

3-year power target

Let there be significant increase to meet country's demand

FINANCE Minister AMA Muhit deserves appreciation for his frank observation that it might not be possible for the government to raise electricity by 1000 MW in next three years as promised in Awami League's election pledge. However the five-year target of 7000 MW will be met, he assured, during his Thursday meeting with editors. In a show of courtesy, a rarity these days, he even candidly praised the steps taken by the caretaker government to add power to the national grid from rental power plants.

The nagging problem of shortfall of electricity and resulting load-shedding is affecting life and work in many ways than we can actually comprehend. Manufacturing industries, especially export-oriented readymade garment factories, are experiencing reduction in efficiency and output. Other vital sectors including health care and education are also being affected in big ways because of frequent power outage. Therefore, it is indisputable that uninterrupted electricity supply is the key to all development programmes, especially when we harbour the dream of creating a digital Bangladesh to face the challenges of the 21st century. We believe it is an achievable target since we already have a large number of IT savvy young professionals ready to do wonders. But, first and foremost, the government will have to ensure further generation of electricity, modernisation of the distribution network, minimising system loss and snapping of all illegal connections. Attaching utmost importance to improving the power sector, the present government also needs to initiate feasibility studies on the proper use of resources like coal, solar power, wind and water (hydroelectricity) to meet the increasing demands for electricity.

It is worth mentioning here that the former adviser to the caretaker government, Akbar Ali Khan has euphemistically said recently that electricity is more important than democracy. We believe what he said was meant to impart the immense importance of electricity in a modern world. Therefore, we may not agree with his expression but we are inclined to endorse the spirit of the argument in the present context. Undoubtedly, there has to be substantial growth of the power sector in terms of productivity and distribution. If 1000 MW is not achievable then go for 700 MW or 500 MW. Let there be a beginning and then build on from there, otherwise implementation of the development agendas would suffer a severe set back.

President Obama's outreach to Muslims

However the US needs to be more sensitive about Muslim concerns

WE applaud the speech made by US President Obama to the Turkish parliament on Monday, and hope that will be a harbinger of fundamental change in United States policy with respect to how it approaches its relations with the Muslim world.

For too long under his predecessor, the US had pursued policies, taken positions, and made statements that were perceived to be antagonistic to Islam and the Muslim world. From the rhetoric that came out of the Bush White House, to its lack of sensitivity on issues in the Middle East and Afghanistan, to refusal to listen to Muslim concerns, the perception was created that the US was hostile to Islam.

It is good that President Obama has unequivocally stated: "The United States is not, and will never be, at war with Islam." Not only this, but he has taken concrete steps to reach out to Muslims and address Muslim concerns, such as closing down Guantanamo Bay, that, together with his pledges to wind down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan give one some confidence that a new era is dawning when it comes to America's relations with the Muslim world.

There is no reason for antagonism. There are millions of Muslim Americans who are free to practice their faith freely and with dignity. In addition, as President Obama stated in his landmark address, the interests of the US and of the Muslims of the world are aligned, not just in fighting terror but also in terms of providing opportunities so that young Muslims do not feel marginalised and dispossessed.

A rapprochement between the US and the Muslim world is long overdue. For the world's foremost power to be in apparent conflict with one of the great religions with over one billion adherents is simply an untenable situation that has given rise to extraordinary tensions and has led to considerable unease among the Muslims of the world and unwarranted distrust between them and the US.

This is the kind of bold thinking that we hoped that President Obama would bring to the White House. This is the kind of vision and courage that is needed in an unstable world. We applaud his important speech, and hope that his administration will back them up with deeds that will truly win the respect and the affection of the Muslim world.

Dimensions of the water crisis

We need to remember that water, on the one hand means life, and on the other, can become a threat to livelihood during extreme situations arising out of flood or drought. The successful tackling of these issues will require common political will and understanding based on flexibility and harmonious water sharing.

