

Load-shedding free Bangladesh by 2010

A complex issue that will require highest level of expertise

ANY expressed intention by the government that articulates plans for ameliorating the hardship of the people is always welcome, even more so when it holds out the promise of relieving the people of the most unbearable sufferings of all, that of load shedding.

The finance advisor's commitment to rid the country of this problem sounds very comforting indeed and must be welcomed by all and sundry in Bangladesh. However, one must admit that this is a very ambitious target given that very little had been done to attenuate the crisis in the last five years added to which is the lack of adequate infrastructure that is required to attain the stated objective of uninterrupted power supply and related service, and the lack of local expertise. We are happy to note that the caretaker government has demonstrated its resolve by increasing the budget allocation in this sector by 31 percent.

The advisor has come out with some strategies that sound very plausible indeed. However, there are a few more that can be considered which might assist in seeding up the implementation of the strategies. For example the Energy Regulatory Commission can be fully activated, to start with.

However, generating enough power to satisfy the current need, not to speak of providing for the yearly increase of ten percent in the next three years is a complex matter, more so since the tenure of the caretaker government is due to end by 2008. Given that the projected increase in power generation in the third year (1050 MW) is almost three times that which is projected for the first year (345 MW) it is essential that all major decisions are taken by the current government, so that all preparatory work can be initiated to operationalise the strategies to meet the projected aim.

What that would require is doing away with the existing procedure of approving projects that entails a long tortuous process and imposes inordinate delay in getting a project off the ground. It is essential that the decision making method is not only made faster, more professionals must be involved in the process also. All bottlenecks in the procedure must be circumvented to obviate the shortage of time impacting on the overall plan. But while we want quick decisions in the matter of enhancing power generation we would like it to be very well-informed and well-considered decisions. There is also the need to involve our development partners in reviving the moribund power sector.

Water-logging in Dhaka

Comprehensive strategy needed to combat menace

THE torrential rains which swept Dhaka the other day raise once again the issue of water-logging, which has clearly gone from bad to worse over the years. The level of rainfall in the capital on Thursday and early Friday was recorded at 36 millimeters. Clearly, it was enough to cause disruption all over. But such rainfall did not earlier lead to the kind of difficulties we face today.

The causes behind urban water-logging are easy to find. The presence of scientifically unsound new storm sewers together with the clogging of the old ones is one of the major reasons why Dhaka city goes under water every time there is a rainfall. Another reason is the systematic filling of lakes and other water bodies that has been going on in the name of development. In a number of instances, lakes and canals have been replaced by new roads, with the result that rainwater, or any other water for that matter, has no outlet for itself. Then too there are the box culverts that block an easy passage for water. Add to that the haphazard manner in which homes, especially apartment complexes, as well as shopping malls have been built in the city in the last many years. What has happened in the process is that the old drainage systems along the roads where these new buildings have come up have been lost under the weight of the new constructions. Worse, the pumps that Wasa is wont to use in emergencies have clearly gone decrepit.

The facts noted above have again a whole lot to do with the regrettable lack of coordination among the various departments responsible for ensuring an orderly system of work in the nation's capital. Wasa, Dhaka City Corporation, Water Development Board, T&T and other bodies have generally worked at cross purposes or have not felt any need to communicate with one another where utility planning schemes are concerned. Only recently, a steering committee was set up to address the water-logging issues. It will remain a cosmetic measure unless comprehensive and doable strategies are devised by it towards dealing with the problem. The time has arrived to review in full existing strategies regarding dealing with water-logging in Dhaka city, or shape new ones.

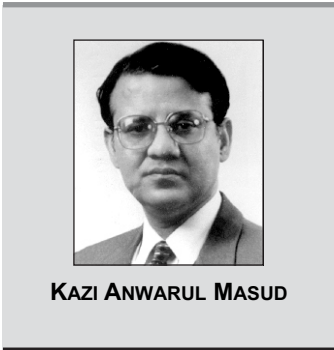
gone, following the mid-term elections in November last year which gave the Democrats a majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Democrat controlled congress wants to regain its lost image. The 110th Congress is shaping up as the oversight congress indeed.

According to the Politico, which is published three days a week and covers the activities of the Congress, "aided by a new investigative team including a

former mob prosecutor and a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, Democrats have launched more than three dozen probes of the administration, ranging from the White House to obscure agency heads."

That is nerve-wracking news for the White House and the Republicans. By now six administration officials, including the latest Deputy Attorney General of the Department of Justice, have resigned amidst the congressional probes.

Which democracy model will suit Bangladesh?

