

Justice delayed is justice denied

Beef up the judiciary urgently

It is worrying news that the number of criminal cases awaiting disposal at the courts shoots up by a staggering 31,000 every year. This means that the workload of courts -- already cluttered with huge piles of cases -- increases further and the end-result is that the slow pace of case disposal becomes even slower.

The judiciary is not delivering the way it is expected to. Obviously, backlog of cases not only denies citizens their right to justice but also negates the whole concept of the rule of law. The judiciary, though a vitally important organ of the government, remains an area where little investment has been made since we became independent. It doesn't have the wherewithal or the manpower to deal with the fast-changing situation. The judges still have to sit in the crammed, ill-equipped rooms that were used in the distant past and that are no longer suitable for dealing with extra numbers of people seeking justice and the much greater volume of work.

So the judiciary needs capacity-building on the basis of a sound plan. Training of judges in view of their job turning more and more challenging and computerization of the whole judicial process are needed to enhance the efficiency of the system. In other words, technological support commensurate with their work must be provided to the judges.

Quick disposal of cases is greatly obstructed when police investigation proceeds at a snail's pace. Police officers who initiate cases are found to be lacking in legal expertise which can influence the whole course of legal proceedings in a very negative manner. The police do not have the necessary forensic skill which turns out to be a major flaw. That said, some investment has been made to modernise the police force, but the judiciary is still functioning with its limited resources and manpower that are hopelessly inadequate.

Then there is the issue of corruption and partisanship. These are debilitating factors both for the lower judiciary and the police. Partisan pressure and factors responsible for widespread corruption in both the lower judiciary and the police must be eliminated to clear the way for quick dispensation of justice.

Spiraling price line

Long on promise, short on delivery

OST of all major items of food have been on the rise continually for the last several months. Admittedly we are part of the free marketing system but surely that should not be interpreted or looked upon as licentious marketing. In the recent past government had changed ministers with the promise that prices would be controlled and brought down. But goal remains as elusive as ever.

We find the situation disquieting. Clearly it appears that there is no firm law nor any regulatory instrument in place for the government to check the continuous rise and fluctuation in the prices of essentials. At one time, some in the administration itself talked about a syndicated cartel being responsible for such price hikes. Thus the question is, being aware of the reasons and the sources of the price hikes, why no action has been taken in bringing the prices down?

We strongly believe that given the honesty of purpose and commitment, the administration should be able to tackle the matter with a considerable degree of success. There is practically no supervision of any kind over either retail or wholesale markets. It seems that most traders, driven by sheer motive of "profiteering", fix the prices at will.

In the past we have seen both the BADC and TCB play important roles directly or indirectly in keeping the prices of essential commodities under reasonable control. It is not understandable as to why these organisations are not allowed to play that role any longer.

Today's high prices of essentials have badly affected the lives of majority of the people. We find government's apathy in dealing with this vital issue of public interest totally unacceptable. We urge the administration to gear up all its resources to arrest this unnatural spiraling of prices without any further loss of time.

Politicians call the shots



S H IMAM

FROM MY WINDOW

In public perception, the major political parties by their unabated confrontational posture against each other might have unwittingly estranged their relations with the electorate. In that context some political pundits were even apt to suggest that the voters might be looking for a third alternative to both BNP and AL. But such predictions seem to fall flat on the ground that neither any alternative force has emerged in the political arena nor do the objective conditions permit the genesis of a third force as yet. It is very much the two major political parties and their alliances that call the shots.

THE dull consistency of confrontational, polarised and bankrupt politics is gradually giving way to what looks like a jamboree of ingenuity and engagement, bordering on creativity. By past standards of boredom and inactivity, that is.

A startling statement as it may seem on the face of it -- no headway having been made on the key procedural issue of holding a dialogue on the substantive questions of electoral and caretaker government reforms, removal of the CEC and his two commissioners and ensuring availability of an authentic voter list, yet even in this frustration zone, there is a flicker of hope kindled by the tenacious business community.

Their throwing the idea of a bipartisan start to a dialogue

between the secretary general of BNP and his counterpart in Awami League has apparently caught the imagination of the ruling party and the opposition top brasses. So long the question of dialogue itself was ensnared by BNP's insistence on Jaamat's participation in the talks and AL's vehement opposition to it. The secretaries general meeting could be a workable compromise solution, since a dialogue had to be held at some stage to start ironing out differences between the major parties for the elections to be made possible with a broad-based participation.

