

## Rise in fuel prices

*Likely fall-out must not be overlooked*

THAT the prices of fuel might need to be raised to adjust with international prices had been anticipated. What is quite beyond comprehension is the sheer scale of the increases imposed on the country on Monday. At one go, despite everything the administration might attempt to explain away the price increases, there is now the distinct fear of the possible ramifications of the move in nearly every sector of life. The cost of irrigation will go up, which means that it will be the already exasperated farmer who will find himself in a new grinder. Add to that the effects of the price increase on public transport in spite of what the government might plan to do about a strict monitoring of the transport sector. There is then the market, a place which has already proved notorious in terms of unbridled pricing. Overall, the increase in fuel prices can only lead to a rise in the cost of living.

The energy adviser has acknowledged that the move for a price rise was an unpleasant decision. That does not quite obviate the new worries that have come into the public mind, particularly among the poorer sections of society traditionally tied to a use of kerosene. The big jump in fuel prices will affect them as well as the middle class, a reality that cannot be ignored. The compulsion of the authorities have been through over the price matter is of course an issue. Even so, there are certain measures the administration could have adopted instead of going for such a drastic, pretty unexpected move. One of those measures could have been a reduction of excise duty on fuel, a suggestion that (as we understand) was made last year by the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation itself. Moreover, if people in the transport sector are to be listened to, the spiralling effects of such fuel price increases on the sector would be checked through a reduction in the import duty on spare parts, et cetera, necessary to keep public transport running. Of course, these and similar ideas seem not to have been considered. If they had, our sense of relief would certainly be pronounced.

The authorities have over the years been attributing the regular increases in fuel prices to the rise in prices worldwide. That, again, is a point to be noted. But what remains a mystery is the fact that when fuel prices have come down in the world market, a corresponding decline in prices has not been observed in Bangladesh. That ought to be cause for a rethink on the part of the administration.

## Stepped up service at DMP welcome

*Make it sustainable*

ON March 1 the present government introduced a new initiative called service delivery system in nine Dhaka metropolitan police stations whereby each station shall have a designated officer for filing and recording of public complaints. By March, the method found its way in all the remaining 24 stations of the city. It is worthwhile noting that the new move has not only changed for better the hitherto unfriendly atmosphere prevailing in police stations, but also helped revive some of the people's lost confidence in the police.

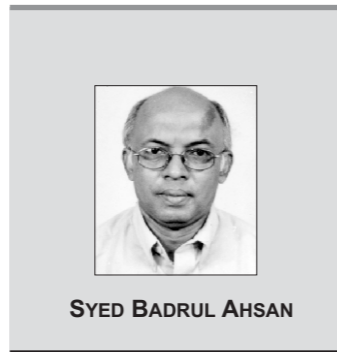
More and more people are now arriving at the police stations and registering individual complaints and cases, so much so that till 15 March, a staggering 1395 cases were recorded as against an average of 200 per month.

Considering benefits the system will yield, if used to its full potential, it does commend itself as a very good move worth replicable in at least all major cities.

We are, however, apprehensive about the sustainability of the system under given circumstances. When there has already been a phenomenal increase in cases to be dealt with by a particular police station, the total number of officers available for investigation remains static. Besides, whatever number of investigating officers there are remain considerably burdened by multifarious duties which, among other things, include patrol duties at odd hours of day and night. It is thus imperative that the police stations be duly equipped with manpower and resources without further delay if the system is to become result-oriented and indeed be able to come in aid of the people.

It is also relevant and important to remember that if the sub-inspectors, for one reason or the other, fail to investigate properly cases they have been entrusted with, it may lead to eventual denial of justice. Recruitment to the vacancies at each of the police stations should therefore be completed with great urgency. Officers selected on merit should also be well-trained and professionally committed. A mere stop-gap arrangement by shuffling of an officer from one location to another may prove counterproductive.

# Another April and memories of Z.A. Bhutto



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

WHEN Zulfikar Ali Bhutto walked to the gallows on April 4, 1979, the curtain finally came down on the life and career of a man whose rise in politics had been swift and, in equal measure, brisk. There was an element of melodrama about Bhutto, something of the Machiavellian, which constantly defined his attitude to those around him.

He was an extremely talented man. In much the same way, he was highly contemptuous of everyone else around him. He was Pakistan's first elected leader by default; and during his five years in office he left no stone unturned to demonstrate the authoritarian streak in his personality.