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

THE demand for clean drinking water continues to reach critical proportions from the lanes of Dhaka to most areas all over the developing world. The value of fresh water as a commodity has continued to grow because of its increasing scarcity. That has enhanced the risk factor for economic development, sustainable agriculture and the environment. It is this crisis that has encouraged multi-stakeholders to consider alternate strategies for overcoming the problem.

Special focus was given to the international dimensions of water-use in the Fifth World Water Forum held in Istanbul, Turkey. I had the privilege of being there as vice-president of the Bangladesh Water Partnership, through the cooperation kindly extended by the German Embassy in Dhaka.

There were representatives from more than 100 countries. The Forum's main theme, "Bridging divides for water," was addressed through six sub-themes; global change and risk management; advancing human development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); managing and protecting water resources; governance and management; finance; and education, knowledge and capacity development.

This process of examining, discussing and identifying ways forward pertaining to use of fresh water was initiated with seriousness through a meeting held in Morocco in 1997. Since then, three other

meetings were held before the latest in Istanbul this year.

Participants considered the following issues:

- Meeting basic needs for safe and sufficient water.
- Securing food supply through the more effective use of water.
- Protecting ecosystems and ensuring their integrity through sustainable water resource management.
- Sharing water resources by promoting peaceful cooperation between different uses of water and between concerned states, through approaches such as sustainable river basin management (the concluding synthesis session pertaining to this topic was co-chaired by me and Lazlo Kothay, Hungarian state secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Water Management).
- Managing risks by providing security from a range of water related hazards.
- Managing water in the light of its different values, and ascertaining whether it is possible to move towards pricing water to recover the cost of service provision (after taking into account equity and the needs of the poor and the vulnerable).
- Governing water wisely by involving the public and the interests of all stakeholders.

Four other challenges were also brought within the purview of the different sessions promoting cleaner industry with respect to water quality and the needs of the other users, assessing water's key role

in energy production and in the meeting of rising energy demands, expanding the knowledge base and recognising the distinctive challenges of an increasingly urbanised world.

There was an effort to blend together the three levels of political power: national governments, local authorities and parliamentary members. This was done to facilitate the reaching of common understanding so that implementation of developmental projects regarding the delivery of potable water and better sanitation is not hampered due to ineffective agendas arising out of resource constraints.

This innovative approach encouraged participatory appreciation of the problems. I feel that replication of this process needs to be considered in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the region within the ambit of water governance. The European Union in general and Germany in particular took special interest in such a format. I hope that Germany, within the scope of its developmental cooperation, will examine the potential for activating such a paradigm in Bangladesh.

The problems within the water sector were also scrutinised against the backdrop of the world having to adapt to climate variability and global warming. It was earlier believed that water management was the art of matching our limited water resources with the present and the projected water needs of people, food economies and the environment.

Water security is perceived as being closely linked to energy security and food security. There are diverse compounding global drivers that generate their own dimensions on water resource management: climate change and migration being two of them. This includes internal migration related to creation or presence of employment opportunities.

It was also interesting to see participants considering the possible effects of using the same water or infrastructure for manifold uses and functions so that it multiplies the benefits to communities in

terms of cost benefit in areas like livelihood, irrigation, hydro-power and ecosystem services. Attention was also paid to the bridging of the gap between different sectors to enable the development of comprehensive strategies on multi-services and benefits to people at lower cost.

Another facet that came up for intensive discussion was the need to increase cooperation over trans-boundary surface and groundwater resources, and to initiate greater integration in trans-boundary river management. Assessments were also made pertaining to institutional tools and available mechanisms for the reinforcement of such cooperation, with special reference to improvement of basin management. This was the source of heated debate, and some insisted that access to water was a human right as opposed to a "need." This matter, most unfortunately, remained unresolved.

We need to realise that only six years are left to the deadline set for the achievement of the MDGs. The world faces, today, phenomenal developmental and environmental challenges.

There is need today to act together so that we can carry on our fight in Bangladesh against poverty, hunger, poor health, lack of access to clean water and sanitation and sustainable energy. We also have to recognise that eco-system services are under threat and land degradation continues (both through draining of land to meet growing demands for food and filling of water-bodies to provide urban habitation).

