

## Crippling power cuts Keep people informed on action plans

It seems that we will not be able to get out the problem of power shortage in the short-term. In some parts of the capital last Friday, the residents had to suffer power outages as many as four times lasting several hours, without the people being told what was to befall them, in advance. We have never had enough of electricity, and, in spite of the fact that the problem is recurring year in and year out, the government seems not to take timely measures to offset the impact.

We grant that this government is not responsible for the present state of power generation in the country. And we grant too that the problem cannot be redressed in a year or two. But certainly, knowing well that this is the crunch period of the year, with the onset of summer and the new cropping season, necessary anticipatory work could have been done to ameliorate the burden that the crisis puts on every sector of the economy and on the people in general.

We feel that the government must let the public in on the actual state of the power sector. We must know what we are in for now and the near future. The daily shortfall must be made public as well as the mechanism the government would be employing to distribute with fairness and on the basis of priority, the available electricity. The public must be prepared in advance to meet the crisis.

As we see the matter, the two priority action the government should take are, first, to make serviceable those units that are in a state of disrepair, and secondly, there are power generation units, lying idle for lack of energy, while in some, gas pressure is not enough to run the generators. This is something that we fail to understand. The government must ensure full and uninterrupted supply of the primary source of running these units, coal or gas.

Much of the woe in this sector has to do with mismanagement, corruption and lack of advance planning. There also appears to be a lack of coordination between the energy and finance ministries that is proving to be an impediment to the production of electricity.

We suggest that the government chalk out a plan on both short and long term basis to address the crisis keeping in mind that the problem is linked to several other important factors like the exploration and supply of gas from newer fields including the offshore ones.

## International Women's Day

*The road ahead remains long and hard*

We observe today International Women's Day. The observance is not a run of the mill affair, indeed cannot be, for there are the very critical issues that have in recent years arisen about the position and status of women across the globe. Given the particular context in which women pursue life here in Bangladesh, it can be said with a fair degree of assurance that if women have taken forward strides they have also come across impediments that need to be done away with. In other words, women's progress here has been remarkable; but at the same time there are some glaring gaps that need to be filled. Take, for instance, the fact that as many as 59 per cent of Bangladesh's women are employed in various ways in the agricultural sector. But that is no suggestion that their contributions are recognised for what they are. That is when the matter of discrimination comes in.

There are the international conventions, such as CEDAW, that Bangladesh is signatory to. Those conventions were targeted at empowering women in a way that would not only ensure their independence but also turn them into a major force for social change. Today, we cannot but emphasise the fact that all the provisions relating to women's rights and hence their participation in socio-economic activities must be upheld and defended if and when they come under assault from quarters uncomfortable with change. Consider the advances women in Bangladesh have made in such areas as government service. Today more than ever before, an encouraging number of women are part of the civil service in various ministries of the government. Quite a few of them have by now risen to senior positions and demonstrated their efficiency in no uncertain terms. In areas like the diplomatic service, women have been serving as ambassadors. In business, women have been staking out the parameters within which they mean to assert themselves. In sectors such as garments, it has fundamentally been women workers who have helped the industry keep itself afloat.

And yet there is a long way to go. Women yet die for such medieval reasons as the inability of their families to come up with dowry for them. More girls than boys even now drop out of school in the rural regions. Sexual harassment is still a problem for women in the workforce and outside it. Domestic violence, as the crime figures show, is yet a sad truth. These realities remind us today that the road ahead remains long and hard, that proactive steps are needed to guarantee our women not only freedom but also security, in every aspect of the meaning.

## From mutiny to madness

In retrospect, the entire tragedy hinges on a crucial question. Was it a mutiny at all? A mutiny has a professional goal, a meta-physical objective, guided by the higher principles of human existence. This mutiny was conceived in madness, aimless and mindless.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

GEORGE Patton, an American general who fought in both World Wars, explained that the object of war was not to die for one's country but to make the enemy die for his. The soldiers who died and the soldiers who killed in the mutiny of 25th February at Pilkhana weren't mutual enemies. For God's sake, neither did they come from two different countries. Yet one side so fiercely slaughtered the other, its depravity has left us gasping in pain.

On the surface, it looked like a nourishment of rage, subalterns going into a frenzy of retribution against their superiors. That's how it appeared on the first day of the mutiny when gun-totting soldiers, faces covered with red scarves, shouted grievances into television cameras. As we were to find soon, those scarves actually weren't hiding their faces but their guilty minds. They already had blood in their hands.