Strangely, the secretary general level meeting which looks such a plausible option has been pushed into uncertainty as Abdul Mannan

Bhuiyan and Abdul Jalil keep insisting on each other to make a formal request first. This is inexplicable because one would have expected that the onus lay on the government side to take the initiative. It seems, however, neither side wants to take the blame for a failure of the talks or maybe it is just another round of ego-play.

By

all accounts, after the caretaker government is constituted in October, there is a strong likelihood of a broad framework of electoral understanding emerging beyond what is now known as the 14-party alliance. Awami League is holding parleys with Jatiya Party (Ershad), Bangladesh Communist Party (CPB), Bokalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Zaker Party, coming to the BNP fold, JP is only

expected to be drawn to Awami League.

Jaamat and Jatiya Party at their levels are political rivals on the national stage. In 1991 and 1996 elections JP bagged more seats than Jaamat. Then in 2001 elections, Jaamat in spite of its electoral alignment with BNP secured only three more seats than JP. If all the factions of Jatiya Party are put together, they fared better than Jaamat. That's why Jaamat is keen on keeping Jatiya Party at bay from BNPs.

It is understood that Awami League has altogether three plans revolving around Jatiya Party and Bokalpa Dhara. First, foster a big alliance with Ershad; secondly, have an alliance with Ershad as its chief; thirdly, forge a united front with Bokalpa Dhara including those disgruntled by failing to win BNP tickets and different Islam-oriented parties.

Sheikh Hasina is prepared to concede a large chunk of seats for the sake of accommodating other potentially election winning parties. To this end, she has urged her party colleagues to be ready to make sacrifices. Some tested leaders of Awami League may have to forgo their claims to party ticket. We are told highly affluent seekers of AL nomination are in

communication with party top brasses. The capacity to win is going to be the criterion.

Both Begum Khaleda Zia and Hasina are in a process of meeting party men and women at the grassroots to impress upon them the need for sacrificing for the sake of embracing new entrants. The task may not be easy.

In public perception, the major political parties by their unabated confrontational posture against each other might have unwittingly estranged their relations with the electorate. In that context some political pundits were even apt to suggest that the voters might be looking for a third alternative to both BNP and AL. But such predictions seem to fall flat on the ground that neither any alternative force has emerged in the political arena nor do the objective conditions permit the genesis of a third force as yet.

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Nuclear power for Bangladesh?

If more gas burning power stations are installed, all the gas reserves of Bangladesh will be dried up in near future. Besides, it is not possible to run power stations by oil which has to be imported from abroad at a high price. There is no scope for establishing any more coal-based station which has to be near a coal-field or hydro-electric power station which harnesses a strong flow of water. In the back drop of this scenario, we should seriously consider the only economically viable and technically feasible technology: nuclear power.

DR. M AMINUL ISLAM

IN the first week of July while inaugurating the golden jubilee celebration of BCSIR, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia emphasized the importance of using nuclear power to meet the growing demand for electricity in the country. Indeed, considering the growing demand of electricity and existing modes of its production in Bangladesh and considering all the present technologies prevailing in the present world, there is no alternative for establishing a nuclear power reactor in Bangladesh.

At present, the demand of electricity in Bangladesh ranges somewhere from four to five thousand megawatts. The average production of electricity is 3,200 megawatts, the maximum production being 3,800 megawatts. The shortfall is around one thousand megawatts. At present 80% of total electricity is generated by power stations using gas, 5% by gas-diesel driven generators and 5% by hydro-electric power. Besides, the generators running on diesel alone and producing 10% of electricity are run only in the dry season for irrigation purposes. The newly established 250 megawatt coal-operated power station in Boropukuria, Dinajpur frequently shuts down due to mechanical

faults.

At present in Bangladesh the amount of gas used each day for producing electricity is eighty crore cubic feet which is 50% the total daily extraction of gas in the country. The rate at which the demand for electricity is increasing, it may reach as high as 8,000 megawatts by 2010. Considering this trend, if more gas burning power stations are installed, all the gas reserves of Bangladesh will be dried up in near future.

Besides, it is not possible to run power stations by oil which has to be imported from abroad at a high price. There is no scope for establishing any more coal-based station which has to be near a coal-field or hydro-electric power station which harnesses a strong flow of water.

Electric supply harnessing solar energy has limited use in specific areas. Considering the present technology and the cost, its general use across the board is not possible.

The prospect of wind-mills for producing electricity in Bangladesh is even bleaker. In the back drop of this scenario, we should seriously consider the only economically viable and technically feasible technology: nuclear power.

