

## CPD findings on importers' cartel

*Market manipulation must be prevented*

A study conducted by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has revealed that a cartel of five importers of eight essential commodities is now in a position to control or manipulate retail prices according to its needs. It has almost monopolised the import of those commodities and can make undue profits, particularly because the demand of such commodities is relatively inelastic.

The CPD has addressed a crucially important issue at a time when erratic market behaviour and spiralling prices of essentials are putting tremendous pressure on the consumers in general. However, the CPD findings are in a way a statement of the obvious, because it has always been thought that the market was being manipulated in some way or the other. The CPD findings supported by statistics now provide a clear picture of how the cartel of importers is operating and where things are going wrong.

The market has been influenced negatively by the anomalies and irregularities that the cartel has resorted to. By all indications, there have been under-invoicing, price-fixing and supply manipulation, which are responsible for the unusual market behaviour.

The governments in the past were by and large dismissive of the popular demand that some control over the market be established with a view to halting the price spiral. The government plays the role of a facilitator in a free market economy, but the situation changes drastically when a cartel is formed to monopolise the import of essentials. The small importers are eliminated from the scene to a great extent.

So, the CPD has very rightly recommended that the government encourage the commercial banks to extend support to the small importers to import essential commodities and thus break the monopoly of the big importers. The surveillance on the part of the government must also be enhanced through regular monitoring of the international prices of imported essential commodities.

Keeping the prices of essentials within the common people's reach has to be a matter of top priority for the government. However, we believe the government should approach the issue all thoughtfully. It has to plug the loopholes in the system in a planned way and ensure that nobody can manipulate the market.

## Tackling water logging

*Japanese assistance welcome*

DHAKA WASA had long been struggling to keep its 250km sewerage network clean thereby helping to ease the water logging situation.

As stated by a senior WASA official, the government of Japan is donating a range of modern equipment like cranes, high powered pressure pumps etc to keep city's sewerage lines clean and flowing.

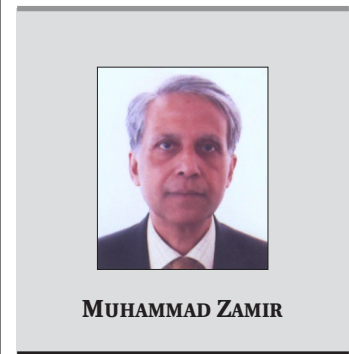
So long WASA had been engaged in manually clearing sewers that was not only time consuming but also posed serious health hazards for its workforce. The authorities now feel that with the availability of the right type of equipment their job would be that much easier.

For all we know, the entire sewerage system in the city generally remains choked by solid wastes and sand. The DCC's capacity for removing 400 tons of garbage out of the total amount of 2000 tons generated per day is also routinely contributing to the drainage problem. The biggest issue stems from DCC's garbage mismanagement at city's kitchen markets.

The fact remains that choked sewerage system has been a perennial problem for the city dwellers for years especially during the monsoon season. The resulting water logging is posing serious health hazards as one of the major problems has been contamination of the domestic water supply system. Besides, severe traffic congestion is another upshot.

We therefore urge WASA to take up this task of clearing and cleaning city's sewerage system in real earnest now that it would have at its disposal the equipment to effectively accomplish the job. We take the opportunity of thanking the Japanese government for the prospective assistance. Needless to say that the administration too has to come forward and provide all out support to WASA's efforts, from start to finish. DCC too must actively join hands with WASA and complement its efforts.

# The fall-out of the Iraq invasion



THE war in Iraq, to say the least, not only continues to be the source for daily casualties but also the basis for controversy. I personally do not like body counts. These statistics hide the other grim realities of conflict situations -- serious injuries, permanent disabilities and mental depression. A senior armed forces official was telling me the other day that for every fatality, there is usually at least one serious injury and another wounded individual. Such a possibility, if correct, is indeed gruesome.

