

Abandon 3Gs, inculcate 3Cs

Only thus will the 3Cs be able to dispatch into oblivion the practitioners of the 3Gs and bring back sanity, sensitivity and sensibility in our politics, which will pave the way for true democracy to take root.

Z. A. KHAN

USA smiles as the Americans are regaining their lost pride after 8 years of hawkish rule that tore apart the fabrics of humanism and humanity. The chauvinists ignited insularity across the globe through a pre-determined policy geared to pre-emptive use of aggressive power in the name of self defense and pro-active democracy building. But the insularity is yet to subside, which necessitates ushering in of an alternative course.

It is the realisation that the louder and more cogently dissents emerges, the more grows the desire for change.

November '08 has put on record the longing of Americans for change. The citizens of the world welcome the wind of change as it promises the end of a global nightmare that America might "impose the limitation of the American dream on the reality of everyone's life."

If the Americans did not support the change, US and rest of the world would have suffered from the "real consequences of death, increasing divide between rich and poor, a squandering of human future and building more and more pretexts for conflicts as the promise of to-morrow."

The Americans' support of change will help them to confront the nightmare that had made the world reel under poverty and denied the people's right to life and liberty. They are realising how important it is to cultivate the culture of friendship, and to protect all from a leadership that sold arms by constructing fratricidal wars in Africa and Asia.

President Obama has learnt to see

America as a part of a world made imperfect by the arms merchants and their accomplices and has assured all that a determined effort will be made "to find answers, new solutions in the struggles of many nations, all of whom also have a vested interest in a peaceful, humane and a better human future." In Bangladesh, the slogan "Din Bodoler Pala" (a time for change) encouraged people to vote AL to power, and they are now waiting to enjoy the fruits of change.

3Gs (goons, guns and gold) have been dominating democracy for several decades. The "heathen" possessors of the 3Gs were confident that even the long arm (?) of the law could not touch them. Strengthening of democracy has been dispatched into obscurity by the goons who used their guns and gold to stifle the rise of credible people who have commitment and want to ensure consistency (in short 3Cs) for development of the economy and institutionalisation of democracy. Change in Bangladesh might seem like a dream, but it must come about.

Our country is divided into two political streams, i.e. the AL and the BNP streams. People are prone to vote against the incumbent government, as they have no third choice. Then why were the "no" votes so few? One reason was that people knew there was no other party with broad-based organisation, therefore one of the two parties had to be voted to power. The other reason is that most voters failed to identify the symbol for "no" vote in the ballot paper and voted for the symbol of their choice.

For them 3C is unimportant as they don't understand what they mean.



Politics of 3Gs.

Those who value 3Cs are subdued by 3Gs. Must we live in this vitiated political environment, thinking it is fait accompli? If we do, we will go nowhere. On May Day an MP said to me: "We have come back to square one. Who do we ask for the return of the two years that started with lofty promises of change but has thrown us into this situation at the end?"

My conviction is that this political situation will not persist forever. The people will refuse to act as pawns as death and denial have pushed them to the wall, and the only way out will be to resist the ominous forces with unity and commitment. Who do we look for to make the way,

show the way and lead the way? New leadership should emerge, and should be imbued with the spirit of change that President Obama is spreading.

Our people deserve to be able make a choice, abdicating from the traditional "no choice barring BNP and AL." The corrupt and the corruptible must be made to quit politics. State institutions should act without fear or favour. Formal institutions should not be employed for informal assignments, and the government's security should not be given priority over state security.

How can good politics be brought about? Student politics cannot be

thought of as an effective alternative as it should revolve around campus problems and may at best be allowed to introspect about national problems and air their concerns and conclusions through seminars and symposiums. An age limit should be set for them to quit campus politics. They can then join national politics, which will inject fresh energy into politics.

As they are likely to be far less corruptible, they will be able to threaten the entrenched politicians with dire consequences including social boycott if they do not mend their traditional ways of taking their voters for a ride

with the help of 3Gs. Experience reveals that people are more inclined to support students turned politicians, hoping that they will be more credible and more committed to the people and may even be more consistent in pursuing fair politics.

The senior leaders may also feel constrained to be more focused about their short-comings. Thus, there would hopefully be a quantum jump in the quality of politics. All these days entrenched politicians prevented people from entering politics in their constituencies.