The fuel of nuclear power reactor is uranium-235 (enriched uranium). In such a reactor, energy is released from the fission (breaking

into two fragments and neu-

trons) of uranium235 atoms.

Fission is a nuclear reaction, the same reaction that takes place in an atom bomb in an uncontrolled way.

Energy released from the complete fission of one kilogram uranium235 equals that produced by burning twenty five lakh kilograms of coal.

Instantaneously some points are apparent: Small amount of uranium-235 can produce large amount of energy in a nuclear reactor. In a coal-based power station, on the other hand, a huge amount of coal is to be burnt to produce required energy. Burning of coal releases carbon dioxide in the atmosphere polluting environment and contributing to global warming.

The whole story is no different for other fossil fuels like oil or gas.

Multifarious use of fossil fuels in exuberant amount specially in the developed countries is depleting the global fuel reserve quite fast. A steady supply of uranium on the other hand can be sustained globally for a much longer period.

In addition, the nuclear energy is clean as no carbon dioxide is produced.

As multiple precautionary measures are taken in a nuclear reactor, accidents are quite rare. In the long fifty year history of these installations, only one fatal accident took place in 1986 in

Chernobyl, Russia. Following the accident world-wide concern prompted the scientists and engineers to engage in designing absolute safe reactors and they succeeded. Besides, for decades there have been researches on safe disposal and management of radioactive waste products. At present safe and convenient methods are available. In a nuclear power reactor heat generated in the core is extracted outside by a coolant to a heat exchanger where steam is produced. The steam produced rotates the turbine of the generator and electricity is produced.

Across the globe, there are 443 nuclear power reactors in 32 countries (there are 520 such reactors in 37 countries if we take those under construction into consideration).

Nuclear power accounts for approximately 17% of total electricity generation in the world. In France, 59 nuclear reactors are in operation, accounting for approximately 78% of total electricity generation in that country.

In Japan, 56 power reactors produce 35% of its electricity. In total 104 nuclear power reactors in US meet 19% of its demand for electricity.

In India and China there are 16 and 9 power reactors producing 3% and 2% of each country's electricity, respectively.

The history of nuclear power reactor in Bangladesh or for that matter in this land is a long forty five year history of hope and despair -- a history of missed opportunities.

In the early sixties a site for a reactor was selected at Rooppur in Pabna, on the banks of river Padma, near the Hardinge Bridge. As a silent evidence there stand some unused buildings on 294 acres acquired land -- land for the reactor complex, for the office

and residential colony. The people of these lands were evacuated, compensation was paid and their rehabilitation in other villages was done. After all these activities, could anybody even imagine that nothing would see the light there even after long four decades?

There have been technoeconomic viability study on the nuclear power reactor in Bangladesh several times. Multiple feasibility studies and surveys were carried out. The specific plans for the reactor were approved many times nationally and internationally. In order to look for financial assistance for the implementation of the project, negotiations with different countries were carried out. The possible site of the reactor, the brand, class and power of the reactor were chosen. Although the prospect of building the reactor became bright several times, for either national or international reasons the implementation of the project never actually started.

In the meantime, Bangladesh has been long preparing itself for the nuclear power reactor. Under the auspices of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission, a skilled and trained manpower was developed. Bangladesh passed the Radiation Safety Bill and signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Safeguard Agreement and other protocols. Bangladesh signed bilateral treaty for peaceful use of atomic energy with many countries.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has long been supporting Bangladesh for building a nuclear power reactor. IAEA is still eager to extend its helping hand to Bangladesh if she decides to have one. It may be

mentioned here that in 1983 a nuclear research reactor for research and radioisotope production was commissioned at Savar and has been operating successfully since. Thus although on a small scale, our scientists, engineers and technologists could have some first-hand experience of operation of a reactor.

There is no doubt that the initial cost of building a nuclear power reactor is high. However, as its fuel consumption as well as fuel cost is low, it can be economically viable in the long run. Reactor fuel will be available in the world market in the years to come. Bangladesh has completed most of the national or international formalities and protocols to implement nuclear power programs on its land.

Bangladesh is a country of immense possibilities. In spite of all the odds the country is progressing impressively. The demand of energy in general and electricity in particular is rising fast. To meet this increasing demand of electricity, building a nuclear reactor is the only viable alternative.

For its financing, national or foreign sources should be explored -- native or foreign non-government entrepreneurs may be encouraged to invest. Whoever be the investor, the government will have to play a significant role considering safety, fuel and some international sensitivities. We have been dreaming of nuclear power for long. For building a nuclear power reactor what is most needed is the political will. We are optimistic to see the reflection of the political will in the speech of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. Once again we have started dreaming.