In retrospect, the entire tragedy hinges on a crucial question. Was it a mutiny at all? A mutiny has a professional goal, a metaphysical objective, guided by the higher principles of human existence. This mutiny was conceived in madness, aimless and mindless. Now we hear that outsiders may have pulled the strings, so much so that they even donned BDR uniform and fired the guns, which mowed down the officers. The entire thing was conducted in the manner of an ethnic cleansing. The killers wanted to systematically eliminate the entire structure

of command.

In 1962 movie *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Marlon Brando famously played the role of Lieutenant Fletcher Christian, who was told by his captain: "Your mutiny hasn't succeeded." Fletcher replied: "Perhaps not. But success enough if it puts an end to you." Sooner or later, the mutineers are going to have this conversation. What have they achieved at the cost of so many lives? What was the real object of this mutiny? Was it to put an end to their miseries or simply to get rid of their officers?

Hope those who have been captured and those who are still on the lam will realize someday that both couldn't be the same thing. Hope they will also realize that this is where the mutiny lost its sense of direction and descended into madness. Perhaps this is where the instigators turned the game on the head. This where the mutiny left skidmarks of going off the road. Instead of getting their demands met, the BDR men were either inveigled into killing their officers or mentally disarmed to quietly watch while others went on killing them.

We can debate until the last star falls from the sky whether the conspiracy had fueled the mutiny or the mutiny had fired the conspiracy. But this is one reason why the mystery of this mutiny might never lift its shroud. We are looking for evidence of foreign involvement in the mutiny. It leaves a component of the problem outside the country. We are also talking about foreign



Is the rage over yet?

involvement, FBI from the USA and Scotland Yard from the UK, to investigate the mutiny. Again, this is going to leave a component of the solution outside the country.

Since we are inclined to look outside the country, why not look for best practice? How did India handle the worst terrorist attack on its soil last November? It didn't seek help from FBI or Scotland Yard. Instead, politicians and officials accepted responsibility and stepped down. The first resignation came four days after the attack. They owned up the problem before they looked for a solution.

In our case, we have focused too much on the smoke and not enough on the fire. Nobody has taken responsibility, but someone must have failed to do what he should have done. Someone was obviously sleeping on the job. I am not talking about the conspirators and perpetrators of the mutiny. I am talking about those who were responsible to guard the guards. Looked from every angle, this mutiny, before, during and after,

has been a huge management failure.

The country is seething with rage, and we don't know what the investigations are going to reveal. We don't know whether it was a global conspiracy on local strength or a local conspiracy on global strength. In thirty-eight years, this country went through the psychosis of loss and grief, not once but several times. In the past, we have hidden the facts as if hiding the wound was going to hide the pain.

But this time it has hit us home like never before, thanks to television. It beamed into our bedrooms the vivid images of an ongoing bloodshed. If we try to hide the truth again, it won't hide the pain. Nothing but the whole truth alone will heal this wound.

Those who forget their wounds are condemned to get hurt again and again.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a columnist for The Daily Star. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

## A general, a friend

FARIDUR REZA SHAGAR

I had been looking at my mobile phone for a while now. Major General Shakil had two phone numbers, which were in my list of contacts. I was wondering if I should delete those numbers. My heart says one thing, my brain another. The heart says the phone will suddenly start ringing with his caller id brightly lit, but the tragic reality is that I will never receive calls from those numbers again.

When Major General Shakil Ahmed received his transfer orders to the BDR he was on duty in Rangpur. He called me and said that, as BDR was a very old organisation with a rich tradition, he wanted books written and documentaries made about the history of the organisation. This is how he felt about BDR when he got his transfer order.

After joining the BDR, Major General Shakil may have taken the initiative to follow through his dream of preserving this history in books and documentaries, but neither he nor his friends ever thought that he himself would become a part of this history so cruelly.

General Shakil was an extremely affable man, and had many friends outside the military. It was often the case that General Shakil was at the side of his friends, not only in the good times but also in their times of need. But it was not only his friends that got to see this side of General Shakil -- his empathy and affection for the soldiers was

remarkable.

He had visited the fair-price stores that the BDR ran the "dal-bhat" program. He had tried to alleviate the troubles of the soldiers as much as he could. At a minute's notice he would go over to border positions of the BDR to uphold the best interests of his nation. He was never interested in TV coverage of these activities. His only interest was the progress of his soldiers and their wellbeing.

72 hours before his death, in the last interview he was to give, he talked to Channel I about the development of the BDR and the problems they were facing. On arriving at the offices of Channel I, General Shakil had said that the honourable prime minister would be visiting the BDR HQ on the 24th, and many were expecting that there would be talk of the problems faced by the soldiers. He said that he would find out the troubles and worries of the soldiers and then present them to the honourable prime minister.