We need to remember that water, on the one hand means life, and on the other, can become a threat to livelihood during extreme situations arising out of flood or drought. The successful tackling of these issues will require common political will and understanding based on flexibility and harmonious water sharing.

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Who is 'Sunita Paul'?

"Sunita Paul" has caused quite a stir recently because her articles make extraordinary claims, based on anonymous sources and apparent hearsay, about the political situation in Bangladesh. Extraordinary claims without much factual support require a significant leap of faith by the reader.

MASHUQR RAHMAN

"SUNITA PAUL" is an "Indian journalist" who has been writing inflammatory articles on Bangladesh in little known foreign online outlets. "Sunita Paul" is also a plagiarist.

"Sunita Paul" has caused quite a stir recently because her articles make extraordinary claims, based on anonymous sources and apparent hearsay, about the political situation in Bangladesh. Extraordinary claims without much factual support require a significant leap of faith by the reader. Whether they should be believed completely depend on her credibility.

The very persona of "Sunita Paul" is somewhat of a mystery. "Sunita Paul" is listed as a writer for the *Weekly Blitz*, the tabloid run by Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury. She also rather coincidentally writes in a number of online publications *American Chronicle*, *Global Politician* and *Asian Tribune* that also publish Mr. Choudhury's articles. She holds strongly negative views about Bangladesh, and has

published articles maliciously claiming Bangladesh to be anti-American, anti-Western, and anti-Semitic.

On March 30, 2008, "Sunita Paul" published an article in the *Asian Tribune* entitled "They Hate US-West Too." By "they," she refers to Bangladesh. In the opening sentence of the article, she makes this extraordinary charge: "Bangladesh, although demanding to be a moderate Muslim nation, is in reality a notorious Jew hater and anti-West and anti American nation."

She goes on to write that "people of Bangladesh in general are West and US haters and the only reason for them for sending their children to these countries are for mere money making."

Note that she is not pointing towards any particular group or party, she is charging Bangladesh as a country, and all Bangladeshis as "Jew hater and anti West and anti American nation."

The thrust of that article is to push Bangladesh to change its policy toward Israel. She questions whether the United States should do business at all with Bangladesh. She writes: "Can we raise a

plain question as to whether the Jewish business communities and friends of Israel like United States should patronize Dhaka economically, to sharpen and strengthen their anti-Semitic and anti US sentiments?"

While writing inflammatory articles on Bangladesh, "Sunita Paul" often uses unverifiable sources for her claims, uses unchecked propaganda, and most notoriously, steals from other people's work and claims them as her own.

When a journalist is engaged in plagiarism that is when a journalist makes false claims of authorship the remainder of that journalist's work should be viewed with extreme suspicion. Plagiarism is dishonesty. And "Sunita Paul" is a plagiarist. She is a cheat.

On February 6, "Sunita Paul" published an article in the online publication *American Chronicle* with the breathless headline "Ruling party getting set to try Bangladesh Generals." Now, if the claim in the article's headline were true, this would be big news.

However, the article was thin on backing up the main charge in the headline. As one reads further through the long article though, one comes across a number of paragraphs that seemed very familiar to this author. For a very good reason. The paragraphs were originally written by me in two October 2007 articles. The articles, titled "Banking: Junta Edition" and "In Denial" are available at: <http://www.bangladesh.org/2007/10/page/4/>

"Sunita Paul" copied, word for word, five

paragraphs that I had written in 2007 and passed them off as her own writing in 2009. No citation was given, nor did she put the passages in quotations. In other words, she has stolen someone else's words and claimed them as her own. Not only did she plagiarise, she also used copyrighted material without the author's consent.

It is clear that "Sunita Paul" is a "journalist" with an agenda agenda that wants to portray Bangladesh negatively in the West and in the United States. A "journalist" with such a political agenda is no journalist at all. In addition, she is a cheat. Her journalistic ethics are in serious question.