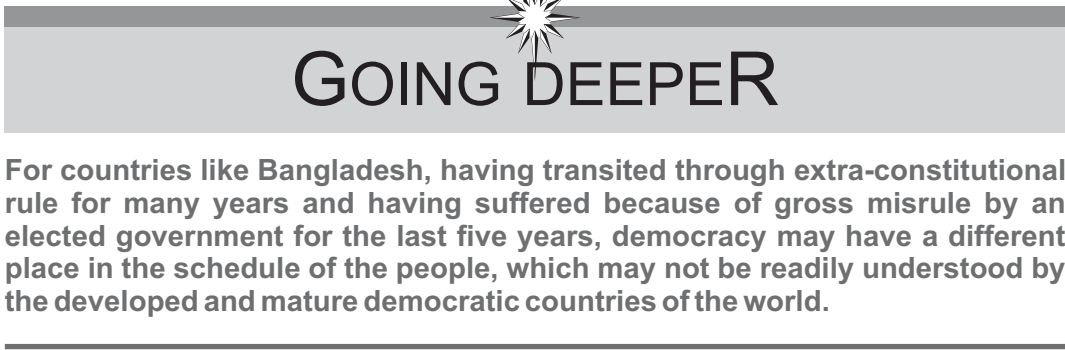


KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

DEMOCRACY can be defined in various ways. One may take the absolutist measure by describing some countries as democratic and others as undemocratic. The other line of argument would portray democracy as having measurable properties. It is the second school of thought, which is widely accepted by theorists of modernisation and by reputed international institutions like the Freedom House, UN HDI, and the World Economic Forum etc.

Very recently BBC ran a report on Bangladesh in which a village woman, when interviewed, said that there was little value in elections while she and her children were going hungry.

Political scientists find democracy accompanied by extreme poverty as flawed, and are not in agreement about the role of developmental democracy defined as a "stage in the evolution of liberal democracy charac-



For countries like Bangladesh, having transited through extra-constitutional rule for many years and having suffered because of gross misrule by an elected government for the last five years, democracy may have a different place in the schedule of the people, which may not be readily understood by the developed and mature democratic countries of the world.

terised by particular concern for individual self-development as a universal right."

One argument would state that democracy, particularly in countries where supportive institutions have not been developed fully, would conflict with the pace of development (economic growth and its distribution into individual and social welfare) because, under a democratic set up, politicians have to satisfy different interest groups, which in the long run may not accord with the kind of development that would meet the measure of social justice and lessen income inequality in the society.

This school of thought would state that democracy indirectly promotes economic development because it is based on market economy, which has traditionally outperformed non-market forms of economy. Albeit examples of Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore are cited by

supporters of the conflict model, i.e. where the pace of economic development conflicts with the necessity of seek broad agreement of a large number of people.

But the great majority of the people of the world do not agree, both in the East, and certainly not in the West, with the comments made by Lee Kwan Yew that "in the East the main objective is to have a well-ordered society so that everybody can have maximum enjoyment of his freedom. This freedom can only exist in an ordered state, and not in a natural state of contention and anarchy."

It is true that Athenian democracy had flourished long before the introduction of Islamic Caliphate. It is equally true that European renaissance and the industrial revolution gave the West an irreversible edge over the East in its quest for modernism, which was coterminous with

the emergence of Euro-centrism.

It would, however, be wrong to ascribe the democratic values as having been borrowed from the West, which till the middle of the twentieth century had been engaged in internecine struggle, and if Queen Victoria is taken as an example then the wars between Germany, England and Russia were wars among cousins.

Yet, it is incontestable that the European renaissance, reformation, and Christian missionaries as fellow travellers who accompanied the discoverers of the new world, had sown the seeds of democratic values in countries that for centuries had only known autocratic institutions.

But the democratic values were sown by both secular and religious ethics. Professor Joseph Runzo (of Chapman University) dispels the common perception that has grown at the beginning of the twenty first

century, that religion is against human rights.

He states that world religions advocate rationality and moral responsibility, but oppose the egocentric secular claim to human rights and rule of law. Secularism needs religion as the most widely accepted guidance for the political community, while religion needs secularism as a mediator between various shades of opinions inhabiting the same political space. Democratic values, therefore, are not the exclusive wealth of any particular community or civilisation.

Albeit, some are better acquainted with the workings of democracy than others because they possess the ingredients to sustain a democratic way of life. Some of the essential ingredients are the state and the stage of the economy, and the richness of the human resources that a country possesses.

In case of those yet to reach the threshold of sustainable democracy, disguised paternalism, however, well intentioned should not be welcomed.

President Bush's crusade to bring about the fifth wave of democracy in greater Middle East (if we accept Samuel Huntington's description of East European democracy as the fourth wave) is well known, despite his inevitable defeat in Iraq as predicted recently by Lt.