He had the respectable J.A. Rahim, who had with him formed the Pakistan People's Party in November 1967, humiliated by security forces. Another of Bhutto's early allies, Meraj Mohammad Khan, was beaten badly by his goons for speaking out against the excesses of his leader. Bhutto promoted Ziaul Haque to the position of army chief of staff over six senior officers, and then did every-

thing he could to insult him in public. He called him his monkey general.

Twenty-eight years after his sordid death, Bhutto remains a fascinating figure for students of Pakistan's history. He came back home from the West in 1953, a brilliant individual who had graduated in law and seemed destined for an illustrious place in the legal profession. As a student at Oxford, he had impressed a visiting Jawaharlal Nehru with his debating skills. In Pakistan, he employed the same skills teaching his students, until politics took his fancy.

As a friend of Humayun Mirza, the son of Major General Iskandar Mirza, President of Pakistan, Bhutto once suggested to Humayun that the head of state be his guest in Larkana. Humayun Mirza turned down the suggestion, for a president could have no conceivable reason to present himself at the home of a young lawyer who was just a friend of his son's. That did not prevent Bhutto from wangling a meeting with General Mirza at the president's official residence in Karachi. The president ended up being impressed by the smooth-talking

young man.

A year later, once Pakistan was placed under the first of its many bouts of martial law, Bhutto, aged thirty, was inducted as a minister in the central government. He wrote an ingratiating letter to Mirza, telling him in unabashed manner that the president's place in Pakistan's history would be greater than that of the country's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

Self-aggrandisement was the guiding principle in Bhutto's life. Contradictions were the hallmark that defined his politics. When Iskandar Mirza was overthrown by General Ayub Khan a mere twenty days after the two men had sent the civilian government packing, Bhutto quickly sidled up to the latter.

He had a genius for comprehending the direction in which the winds would blow. For eight long years, Bhutto served the Ayub Khan regime in a number of ministerial positions, reaching the peaks when, on the death of Mohammad Ali Bogra in early 1963, he was appointed foreign minister.

At one point, with President Ayub Khan serving as leader of the Convention Muslim League, Bhutto became its secretary general. He quickly demonstrated his gratitude through suggesting that Ayub be made president of Pakistan for life.

In 1965, he impressed many Pakistanis, and repelled the rest of the world, with his uncouth behaviour at the United Nations Security Council when he described the Indian representatives led by Sardar Swaran Singh as dogs.

It was behaviour that would be repeated in 1971, when he would tear a copy of a UN resolution to pieces and storm out of the Security Council. Lyndon Johnson once shut him up when he repeatedly interfered with his conversation with a visiting Ayub Khan at the White House. Harold Wilson could not fathom how a man of such malevolence could be a country's foreign minister. Andrei Gromyko studiously ignored him in Tashkent.

In his final days in the Ayub administration, Bhutto went around spreading a systematic web of lies about the Tashkent Declaration the president had signed with Indian premier Lal Bahadur Shastri in January 1966. A secret clause in the deal, claimed Bhutto, had bartered away Pakistan's rights over Kashmir.

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There was no deal, and he knew it. But the untruths he peddled made him popular with Pakistanis impatient to get rid of the field marshal. Bhutto went on leave and would not resign, until Ayub Khan threatened to sack him.

Out of office, he was scared and insecure until other men, all opposed to the dictator, helped him give shape to the PPP. In mid-1968, as political discontent began to take slow but bigger dimensions in East Pakistan, Bhutto dramatically announced his decision to oppose Ayub Khan at the presidential elections scheduled for 1970.

When he was arrested in November of that year, he appeared in court with a piece of meat, one of two he said he had been given for dinner the previous night, clearly with the intent of showing how disgracefully he was being treated in jail. And then he declaimed before the court: "The wheel of fortune will turn; and in the revolution of that turn, a better tomorrow will dawn."

Atomorrow did dawn, but Bhutto made sure that it was not any better than all of Pakistan's yesterdays. His dislike of Bengalis turned out to be pathological. In 1966, when Tajuddin Ahmad took up, on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bhutto's challenge to a public debate on the Six Points at Dhaka's Paltan Maidan, Bhutto simply did not turn up.

But when the men behind the Six Points won Pakistan's first general election by a convincing majority in December 1970, Bhutto at first tried to weasel his way into what he thought would be a grand coalition with the Awami League. When that

did not come to pass, he went back to the army and helped it to take the country down the road to disaster.