The writer is a nuclear physicist and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, National University.

A response to MJ Akbar

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was absolutely right when he called upon Pakistan to rein in the terrorists. Although Pakistan denies it, it is well known that many terrorist groups operate inside Pakistan. However, the authorities might have little control over them. But Pakistan must realise that these terrorist groups are as much a threat to Pakistan as they are to India.

MAHMOOD ELAHI

am writing with reference to Byline: "Terror and Sensexocrats," by MJ Akbar (July 17).

MJ Akbar has written a highly convoluted article which misses the entire point. He has not only failed to make any point, he only added to his own confusion about the nature of today's terrorism. Today's terrorism is incited by religious extremists whom Prof. Salim Mansur, professor of political science at the University of Western Ontario and prominent Indo-Canadian scholar, calls "Islamofascists," whose main goal is to terrorise people into accepting their brutal rule in the name of Islam.

Unfortunately, Pakistan and its US allies played a pivotal role in the rise of Islamofascists during the US-assisted insurgency against the Soviet military occupation in Afghanistan.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said, on July 11 at the G-8 meeting in St. Petersburg, that the US decision to fund and train Islamist guerrillas against the Soviet Union has backfired two decades later. Mr. Putin suggested that Afghanistan's Islamist militias might not have been such a big problem if the Americans hadn't spent billions of dollars training, funding and arming Islamists during almost a decade of proxy war after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. He is absolutely right.

When the Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan to stop fanatical Afghan tribes from overthrowing its surrogate regime, the United States and the Soviet Union might have had a common interest as they had during the Second World War when they were allies against Hitler. Similarly, after the rise of anti-American Islamic regime in

essential to defeat any insurgency in a country as rugged as Afghanistan. Once the Soviets were defeated, the Islamists turned their attention to driving "infidel" Americans from the Middle East. Pakistan's armed forces, on their part, tried to use these Islamists in their never-ending war against India in Kashmir.

In fact, the Taliban cadres and al Qaeda again used Pakistan to launch their invasion of Afghanistan and wage war against American domination of the Middle East and the Indian occupation of Kashmir. The rest is history.

Terrorist attacks of 9/11, bombings of Madrid, London and Mumbai and the daily killing of Shiites in Iraq are all a part of this global terrorism by Islamofascists to impose their reign of terror around the world. And they are inciting hatred against the West and provoking Muslims to commit acts of terrorism throughout the world.

On July 7, 2005, a group of British Muslims bombed London's mass transit system, killing 52 and injuring many more. They claimed they were merely retaliating against the

killing of Iraqi Muslims by the Anglo-American coalition forces. "Until you stop bombing, gassing and torturing my people, we will not stop fighting," vowed one of the bombers in a pre-recorded video statement.

But this perverse logic cannot hide the fact that it is extremist Sunnis who are bombing fellow Shiites in Iraq. Sunni extremists have bombed Shiites mosques filled with worshippers. They have attacked schools and markets crowded with children and women in the name of fighting the coalition forces. Recently, the Sunni extremists destroyed the Golden Mosque, one of the holiest Shiites shrines. And the only person responsible for gassing the Iraqis is Saddam Hussein who used poison gas against the Kurdish Muslims.

Sunni extremists are slaughtering the Shiites in a bid to provoke a Shiite backlash and they might just have succeeded as the Shiites are now retaliating by attacking Sunnis mosques and killing Sunnis clerics.

Similarly, the Mumbai bombing by Islamofascists is basically designed to provoke a backlash by the Hindu majority against the Muslim minority. And as the London bombing by British

Muslims has shown, there are always disgruntled local Muslims available who can be incited to commit acts of violence against their compatriots. By killing hundreds, the extremists were hoping to create a Hindu backlash, plunging India into chaos and ultimate collapse.

But credit goes to India's Hindu majority who refused to be provoked into committing violence against the Muslim minority. This is in stark contrast to Iraq where the Sunni extremists have been successful in provoking the Shiite majority to commit acts of violence. However, the patience of India's Hindu majority cannot be tried too far. This is why stern action against Islamofascists and their misguided supporters must be taken without delay.

MJ Akbar's pointless article fails to touch on these issues. He draws a facile analogy with the Naxalites. Naxalites were angels compared to these religious fanatics. They never attacked mosques, schools and hospitals. Naxalites were