward in their political evolution. The CPI(M) Politburo prevented Jyoti Basu from leading a coalition and becoming the first Marxist Prime Minister of India. No party has used power to expand its base better than the CPI(M). Today, the Marxists have been



restricted to two and a half fortresses (Tripura would be the half), and only one of those fortresses is under permanent possession (Bengal).

With Jyoti Basu in Delhi, the party would have had a unique chance to take its message, as well as its management style, across the country. The results might not have been immediate, but they would have come.

A decade has passed since that historic blunder, and generations have changed. Can Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and Prakash Karat reverse that blunder?

They have one great advantage, which was not so evident a decade earlier. When Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh ushered in economic reforms in 1991, they promised emancipation to all. Their work was carried forward by governments that were hostile to the Congress: the Vajpayee coalition was as committed to those reforms as its originators.

In a sense, these policies were endorsed by a Right Coalition, which could have evolved into a Right Front. Fifteen years later, it is obvious to everyone but the blind that economic reforms have been only a partial success. The Maoist insurgency is violent evidence of the despair in the darker side of

India -- the moonlit India, as opposed to neon-lit India.

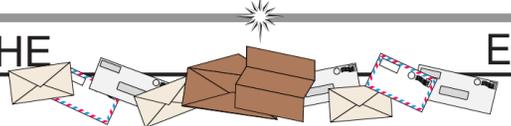
We must not lose what we have achieved through economic reform. But it is equally true that the next phase of economic growth is going to be impossible without a far greater commitment to equity and social change. If the first phase of economic growth was sustained by a Right Front, then the next phase will need a non-dogmatic Left Front in power. The poor will not wait much longer. If they are not included in rapid progress then they could even destroy what has been achieved.

The only political party with any credibility among the poor within the democratic ambience is the CPI(M). The Maoists are a splutter of anger, an important alarm bell, but they are not the solution to this growing problem. Their relevance is limited. The CPI(M) can seed a Left Front that re-establishes Delhi's equation with India.

Step forward, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Anti-kidnapping manual

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) recently launched a manual to help nations handle the scourge, which often results in the death of victims. According to UN estimate, an estimated 10,000 people are kidnapped throughout the world every year.

UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa formally presented a copy of the manual to Colombian Attorney General Mario German Iguaran Arana during the current session of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice being held in Vienna. She said that the purpose of this manual is to save lives.

The UN agency developed the manual to give police officers and policy-makers concrete guidelines on how to respond to kidnappings, building on the contributions of experts from 16 countries and the financial support of the government of Columbia, where kidnapping of civilians has often been rampant during a long civil conflict.

Identifying different types of kidnapping, including kidnapping for extortion as well as political or

ideological purposes, it advises governments on drawing up effective legislation, preventive measures and contingency plans.

It also provides practical guidance for senior police investigators, covering subjects such as negotiation, surveillance and intervention options.

UNODC said it has developed a course based on the manual to train experts for countries of the Caribbean and more such training is also planned for Latin America this year.

This manual is reportedly based on good practices identified by experienced practitioners. Hopefully, it will help to make the global law enforcement response more effective.

Kidnapping could have local, national and international dimensions. So, all the countries need coherent national strategies to combat this crime.

The manual might have great significance for a country like ours. Hope, our authorities concerned will collect the manual and adopt best practices for the country.

The UNDP has presently been supporting a project in Bangladesh for strengthening capacity of the police force.

Needless to say, this support should be in terms of our local needs and reality.

Udatta Bikash, Ph.D.
Legal Researcher and Practitioner
Shayamoli, Dhaka

Misuse of public funds

Recently, I had an opportunity to see a newly built Upazila Complex at

Matlab North. It is a huge establishment far from the dist head-quarters with very luxurious and magnificent buildings in the complex, a multi-storeyed office building, multi-storeyed residential quarters for officers and staff and a mosque, a dormitory and two separate residential houses for the UNO and the Chairman. The Complex compound has a big pond.

All these are very eye-catching, but I was totally bewildered seeing the poor construction quality. And all these constructions were carried out with poor materials. I am not an engineer, but what I have seen is totally dismal and frustrating. I am so hurt; a lot of public money was spent and these constructions would not even last for 20 years.

I don't know who were responsible for supervising the buildings and whether they had performed

their responsibility efficiently.

The huge constructions have been done utilising public funds. Have any local politicians, who devoted their life for the sake and betterment of the people, checked how the constructions were carried out? Where are our ethics and values and religious faith?