Arriving back in Karachi after having watched Dhaka burn in March 1971, he delightedly told the media: "Thank God, Pakistan has been saved." In December of the year, as the generals tried desperately to save their soldiers in Dhaka, Yahya Khan called Bhutto in New York to ask him to accept a Polish resolution for a ceasefire. Bhutto pretended he could not hear the president. A day later, a defeated Pakistan bit the dust in an emergent Bangladesh.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was an avid reader, and missed little opportunity of visiting bookstores wherever he happened to be. He loved beautiful women and enjoyed impressing people with his exercise of power. The modernity in him all too often retreated into the tribal, as his dealings with people in his native Sind would show. He expected respect from others, but would carefully stay away from according them the same.

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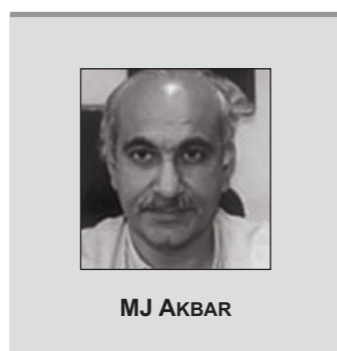
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Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star.

## GROUND REALITIES

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## Double or quits



MJ AKBAR

IT is an error to confuse the first of April with jokes; what is celebrated this day by those within the penumbra of "western civilisation," once lauded by President Woodrow Wilson as capable of doing the thinking on behalf of the world, is surprise. The civilised reaction, when you do get surprised, is to grin and bear it.

Grins in official Washington are noticeable by their absence in April this year, but then surprise is perhaps too mild a word for what it is reeling under. Shock is the more appropriate term. America's Middle East policy is in free fall, its crucial support system knocked out by the most trusted Arab ally in the region, Saudi Arabia.

On March 28, the venerable Saudi monarch, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, told the Arab summit in Riyadh that the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq was illegal. The damage that this has done to America's presence in Iraq, and its credibility in the region, is immense. King Abdullah's precise words were, "In beloved Iraq, blood flows between brothers in the shadow of illegitimate foreign occupation and hateful sectarian-

ism... We will not allow forces from outside the region to determine the future of the region."

This public snub was probably the good news. The private snub was if anything worse. King Abdullah sent his national security adviser, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, to tell President George Bush that he was a bit tied up at the moment and, therefore, could not fly over for a state dinner on April 17: maybe they could do dinner another time? When your best friend is not free for dinner, it is time to look in the mirror.

The White House chose to grin and deny that any invitation had been sent, but it was impossible to deny the contents of the Abdullah speech. The State Department asked Nicholas Burns, still looking depressed after his non-talks on the nuclear deal in Delhi, to explain on television that the American presence in Iraq had UN sanction as well as the invitation of the Iraqi government.

Mr Burns did not dwell on the finer points of both: that the Security Council held another view before the war began, and that the

Iraqi government whose invitation he so admires did not exist then.

And now comes news that young King Abdullah of Jordan has no time for dinner either. Although the Jordan monarch is so often in America that he could qualify for a frequent flyer programme were he plebeian enough to fly on a commercial liner, he too has sent word that it might be wiser to postpone a planned state visit in September. Would 2008 do?

It is not that America's friends have become stronger, but that, under Bush, America has become weaker. Even genuine friends are tired of Bush's posturing on fundamental issues like Palestine, and his self-defeating, lacerating war agenda.

Five years ago, only a few months after 9/11, King Abdullah floated a plan for peace in the region which, in essence, was a land-for-peace option: if Israel returned to its 1967 borders, all the Arab states would accept it as a neighbour with whom they could live in peace. Only two Arab countries, Egypt and Jordan, have full relations with Israel at the moment.

In 2002, America was the most powerful country in the world, not because of the Pentagon, but because it had the genuine sympathy of the international community which condemned 9/11 as an outrageous act of wanton terrorism. America possessed the steel of moral strength. Bush has squandered an asset which history endows upon nations only occasionally, with the petulance of swagger.

A wiser man might have chosen his enemies with more care, and used his friends to more purpose. The Abdullah plan still has legs when Bush has lost his. This is unfortunate, because every proposal still needs the momentum of American support to travel forward. Iraq has become the graveyard of Bush's presidency.

George Bush has destroyed Iraq and wounded America deeply. It is a legacy that will take time to repair. Weakness can be more dangerous than strength, since ebbing confidence often tempts you towards the irrational. The loser's dream, when his stake has disappeared, is to take a chance one last time:

double or quits.

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What is evident is that events could run in either direction. There is a peace plan on the table, and there is a war plan on the seas -- and the skies. Perhaps we have no right to expect a victory for good sense, when so many powerful players believe that they can build something fresh out of rubble. But since surprise is the theme of the first of April, which option do you think would surprise you more? A collective rush towards chaos, or a constructive step towards peace?

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