General Shakil would often say: "I am a son of a soldier. I do not expect any officer to understand the soldiers better than myself." Apart from his deep empathy with his soldiers, and the affection he had for them, General Shakil had one other quality about him.

After his transfer from Rangpur to Dhaka, he asked me to visit him at his office one day, when it looked like it would rain. It started to rain heavily on the way to his office.

His room had an entire wall made of glass, and I could see the rain in all its glory.

"Will you be able to see the rain like this anywhere else in Dhaka?" he asked.

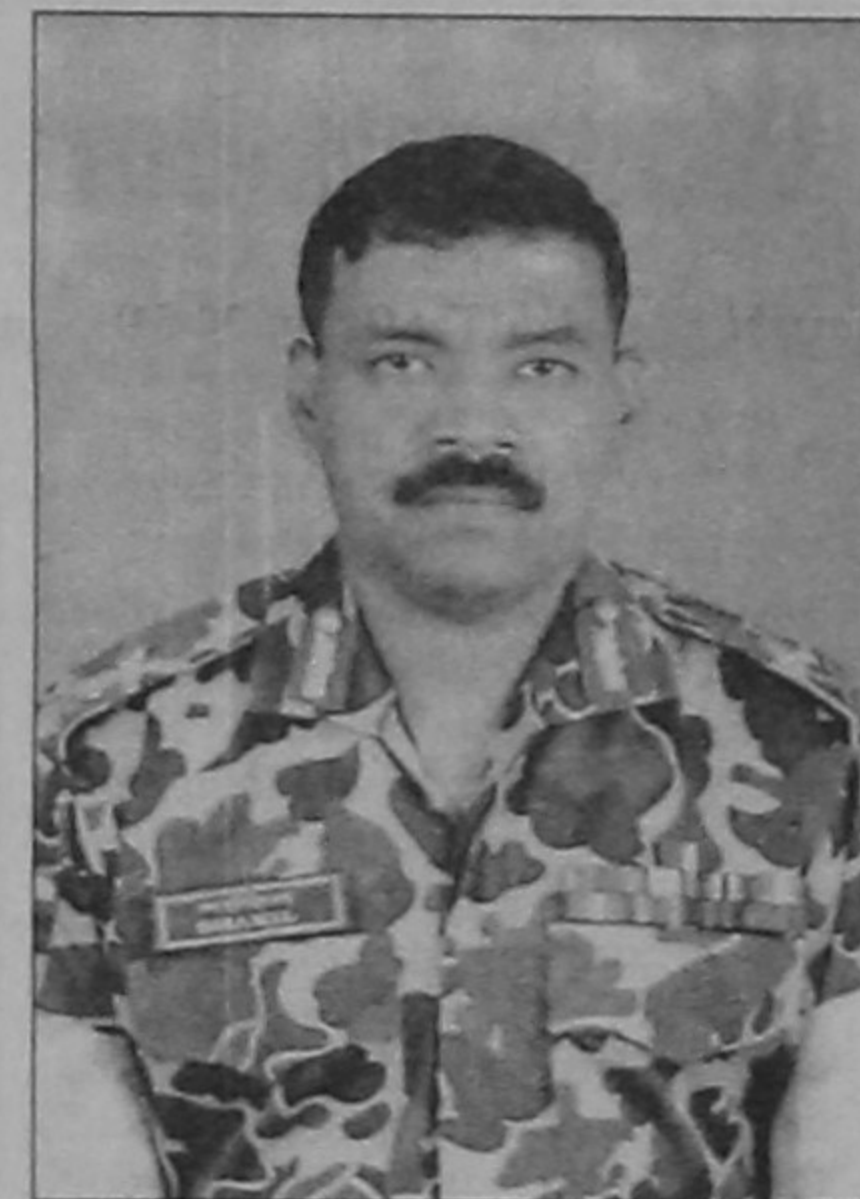
It is hard to find a man amidst the hustle and bustle of the city who makes the time to sit back and appreciate these simple pleasures, who enjoys watching the rain, listening to it. And who enjoys Rabindra Sangeet.

He had started a beautification project in BDR Pilkhana, and planted a variety of flower plants all over the compound. To make sure that these flowers reached the public as well, he had set up a florist in Rifles Square.

He preferred a simple lifestyle. On Eid day or on special occasions he would visit his friends and close ones in a simple panjabi and without a security detail. When he had to travel outside Dhaka on government business, he would travel by plane like any ordinary passenger.

General Shakil treated the junior officers that worked with him like friends. Three months ago his ADC, Captain Majher, got married. At that time he told his friends: "I will be a little busy the next few days. My son is getting married." True to his words, on the day of the reception, General Shakil was hosting the guests at the BDR Darbar Hall, not as the chief of the BDR but as a father. Hundred days onward, at that very spot, when the BDR jawans was about to shoot, Captain Majher stood up not to protect a general but a father.