We have read reports published by various non-governmental actors that nearly three hundred thousand Iraqis have died over the last four years in Iraq after the invasion. There have similarly been nearly 3,300 deaths among the US armed forces. There have also been casualties among other Coalition partners. Given these statistics we are talking here of at least half a million affected families. In addition, there are at least another million internally displaced families in sectarian war-ravaged Iraq.

To this unhappy brew has been added the serious question of a possible attack on Iran. Admiral Michael Mullen, US Naval Chief, has recently remarked that the United States has no plan to attack Iran and that its beefed-up naval presence in the Gulf region is meant to keep the area peaceful. His comment is meant

to be consistent with Washington's views that the USA was still interested and that its efforts were focused on a diplomatic solution to resolve the ongoing row over Tehran's nuclear enrichment programme. Apparently, the building up of the US naval fleet is aimed at providing reassurance to 'friends', to show continued 'commitment to this area,' 'to provide the strength and stability' that is needed and 'to ensure that it remains quiet and

of dissent. This has been followed by the withdrawal from the Iraqi government of six Cabinet members belonging to Saddam's party. This move, while unlikely to topple Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's regime, will nevertheless deal a significant blow to the US-backed leader, who relied on the support of Saddamists to gain office.

On another front, divergence of opinion has surfaced very clearly within the ruling British Labour Party (USA's main ally in Iraq) over the

vision of the world. We invaded Iraq in the sure belief that inside every Iraqi there was an American trying to get out... Unfortunately, for us and for them, that was not the real Iraq, where cultural distinction from the West is still treasured". The result has been frustration, disappointment and finally rage against the 'craziness' of the Iraqis.

The US policy planners probably forgot that alien people with their own cultural heritage and diversity have to

chaos brewing within Iraq has made Iran nervous, but they know that the USA, in its own strategic interest, will try to contain the situation. Given such a scenario, they can afford to sit and watch.

The next actor on the list is the Al Qaeda. Daniel Byman, Director of the US Center for Peace and Security Studies at Georgetown University, Washington has recently remarked that 'before the US invaded Iraq, Al Qaeda was on the ropes' in

## POST BREAKFAST

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peaceful.'

Strong words mixed with hope! The unfortunate reality is however slightly different. Controversy and frustration have surfaced not only within the domestic political process within Iraq based on sectarian lines, but also in the interpretation of how to conduct the 'war on terror' and the future role of the USA.

The fourth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq and the toppling of Saddam's regime was marked this time round with demonstrations by tens of thousands in Najaf and Kufa, burning of American flags and demands that the Coalition forces in general withdraw from Iraqi territory and that the USA announce a timetable in this regard.

The powerful Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, who commands an enormous following among Iraq's majority Shias, was allegedly behind this show

manner in which the 'war on terror' is being conducted worldwide. Hilary Benn, a senior member of the Labour Party, seeking its deputy leadership, has openly disagreed with President Bush's concept of the 'war on terror' and has pointed out that this has only strengthened disaffected extremist groups and given them a sense of shared identity. He has also observed that this war cannot be won by military might alone 'because this isn't us against one organised enemy with a clear identity and a coherent set of objectives'.

Col. W. Patric Lang Jr. a retired US Army Officer, writing recently in 'Foreign Policy' has given another interesting thesis. He has claimed that US foreign policy mostly 'tends to be predicated on the notion that everyone wants to be an American'. He has gone on to state, 'Americans invaded an imaginary Iraq that fit into their

be dealt with on terms consistent with their traditions. Otherwise there can only be catastrophes as evidenced in Vietnam.

Turning to important fall-outs of the Iraq war, one needs to focus first on Iraq. For them, it has been a strategic windfall. It not only uprooted Baathism from Iraq but also pacified a nemesis that had been a thorn on Iran's side since the Islamic revolution in the late seventies. The departure of Saddam has meant Iran's influence extending to every level of Iraq's bureaucracy, Shiite clerical and tribal establishments and security and political apparatuses. A large part of Iraq is now within the Iranian sphere of influence. Iran also knows that their support for Hezbollah, Hamas and the nuclear impasse has paved the way for Iranian regional hegemony in the Persian Gulf. It is true that the

Afghanistan, Morocco and Malaysia, but 'the invasion of Iraq breathed new life into the organization'. Considered dispassionately, one would tend to agree with such a hypothesis. It does appear that the Iraqi invasion, instead of promoting stability and order within the affected region, and in underdeveloped countries with Muslim populations, has inspired a new generation of young Muslims around the world towards militancy. It has also helped to create a network of so-called 'Jihadists' who are lethal and indiscriminate in the use of improvised explosive devices in their attacks against State infrastructure and civilians. This process has cast its shadow also within Bangladesh.