Yet, a number of prominent people in Bangladesh, including the leader of the opposition in Parliament, have cited the articles of "Sunita Paul" that fuel unsubstantiated conspiracy theories about the recent massacre at Pikhana. The same person who wrote malicious propaganda against Bangladesh, is now being given credence in spreading unsubstantiated conspiracy theories that will hamper fair, neutral investigation of the BDR massacre. It should however be clear to everyone that this so-called journalist's agenda is counter to the best interests of the people of Bangladesh.

Given the corrosive agenda of "Sunita Paul" and her proven plagiarism, the reader should question her breathless articles on Bangladesh.

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Recommendations mandatory

The Charter of Change or Vision 2021, to turn Bangladesh into a respectable nation with the transformation of political culture and making the society corruption free, will be difficult to achieve unless a strong, honest and dedicated local level governance system emerges to support the central government.

DHIRAJ KUMAR NATH

THE government deserves high appreciation for placing the Upazila Parishad (Repealed Act, Re-introduction and Amendment) Bill 2009 before the Parliament and getting it passed. With the passage of the bill, the concept of Upazila Parishad has received confirmation as the focal point of local level administration at the grassroots level.

In 1991, the committee headed by Barrister Nazmul Huda discarded the Upazila Parishad without leaving any scope to justify its fruitfulness or functional efficacy under a democratic climate although it started working in 1982 with the promulgation of the Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganisation) Ordinance.

After 18 years of confusion, debate, discussion and argument in favour of or against the upazila system, a law has now

been made to address the issues of local level planning, rural development and socio-economic emancipation. Above all, Upazila Parishads might contribute significantly towards making the country poverty free, turning it into a middle income nation, and building digital Bangladesh.

Local government, as we find it today, is the cumulative result of years of change, upheaval and evolution. It is about local leadership, building strong communities and ensuring the wellbeing of the people it serves, while striving to help local areas to grow and develop with delegation of power and devolution of authority. Thus, the expectation was to see a strong Upazila Parishad manage local level issues in its own way.

The Upazila Parishad Act was approved by the Parliament recently, but the upazila chairmen and vice-chairmen feel that they have been made subordinates of the concerned member of Parliament. Recommendations of the concerned MP

should be considered as mandatory and obligatory. Upazila Parishad chairmen shall not have the right even to refer a matter to the government without the approval and consent of the MP.

This is perhaps the first time that a law has been enacted where recommendation should be taken as final. Before this, recommendations were treated as optional, even so flexible that a recommendation of a minister used to be implemented after specific instruction or written order from him. In fact, recommendations are always optional, but this law is altogether different from precedents and practices.

In 1998, MPs were advisers without such power. Mr. A.K.M. Mozammel Huq, MP of the treasury bench raised a bill against this provision because he was chairman of Joydevpur Union Parishad and also Upazila chairman. He did not like to compromise his position. But he had to withdraw from his stand because of his party affiliation.

Mr. Abdul Matin Khasru, former law minister, and MP from Burichang and Brahman para of Comilla, raised a motion to designate the upazilla nirbahi officer as secretary of the chief executive officer, which was applauded by the House. There is no apparent legal reason for such a motion, except downgrading the bureaucracy. It is true that whenever bureaucracy is undermined efficiency is comprised,

which eventually shatters the image of a popular government.

Strengthening local government is the primary objective of the upazila system. Thus, agriculture, land administration, health and family planning, primary education, rural electrification, poultry, fisheries, live stocks, horticulture, social forestry, milk production, cooperatives marketing, etc. should be transferred to the Upazila Parishad. But this time, the central government has retained many subjects. There should be, in fact, more devolution of power and delegation of authority to the Upazila Parishad.

Upazila chairmen and vice-chairmen were elected by the public with the expectation that they would resolve local problems without having to rush Dhaka and asking the MPs to mitigate the same. The duty of the MPs is in the Parliament, and not in interfering in a divorce case or a dacoity in his locality.

The Charter of Change or Vision 2021, to turn Bangladesh into a respectable nation with the transformation of political culture and making the society corruption free, will be difficult to achieve unless a strong, honest and dedicated local level governance system emerges to support the central government.

Dhiraj Kumar Nath is a former Secretary and a former Adviser to the caretaker government.