Captain Majher's stance was fatal.



Major General Shakil Ahmed

Usually, friendships are formed at an early age. Once a certain age threshold is crossed, it is difficult to find new friends. In my professional life I had found two very dear friends. Today one of them belongs to another world. The other is carrying out his important duties diligently. Like all my friends, he knows, people leave, and they leave behind only their contributions and memories.

Faridur Reza Shagar is the Managing Director at Channel I.

## Troubled Pakistan seeks a way out

Pakistan is, indeed, a distressed state. It is not the lack of political unity or the increasing Talibanisation, which bothers me. It is the absence of ethos, which often makes Pakistan lose its way.

KULDIP NAYAR

THE forbearance and endurance of the people of Pakistan is admirable. Neither the 50 years of military rule nor the obsequious politicians have disheartened the nation. Still the people dream of a democratic setup which will give them not only political stability but also economic viability.

Pakistan is, indeed, a distressed state. It is not the lack of political unity or the increasing Talibanisation, which bothers me. It is the absence of ethos, which often makes Pakistan lose its way.

I led a delegation to see if civil societies on both sides could rekindle the fire of amity from the embers left in the heap of burnt-up India-Pakistan relationship. Friendship with India is on the agenda of every political party, including the Jammat-e-Islami. Yet the two countries are far from holding talks. In fact, there is no such prospect until Mumbai is out of the way and a new government is in the saddle in June or July.

On the last lap of the trip, domestic political upheaval crowded us out from the media and the government's attention. Only two

days before we had a long with Nawaz Sharif, whom the Supreme Court disqualified.

He talked about President Zardari "going back on the promises he made," but did not think of parting ways with him. "The repercussions are too serious," he said. In my presence, he received a telephone call from his brother, Shahbaz, then the Punjab chief minister, saying that his meeting with Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani was "positive."

Therefore, I was surprised over the dismissal of Shahbaz's government and the disqualification of the two brothers. The military and politicians have battered the institutions in Pakistan so much that anything emanating from them evokes little credibility.

What amazes me is the cursory manner in which Zardari treats his political opponents, and that too when the situation in Pakistan demands national unity. There was no last minute effort to talk to Nawaz Sharif, who complained repeatedly that he was never consulted on the probe into the Mumbai happenings.

Awami National Party (ANP) chairman Asfandur Wali Khan could have been of help

to Zardari. Even after the dismissal, the Punjab assembly should have been convened to see if any other person was in a position to form the government.

The Punjab governor was in a hurry to have his rule, even for two months. The Muslim League (Quaide) does not have the numbers. There may be fresh polls in Punjab, but Zardari will try his best not to have it. This may develop into an issue, which can tell upon the federal structure of Pakistan.

The biggest gainer is the military, which got rehabilitated because of the fear that India might attack Pakistan following the Mumbai happenings. Only 10 months ago, it was hated. Now it is seen as a protector. That the military is relevant is a sad commentary on political leaders who could not stay together even for one year.

The situation can be retrieved if the ruling PPP takes the initiative. There is an effort within the party to mend fences with the Muslim League (Nawaz). Many PPP National Assembly members, particularly from Gujarat, are against any conciliation with Chaudhary Sujat who heads the Muslim League (Quaide).

The army gives the impression as if its heart is not in the fight against the Taliban. Asfandur Wali did not want to comment on this point when I asked him. But he did admit that there was no alternative to peace with Taliban in Malkhand division, comprising six districts including the Swat. He

argued that the introduction of Shariat laws in those districts did not suggest the triumph of the Taliban.

However, this view is not shared either by the Pakistani civil society or by the media. They fear the Talibanisation of Pakistan within a decade or so if nothing was done to counter it. Many warned me that the Taliban would not stop at even Islamabad but go right up to the Wagha-Amritsar border.

The attack on the Sri Lankan cricketers suggests that. If the Mumbai attack was aimed at India, the Lahore incident points to the steady inroads terrorist organisations have made in the heartland of Pakistan. That New Delhi should join hands with Islamabad to fight terrorism makes sense.

People admit the presence of jihadi elements both in the military and the government. But they argue that such elements will get sustenance if New Delhi does not give visa to artistes and academicians. There is no ban on the screening of Indian films.

Information Minister Sherry Rehman said she did not know how long it would continue if relations between India and Pakistan did not improve. She deserves praise. But it does not solve the problem between the two countries. Dismantling of terrorists' camps in Pakistan may. She should try for that.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.