I was amazed to observe a sea change in the attitude of the new voters, who are prepared to voice their dissent even at the peril of immense suffering that may follow. I implore the 33% new voters to get the wheels of change rolling so that the politics of welfare overwhelms politics of time watching. For this to happen they should imbibe the 3Cs, which promise a move for the better -- for the leader and the led.

An expatriate said to me that most political parties in Bangladesh behaved like the top leader's party rather than people's party. Because, he thought, leaders moved with the finger movement of the top leader. I was abashed and could find no reply, because his observation was not far from being correct. So the time has come for collective wisdom to replace the arrogance of the few.

People imbued with the 3Cs should now come out for the sake our country and our people. The winds of change blowing all over the world should sweep through our country to remove the ills of captive democracy and the perils of stagnancy. Only thus will the 3Cs be able to dispatch into oblivion the practitioners of the 3Gs and bring back sanity, sensitivity and sensibility in our politics, which will pave the way for true democracy to take root.

Z.A. Khan is a former DG of Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies.

Water crisis: Pitfalls and possibilities

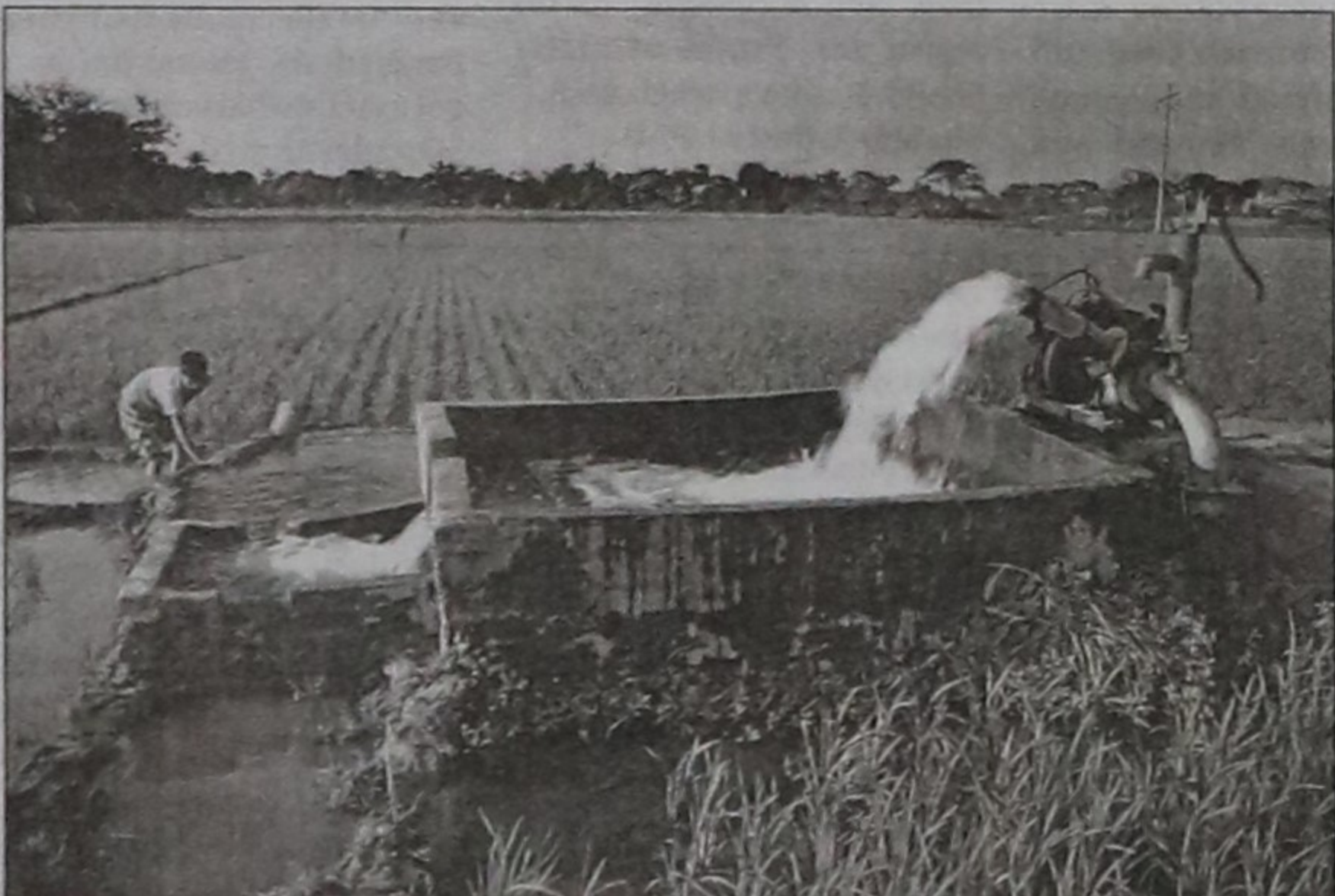
A problem in underground water supply is the potential contamination by lateral migration of toxic contaminants from the surrounding rivers and the emergence of arsenic.