The 3rd floor of the main building is almost damaged, many cracks have developed, and the staircases are almost without plasters. The bathrooms are mostly broken and damaged. Water seepage is very common from the roofs and ceilings. Many ceiling fans are not functional. Thank God, the buildings are there since we have not faced any major natural calamity in the recent past.

Who will look into the matter?
Abdur Rahim
Dhaka

Job quota

It refers to Mr. Mainul Quader's letter entitled "Quota in government job" published in the May 6, 2006 issue of The Daily Star. I cannot really support the views of Mr. Mainul. According to him, quota in govt jobs is making the job market worse for the job-seeker. But I don't think so. At present, very few govt. jobs can be obtained without going through a corrupt process.

On the other hand, the quota

system for freedom fighters' families and women in general are based on certain considerations. I hope you agree with me that we, the new generation or the people of Bangladesh, should show due respect to our freedom fighters. This quota system gives an opportunity to the wards of the freedom fighters to get jobs.

Moreover, if this quota system is abolished do you think that you can have a good job market overnight? Our problem is corruption. So try to remove it, instead of prescribing other solutions.

Golam Rosul Maruf
University of Dhaka

On 'Stoic bliss'

Recently the music veteran 'G Series' has brought out 'Light Years Ahead', a hip-hop album in both mixed up English and Bengali from a US based band 'Stoic Bliss'. Almost all the tracks sound tremendously cool with raps in Bangla and I welcome them for taking up such an innovative move. But the last track entitled 'Bloopers' really has some shocking bloopers inside that I find a little pathetic to listen to. It actually is a track with some informal conversations of the band members. There are some remarks on the great poet Rabindranath Tagore. All they said

about him was totally devoid of respect.

Very little did they care about the greatness of Tagore. The new generation singers have to be a little more careful on this type of 'Bloopers', or else the young listeners won't learn that the all time greats are not people to crack jokes on.

Ahmad Raiyan
Banosree, Dhaka

Election -2007

It is apparent that the people of Bangladesh are much more aware about the electoral system than before. All the media are playing a very important role in this regard. The dialogue initiated by the civil society is noteworthy!

Like many, I think there is no need for caretaker govt. What we require is reform to the Election Commission.

I think if the people vote for the party symbol, then there is no need for poster printing; no individual candidate will spend money for purchasing votes and all the people of the country will be represented in the parliament. The parties also have to practise democracy within.

This system is in vogue in many countries. The media can initiate a dialogue in this regard. I can only say that the initiative taken by the civil society is a

noble venture, but how this can be made effective is a big question.

MA Ullah
DOHS Baridhara, Dhaka

Enact "clean" laws!

Though I am not naturally honest, I am so sometimes by chance-William Shakespeare Human being is the most dishonest, corrupt and insidious among all living creatures on this planet. Doing harm to others for own interest and domination is the basic instinct of human being.

To arrest these instincts, various rules and laws (religious, social and state) have been evolved since the ancient time. No law is required to govern other creatures except human being.

The Daily Star-Prothom Alo-CDP-sponsored civil society initiative for accountable development and clean candidate movement for the 2007 election appears to be a utopian and unrealistic idea of a group of dreamy people.

However, there is no dispute over the essentially of freeing the country's politics from the clutches of corrupt and inept persons. The movement of the civil society would face snags in a number of issues viz: definition of clean candidates, identification of clean candidates, identification of "unclean" candidates, sharp polarisation in the society and the major two political divides, controversial roles of some

of the organisers, and practicability of launching such a campaign.

The society and politics of Bangladesh have become so polluted that it's very difficult to find a "clean" worldly person in the real sense. Can anyone find out 100 persons who did not do any harm to others in his lifetime, who did not trample the rights of others, who did not exploit others, who did not violate laws and undertake undue facility, and so on?

I can definitely say that it's quite impossible. We, the members of the so-called middle or educated class, are the most opportunist section in the society and compromising in nature. Then would we let the current unholy practice go unabated? Of course not.

As I mentioned at the beginning, I again want to say that only rules and regulations, and their strict enforcement, can deter human being -- whether he/she is from Bangladesh or elsewhere in the world -- from harming others. Only strict application of laws can prevent a person from turning "unclean" or dishonest.

So, let us start a movement to force the authorities to enact clean laws and their proper enforcement to bound the people to become honest, who are not naturally so.

Nazrul Islam
On e-mail