Gen Sanchez, former US commander of allied forces in Iraq, and the reported advice to be given to Gordon Brown by the British chief of general staff as soon as Brown takes over from Tony Blair.

There is wide spread scepticism about the possibility of any success that can be achieved by President Bush, given the absence of essential conditions necessary for transformation from autocracy to democracy in many of the countries of the Middle East and Africa.

For countries like Bangladesh, having transited through extra-constitutional rule for many years and having suffered because of gross misrule by an elected government for the last five years, democracy may have a different place in the schedule of the people, which may not be readily understood by the developed and mature democratic countries of the world.

One would expect the interim government to stay its course without being influenced by external pressure. In the ultimate analysis, the compatibility model of democracy that promotes economic development coupled with social justice would be the optimum solution for the woes facing the country.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is former secretary and ambassador.

Retrieval of siphoned off wealth

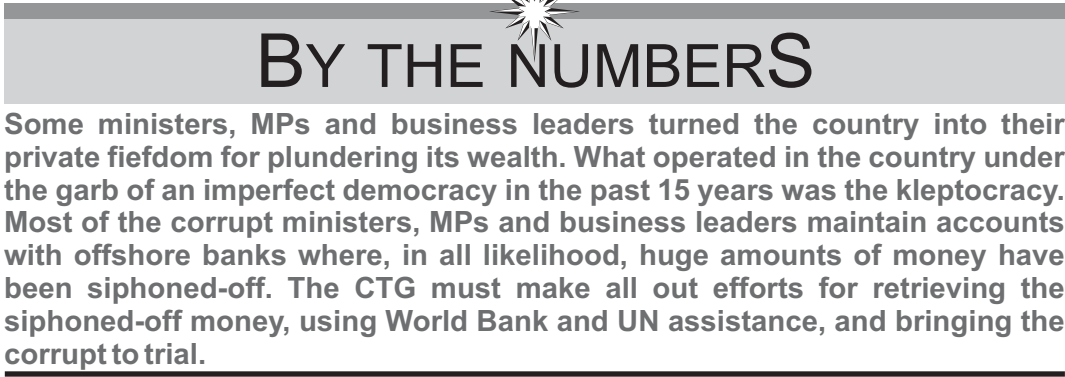


ANM NURUL HAQUE

IT is really a welcome development that the caretaker government (CTG) has started to retrieve the stolen wealth siphoned-off abroad. According to a report published in the Bengali daily Prothom Alo on June 4, detained controversial businessman and a close friend of BNP senior joint secretary-general Tarique Rahman, Giasudding Al Mamun has issued three cheques for repatriation of Tk 20 crore 41 lakh which had been siphoned-off to Singapore.

Of the three cheques, the first one is for \$27,77,351, equivalent to Tk 19,16,37,225, the second one is for Euro 1,28,609, equivalent to Tk 1,18,32,108 and the third one is for 14,059 Singapore dollar, which is equivalent to Tk 6,39,724. All the three cheques are drawn on City Bank NA, Singapore.

The government has so far been able to retrieve Tk 451 crore after the drastic measures taken against the corrupt businessmen and political bigwigs. At first, it recovered Tk 274 crore from a business group which laundered the money. Then it recovered Tk 77 crore



Some ministers, MPs and business leaders turned the country into their private fiefdom for plundering its wealth. What operated in the country under the garb of an imperfect democracy in the past 15 years was the kleptocracy. Most of the corrupt ministers, MPs and business leaders maintain accounts with offshore banks where, in all likelihood, huge amounts of money have been siphoned-off. The CTG must make all out efforts for retrieving the siphoned-off money, using World Bank and UN assistance, and bringing the corrupt to trial.

from the Basundhara group.

Tk 20 crore was recovered from former state minister for home, Lutfuzzaman Babar, who received the amount from the chairman of Basundhara group as bribe to save his son. Tk 80 crore was recovered very recently from S. Alam group. All these amounts are recovered in local currency, and have been kept in a government account in Bangladesh Bank.

Earlier, the joint forces seized a huge amount of illegally possessed local and foreign currency from the residence of former communication minister Nazmul Huda. The seized currency include Tk 18,68,470, 1,796 Singapore Dollars, 1,350 Pounds, 300 Euros and 18 Dinars. Huda was widely accused of making a huge amount of money through corruption, and it is believed that he has siphoned off the money abroad.

The most talked about corrupt figure in Bangladesh is Tarique Rahman, the eldest son of the former prime minister Khaleda Zia. Tarique became billionaire just in a few years. Her second son, Arafat Rahman Koko, has

also been implicated in a number of graft cases for plundering huge amount of public funds.