TANWIR NAWAZ

DHAKA city is facing an acute water crisis. This happens in the summer months due to the high demand for water and the growing population. This year the situation is worse due to shortage of electricity, which affects the pumping of under-

ground water. The situation might improve marginally with the coming of the monsoon, but will resurface again next year.

Dhaka has a population of nearly 14 million. Its minimum consumption demand is over 2,200 million liters at only 157 liters per person per day (as against the daily normal requirement of



How much can we extract from underground?

around 400 liters per day in a metropolitan area). Dhaka Wasa is unable to meet even this modest demand. Further, there is a system loss of nearly 40%.

At full capacity, Wasa is able to produce maximum of 1,750 million liters per day with some 427 deep underground tube wells. The Saidabad Water Treatment Plant (SWTP) is capable of supplying 225 million liters per day. The rest of the water supply comes from some 700 privately sanctioned deep tube-wells of much lesser capacities.

There is a normal shortfall of at least 250 million to 300 million liters per day. The Wasa tube-wells depend on generators when the power supply fails. However, there are only 220 back up power generators available for the 427 pumps. So, nearly 50% pumps have no back up power supply available.

The 427 deep tube-wells are sunk to a depth varying between 200 feet in the fringe areas to 500 feet in the inner areas, while some have been sunk to a depth in excess of 1,000 feet. In one case the depth is close to 4,000 feet. The water level in Dhaka, particularly in the central part, has been falling every year by 1.5 to 2.5 meters, and some tubewells will run dry in the near future, causing further shortfalls. Will this cause future land subsidence problems also?

With the filling of some 43 canals and many water bodies in Dhaka, there is very little ground water recharge. This requires going deeper and deeper for any new wells. The underground water

sources could be exhausted in the not too distant future. A problem in underground water supply is the potential contamination by lateral migration of toxic contaminants from the surrounding rivers and the emergence of arsenic.

The problem facing Dhaka Wasa is that the demand for water is increasing at the rate of some 7% to 10% per year because of population growth and more industrial uses of water. Dhaka's population will double to more than 24 million by 2024. Even at current low rate of consumption (around 150 liters per head per day) Dhaka will need more than 3,700 million liters by then.

It is highly unlikely that the ad-hoc deep tube-wells or the underground aquifers will be able to supply or sustain this level of demand. So, the crisis can only get worse. The main future potential source thus has to be surface water from surrounding rivers. But how good is the condition of the surrounding river waters?

What is the solution to our water supply problem? It cannot be the endless supply of underground water through deep tube-wells, but has to be surface water. As noted earlier, the SWTP currently supplies 225 million liters of water from the river Sitalakha. Three more phases, each with 225 million liters, remain unrealised to date.

It took fifteen years of various trials and tribulations to build one surface water treatment plant. We will need to

build fifteen such plants of the same size during the next twenty years just to maintain the supply at current levels, if underground water supply was to cease. But Sitalakha is polluted and has limited potential as a surface water source.

The waters of Balu and Turag and Buriganga are extremely polluted and chemically contaminated through industrial waste dumping. So the hunt for surface water has to be from Meghna in the east to Jamuna in the west to Padma in the southeast. In addition to the cost of plant construction there will be the cost of bringing the water to the treatment plants and connecting them to the distribution system.

Bringing water from downstream Padma will be even more costly as it will involve, in addition to pipe lines, the cost of large pumping stations and of operating them continuously. Clean water cannot be drawn from the confluence of Sitalakha and Meghna as Sitalakha is already contaminated. Meghna is also undergoing similar misuse and industrial contamination.

The third option is to bring water from Jamuna through excavation of deep canals from somewhere near Nagarpur and connecting it to Dhaleswari and subsequently to Turag and Buriganga.

The water will have to be drawn before it reaches Turag, which is contaminated. The water can then be sup-

plied to new treatment plants or piped to Saidabad where additional plants can be built.

One note of caution, if we continue to pollute all our rivers, particularly with chemical and industrial wastes, our sources of safe surface water will also vanish. We should be particularly careful where we dump effluents from the industries.