The United States' problems in Iraq and Afghanistan have also helped the gradual rise of another 'superpower' in East Asia. I am referring here

to China. The quagmire in which the US Army finds itself in Iraq, the scandals of Abu Ghraib, and the American failure to deliver security and stability, let alone democracy in post-Saddam Iraq, have greatly eroded US international standing and prestige. China has exploited this scenario of loss in US soft power, by portraying itself as a peaceful, benign and even constructive partner. This has been most evident in its efforts in Africa and in Iran. They have tried to build on their stated philosophy of 'harmonious world order' and a positive image by not only hosting talks on denuclearization of North Korea but also sending their political leadership to countries like India and Japan. Their gradual rapprochement with a stronger, energy rich Russia has also underlined the steady re-adjustment in the balance of power. These steps have enhanced China's role in international affairs at the expense of the United States.

The USA, within this changed matrix, needs to understand that multilateral rather than unilateral interventions, will facilitate constructive engagements on international issues. Hopefully, US policy strategists will follow a flexible approach in finding implementable least common denominators. This will enhance their chances of success in resolving intractable problems -- be it on Palestine, climate change and the environment or issues related to trade.

I believe that the United States will remain as the world's greatest economic, military, technological and cultural power, but the continuing imbroglio in Iraq will affect, directly and indirectly, its status as a power broker. In this context, I feel that the future position of the USA, particularly within the United Nations, will be one of leadership, rather than unchallenged domination.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador who can be reached at [mzamir@dhaka.net](mailto:mzamir@dhaka.net)

# Dare to dream, once more

AHMED BADRUZZAMAN

IT was December 16, 1971. The Pakistani army had surrendered. The nation was on way to greatness. Anything was possible. The country was in ruins but people were eager to make the sacrifices needed.

A new constitution, guaranteeing fundamental rights and rule of law was soon adopted. But the new dawn we all dreamed of did not come. Bangabandhu who had mobilised the people for the struggle for freedom so well failed to mobilise a functioning government and resorted to the desperate measure of a one-party state. The 15-year period of assassinations, successive military dictatorships and darkness that followed has been well documented. The constitution was trampled at will.

Then came the uprising of 1990 forcing the sitting military ruler to give up power and ushered in 15 years of democratically elected governments. We dreamed again. But corruption became rampant and it appeared to have been taken to a new height by the most recent elected government. Their eagerness to manipulate the election and the opposition's equally determined stand against such a thievery led the country to a near civil conflict, resulting in the declaration of a state of emergency under the constitution and set up of a military-backed caretaker government (CTG) with a mandate to hold a free, fair and credible election. A significant component of the Bangladesh civil society welcomed the new CTG, if not outright backed it.

The CTG's steps to revamp a partisan election commission, eliminate corruption, improve law and order and reduce the influence of black money on future elections were welcomed by the people. However, certain worrisome trends have

emerged recently. Both civilian and military elements backing the CTG have begun to jockey for their favourite agenda. Some in the army appear to favour a new type of democracy, raising the spectre of another experiment with the country's political destiny. (Some of us who were around then still remember the "basic democracy" of Pakistani dictator Field Marshal Ayub Khan). A segment of the Bangladeshi civil society which has been frustrated in the past 15 years by the foot-dragging and often outright hostility by

the Election Commission and the CTG had the usual determinants needed for success of any political system, namely people who made it work.