Besides her two sons, many relatives of Khaleda Zia became fabulously rich under her direct patronization. Tarique reportedly disclosed to the members of the joint interrogation cell that he has deposited money in banks of different countries.

AL general secretary Abdul Jalil and presidium member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim have reportedly disclosed some sensational information about Sheikh Hasina during interrogation by the intelligence agencies, admitting that she owned assets worth one thousand crore Taka.

They also mentioned that Hasina used to receive a fixed rate of bribe, as for example, Tk three crore for granting license to a bank, Tk two crore for insurance company, and a minimum of Tk one crore for any tender approval, while she was the prime minister.

According to a newspaper report, both the detained AL leaders have told the interrogators that out of Tk one thousand crore worth of assets possessed

by Sheikh Hasina, only a meager amount of money remains at home as most of her assets are in London and United States.

The assets are kept under the names of her son Sajeed Wazed Joy, daughter Saima Wazed Putul and sister Sheikh Rehana. Besides, Hasina kept a huge amount of money in banks there in her own name also.

Denying the allegation of possessing hundreds of crores of Taka, AL president Sheikh Hasina has expressed surprise over the publication of reports in a section of the press regarding her alleged involvement in taking a huge amount of subscription for party funds. "It's nothing but a deliberate bid to alienate me from my party and the people," some party leaders quoted Sheikh Hasina as telling them when they met her.

The commercial banks in the country have reported that former prime ministers Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina have around 45 bank accounts in their names. According to the report, BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia and her counterpart in the AL maintain accounts with six or seven banks where each

have Tk 2-3 crore. The National Coordination Committee on Combating Corruption and Crime sought the information through the Bangladesh Bank.

It has been learnt that the government is likely to reach specific agreements with certain countries for retrieval of the siphoned-off money. According to sources, fruitful correspondence is going on with the countries where crores of Taka were deposited. The government is also trying to sign agreements with the international anti-terrorist organizations to accelerate the process of repatriating the money.

Bangladesh Bank has formed a special team -- Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) -- with technical assistance from the US to combat financial crimes and to retrieve money kept abroad. The FIU is comprised of Bangladesh Bank officials and Anti-Corruption Commission and law enforcing agency officials.

The FIU has already received training on identification of illegally transferred money. It will also work as a data bank, using sophisticated software and technology to identify financial crimes.

The World Bank has offered its assistance to recover the siphoned-off wealth. The World Bank's South Asia Region Vice President Praful C Patel made this pledge on June 2 in a media briefing at the conclusion of his three-day visit to Bangladesh. "Stolen assets must be recovered, and the World Bank stands ready to provide assistance in this regard," said Patel.

The United Nation (UN) has also offered help in retrieval of illegally earned money sent overseas. The 11-member UN delegation head, Sergey Kerev, who is also assessment and technical assistance director of the counter terrorism committee, informed the media of this offer after he met the Bangladesh Bank governor on June 4.

The detained political bigwigs and business leaders have continued to disclose startling information to the Task Force for Interrogation (TFI) about massive corruption by themselves and by the two top leaders of the country.

Really, it beggars the imagination to think of the amount of money that some politicians and businessmen had earned, enjoying unchecked power and privileges during the tenure of the immediate past government.

In fact, some ministers, MPs and business leaders turned the country into their private fiefdom for plundering its wealth. What operated in the country under the garb of an imperfect democracy in the past 15 years was the kleptocracy.

Most of the corrupt ministers, MPs and business leaders maintain accounts with offshore banks where, in all likelihood, huge amounts of money have been siphoned-off. The CTG must make all out efforts for retrieving the siphoned-off money, using World Bank and UN assistance, and bringing the corrupt to trial.

ANM Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Oversight role of the Congress

As of now, 204 hearings have been held by committees in the House of Representatives. In the process, the job market has been expanded by recruiting staffers who are being trained by attorneys. Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce committee, Representative John Dingell, said: "We have a huge backlog, and we will try to use what we can do to get to everything."

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

CONGRESS in the United States is a powerful institution of the government, which has been mandated by the constitution as the oversight Congress, apart from lawmaker. Unfortunately, the people of the United States saw the last six years of the congress as a rubber stamp of the administration of the Republican government headed by President Bush.

Those days are apparently

been held by committees in the House of Representatives. In the process, the job market has been expanded by recruiting staffers who are being trained by attorneys. Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce committee, Representative John Dingell, said: "We have a huge backlog, and we will try to use what we can do to get to everything."

This is for the first time that President Bush and the Republican party are having a real difficult time as a result of the Congressional oversight program, which had been neglected in the past.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain is a former diplomat, writes from Virginia.