With unregulated industrial expansion and waste dumping we will definitely pay an extreme price. In the short run, we may opt for a combination of underground water supply and surface water treatment plants. However, in the mid to longer-term, surface water will have to be the major solution to our water supply problems.

Since it will take time to construct the new plants, we are well advised to start without delay. If we are unable to finance these from the public treasury, we should consider a combination of public private partnership. In some cases it could be through build operate and transfer projects (BOT).

If we cannot afford to build the plants and the pipelines ourselves then let somebody else build the plants and sell the water to us under controlled and agreed price set-ups. But this is one sector we can neglect only at our own extreme peril.

Tanwir Nawaz is an architect and urbanist. He was the Co-Chairperson of 2001 and 2003 Task Force Reports on Urban Governance prepared by CPD (Centre for Policy Dialogue). E-mail: tanwir.nawaz@yahoo.com.

TRIBUTE

A great man, a humble man

ENAYETULLAH KHAN

THE last time I met Dr. M.A. Wazed Miah was when he made that final trip to Singapore for medical treatment. He looked rather frail. But then, there was no absence of enthusiasm in him. As I sat beside him on the plane, he held my hand and we talked. I was acutely conscious of the fact that he did not need to be disturbed, that he needed all the strength he could muster to pull through. It was I who did the talking. I recalled in my mind the brilliant career Wazed Miah had travelled over the years, the niche he had carved for himself in the arena of nuclear science.

The best that can be said about Dr. Wazed Miah is that he always remained his own man, and carried himself with great dignity as an individual. That he was the son-in-law of the Father of the Nation, that he was married to the most influential

politician in the country, were truths that were certainly not bigger than the truth that he was a thoroughly professional man in his own right.

He was surely proud of the fact that he had married into the family of a man destined to make history. On the day Sheikh Hasina took office as Bangladesh's prime minister in 1996, he beamed with pride. He knew that his wife's long, tortuous political struggle had paid off, had indeed contributed greatly to the rise of democracy in the country. He was happy for her.

The scientist was a self-effacing man and never has there been any point in time when he has been seen to take advantage of the pre-eminence of his family in politics.

As a senior official and then as chairman of the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission, he remained committed to his job. I often wonder about the way

he carried himself. And I do that especially when I think of all the other political spouses who, in our own era, have not been able to resist the temptation of deriving advantage from the power and prominence of their wives or husbands.

The husband of Turkey's former prime minister Tansu Ciller had many questions raised about his predilection for wrongdoing only because of his links to the most powerful individual in the country. In Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari carried the stigma of corruption from the two stints his wife Benazir Bhutto served as prime minister. Very recently, in Britain, the husband of the home secretary, Jacqui Smith, landed his wife in trouble over the use of taxpayers' money for him to be able to see adult movies.

There are innumerable examples one can cite about the many ways in which powerful spouses have earned notoriety for themselves. But Wazed Miah was

always the exception. And why shouldn't he have been? The answer to that question is simple: he was a self-made man. By the time he married Sheikh Hasina, he was already established in his field as a talented nuclear scientist. He had already been abroad and had already earned the appreciation of as significant a personality as Dr. I. H. Usmani, chairman of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission. Usmani recognised the huge potential in Miah and arranged for him to be sent abroad for higher studies and further research.

At his office at the BAEC, there was hardly anything forbidding about him. His colleagues and other staff always found him accessible. Indeed, he was one of those men for whom respect from others came naturally and spontaneously. No one would be able to suspect that he was the husband of the prime minister. When the time came for him to retire in



Dr. M. A. Wazed Miah

1999, he took it in his stride. He could have asked for an extension, since Sheikh Hasina was then the prime minister. He did not and instead went quietly into retired life, into his own cocoon as it were. Wazed Miah could have, like so many

others we know, used these past few years to appear on television channels or write in newspapers and give us his considered opinion of matters in general. That he chose not to remain a sign of the dignity in the man. Like any decent individual, he knew the torch had to be passed to other, younger individuals.

Just how wide and diverse was the respect for Dr. Wazed Miah can easily be observed from the plethora of tributes and condolences that have been showered on him since his death last week. Personally, I am proud to have known this great and yet humble man, one who did not seek the limelight or glow in reflected glory but stayed glued to his own honest, middle class ideals all his life. I pray for the salvation of his departed soul.

Enayetullah Khan is Chief Editor, UNB and Editor, Dhaka Courier.