Unfortunately for Bangladesh, the succeeding elected governments did not spend time to build or strengthen the country's institutions. For example, separation of the judiciary from the executive did not happen despite each new government promising it. The Election Commission did not or could not enforce the spending limit of candidates for parliamentary election. Rather politicians took

advantage of weak institutions to consolidate their hold and enrich themselves. In fact, the parties did not practice democracy in their own organisations. The immediate past elected government took the corruption of institutions to a higher level. Determined not to lose the next election, they stacked the election commission with partisan persons, and manipulated the government machinery and possibly some of the courts. From behind the scenes, they dictated the CTG that took over late last year and was later replaced by the current one. These clearly expose weaknesses of the country's institutions.

Despite these shortcomings, Bangladesh made huge strides in the past 15 years. The economic growth was robust at over 5% in the past few years. The press was free and active in reporting political and financial corruption. Civil society organisations were engaged, though frustrated. After some hawing and hemming, the government did apprehend and try the militants who had

caused much havoc. Foreign investment, though somewhat slow, was coming in. The microcredit phenomenon had made Bangladesh known the world over, and ultimately earned Prof Yunus and Grameen Bank a Nobel Prize. The birth rate was down and female education was boosted. The Bangladesh military earned the country much respect for their role in UN peace-keeping missions.

But the single-most important success for Bangladesh in the past 15 years was the holding of three successive and successful fair, free and

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credible elections for the first time since her birth. It looked like the military leadership, much to their credit, adopted a policy of non-interference in the politics of the country. Yes, the losing party did not accept the results, made a lot of noise, the parliament often did not function as it should have and there were hartals galore. Some say we did not have real democracy, just only elections.

But elections are the very first and absolutely critical steps of a democracy. The fact that in each of the last three elections the immediate past ruling party, having been unable to keep its election promises, had lost speaks volume of the political maturity of the electorate of Bangladesh. Thus, the answer to past failures is not withholding of elections, abrogation of current institutions, exiling political leaders, declaring martial law or inventing a new type of democracy. The answer is functioning of robust political, electoral, administrative, judicial, educational and civil society institutions, a free

and hand over power to an elected government at an early date. I hope the political parties learn from their current near-death experience. Any new system must hold the parties accountable for following their own constitution and the law. Party leaders must grow their spine to challenge illegal and corruption-ridden practices. It was shameful, and frankly pathetic, to watch major parties utilising foreign ambassadors and senators to mediate their dispute. Political parties must institute internal democracy and declare their adherence to the founding principles of the country. One of those was religion-neutral equal treatment of its citizenry before the law and the constitution. There is no doubt that the people of Bangladesh take their religions seriously, but they want to exercise their fundamental rights irrespective of religion. That dream of martyrs of our war of independence can no longer be denied.

One more thing. The two major parties must stop their lame bickering on naming a father of the nation or

identifying who declared independence. In the process we have ignored the role of Tajuddin Ahmed, Maulana Bhashani and others in Bangladesh's long struggle for emancipation. We all recognize Bangabandhu as the premier leader of the 1971 war of independence. In the same token, General Zia is one of the premier heroes who made the war of independence successful along with others.

As for Bangladesh's political personalities, being Bangabandhu's daughter or Martyr Zia's wife, respectively, does not give Sheikh Hasina or Begum Khaleda Zia any special entitlement. If anything, it imposes a special responsibility on them which they have failed to fulfil. They have squandered a unique opportunity to use their lineage and take the country to great heights. As for General Ershad, it is time that he finally pays for his sins instead of being sought for support by the two major parties in the shameful spectacle we have witnessed in the past decade.

As for alternatives to the two major parties, a strong third major party would definitely be welcome. But it must offer an institutional and organisational alternative and not be a vehicle for propelling a certain individual, no matter how brilliant and well-meaning he or she is. Yes, personalities do matter, but they must function within an institution for a long-term benefit to accrue.

Let us not be fooled by the current calm due to the state of emergency. Bangladesh faces a grave test of viability as an independent and respected country. Her leaders, current and future, must act with wisdom, honesty and decency so that the country does not join the column of failed states. The current crisis offers another extraordinary opportunity. Let us dare to dream, once more.

Dr. Ahmed Badruzzaman is a Bangladeshi-born scientist, living in California.

## OPINION

# Act, rules and regulations are vital for coal mine operation

ENGR A K M SHAMSUDDIN

COAL mining countries in the world have their own coal mine Act, coal mine regulations and rules for the development and operation of coal mines. Indian Mine Act 1923 and Indian Coal Mine Regulations 1926 were formulated and adopted for the development and operation of coal mines in undivided India. After partition in 1947, Indian Mine Act 1923 and Indian Coal Mine Regulations 1926 were revised and amended in 1955 suiting the needs of new India and since then remained effective for development and operation of Indian

coal mines. Immediately after independence Pakistan also adopted the same Act and Regulations for the development and operation of Pakistani coal mines. However, those Act and regulations were revised and amended several times in Pakistan and the latest revision and amendment were known to be made in 1981 suiting the needs of the country.

Mine regulations are made under the provisions of Mine Act and the requirements are set out to be complied with from a health and safety viewpoint, to ensure the effective management and administration of a mine. Methods of meeting the require-

ments set out in the regulations are provided in the rules, which are under the regulations. The rules code provides guidance on the management and administration of health and safety in mines and deals with the more important factors influencing safety in this respect. Failure to observe any provision of the rules are deemed as an offence and may be taken by a court, in criminal proceedings, as proof that a person has contravened the regulations. The regulations and rules are intended to operate within the framework of duties and obligations provided by the Mine Act.

The Inspectorate of Mines,

which is headed by the Chief Inspector of Mines, would regularly monitor and observe and make examination and inquiry whether the provisions of Mine Act, mine regulations, mine rules and bye-laws are observed in the mine.

In general the Coal Mine Act and Coal Mine Regulations provide the following provisions for: (1) Effective management and control of the mine; (2) Shaft sinking operation; (3) Fire prevention and control; (4) Precautions in vertical bunkers; (5) Protection against accidents; (6) Strata control; (7) Protection against outburst; (8) Protection against explosion; (9) Respirable

coal dust control; (10) Protection against inrushes of water; (11) Protection against spontaneous combustion; (12) Control of temperature; (13) Control and prevention of poisonous gases, noises; (14) Safety in shafts and windings; (15) Safety lamps; (16) Safety of ventilation systems; (17) Electrical regulations and applications, etc.

The Barapukuria Coal Mine started its development works in late 1994 and initial and partial production commenced from 1999. Due to non-existence of anything like Bangladesh Mine Act and Bangladesh Coal Mine Regulations and since the mine developer was a Chinese Mining

Consortium, the mine was developed under Chinese Mining Regulations of international standard as per provision of coal mine contract. International Mining Consultant Limited, a British mining consulting firm and consultant of Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Limited, drafted Bangladesh Mine Regulations and Rules in 1999. The draft mining regulations and rules were examined and evaluated by Petrobangla in the light of Indian and Pakistani Mine Act and Regulations and a final draft was formulated in 2004 for the consideration of the government.

But unfortunately the said Bangladesh Mine Regulations

and Rules have not yet been finalised and adopted though Barapukuria Coal Mine started commercial production in 1995. As a result Barapukuria Coal Mine is now operating under Chinese mining regulations. And also due to non-existence of "Inspectorate of Mines" the monitoring and observation of mine regulations are overlooked. This should not be continued. We must have our own Coal Mine Regulations and Rules, observance of which should be regularly monitored by the Inspectorate of Mines, a regulatory body for mines.

It is very encouraging to note that the present caretaker gov-

ernment has taken effective measures for the finalisation of Bangladesh Coal Policy. At the same time it would be most appropriate if effective and concrete measures are taken for the finalisation and adoption of Bangladesh Mining Regulations and Rules and establishment of Inspectorate of Mines for the implementation and monitoring of Bangladesh Mining Regulations and Rules in Barapukuria Coal Mine as well as in future coal mine projects.

The writer is a mining engineer and former Managing Director, Pashchimanchal Gas Co. Ltd, who can be reached at 'sham19472001@yahoo.com'