

Murders in the city

Reordering of crime tackling strategy called for

The murder of a ten-year-old boy and the severe injuries inflicted on his father in Gandaria on Saturday once more bring into focus the worries generated by unbridled crime not only in the city but also elsewhere in the country. Add to the gruesome murder of the boy (he was subjected to dunking in a bucket of water only because he saw his father being attacked by local criminals) the murder of a trader in Kamrangirchar. The body of the trader was found hanging from a ceiling fan. A few days ago, the decomposing corpse of a pesh imam was discovered in the city, with as yet no clear clue as to who was behind his murder. As a matter of fact, hardly a day goes by when some murder or the other is not committed in the nation's capital.

It is time for the government to take notice. Of late we have noted the observance of a police week in the country, with nearly everyone who matters exhorting the law enforcers to take their job seriously. Judging by the way things have been going, with not just murders but also robbery, vandalism and extortion, it is pretty obvious that such exhortations have not been working to people's satisfaction. Now, what needs to be done is a thorough recasting of perspective on law and order in the sense that the police and other security agencies in the country are fully and purposefully deployed in the task of keeping track of criminals and would-be criminals. In many cases, those who commit crime swiftly disappear. Those who are eventually caught are rather few in number, but the larger body of criminals somehow remains outside the police net. In recent times, despite an expanded police presence in many areas, especially in the capital, extortionists and murderers have apparently become active. An intriguing aspect of recent murder-related crimes is that they have generally occurred when demands for extortions have not been met.

Clearly, the home ministry has been unable to convince the nation that it is on top of things. Indeed, in these past two years of the Awami League-led government, this ministry has been one of those which have not performed to people's satisfaction. Serious rethinking on how the ministry and the police department can reorder their crime-battling strategy is called for. Having taken much flak in recent times on charges of having been behind a number of extra-judicial killings, such forces as the Rapid Action Battalion as also the police must now focus on tackling real crime. It is in the alleys and by-lanes of the city rather than broad roads and streets where crime is generally committed. Security patrols must, therefore, be redirected to these areas.

A major incentive to power plant and industry operators

It must come with safeguards against pollution

In what appears to be breaking a gridlock in terms of local industries tiding over energy crisis on their own, the government has withdrawn import duty on furnace oil. This is a substantial incentive because it meant waiver on 37.5 percent levy on import. Given that paucity of gas has affected power generation that is critically dependent on this hydrocarbon, liberalising import of furnace oil or Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) looked somewhat unavoidable. More so, in a context where no one knows when government would be in a position to supply gas with appropriate pressure to industries to run their boilers and generators.

The government had to meet the demand from large industries to let them have their own power plants based on imported furnace oil. Even though the 'cost of furnace oil-based power will be higher than that of gas-based power', an official of the Youngone company asserted that within six months industries will turn the table on power crisis. True, steady supply of energy is imperative but no less so is the affordability of cost for the consumers.

On the flipside, there is plentiful on our plate to be handled judiciously. The first shortcoming is in the inadequacy of storage facilities. The industries will have to build up silo capacities of their own. Secondly, not all industries may have the equipment to use both diesel and furnace oil. So, some re-equipment may be necessary.

Most important of all, furnace oil-based production is known to cause heavy pollution. This would require of the industries and power plants to have their own treatment facilities. If this is not ensured than the benefits in terms of a turn-around in power crunch may be more than offset by proliferation of pollution. In an era of mounting worldwide concern over the adverse impacts of climate change, any possible air pollution due to lack of effluent treatment in an industry or production process is an anathema, to say the least. All concerned should, therefore, put their heads together, especially the experts, in order that we will have taken adequate guard against environmental pollution when furnace oil is used widely.

Bracing for the energy crunch

SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

THAT Bangladesh has to depend on the oil-exporting countries for the supply of its fuel to keep its wheel of economy moving need not be over-emphasised. Given the fact that the existing supply of natural gas in the pipelines is tapering off fast and that we are yet to command the technology and financial resources to access the untapped reserves of gas in the offshore areas, the spectre of energy crunch will continue to loom large on the horizon. Are we really aware of the danger facing us?

Though it may sound somewhat pessimistic, it is also not totally an exaggerated view of our energy future. In fact, that is the reality if we are to solely focus on natural gas or the reserves of coal that are yet to be fully exploited. And the hydropower which we are generating cannot be a feasible option either, especially in the context of the increasing demand for power everyday.

Even the massive plan that the incumbent government has taken to increase power generation, too, will depend mostly on imported fuel. The cost of the power from the new generation units will also go up and the government will have to provide a huge subsidy to bring down the price of that power within the reach of the general consumers.

That means the public exchequer will be under heavy pressure in order to supply electricity in the future. But to spare the government of this double whammy, are the common users of power ready to pay higher prices for the future use of power? The answer has a lot to do with the present level of income of the people and their willingness to forget the days of cheap power, just like the way they are getting used to the higher prices of the every day essentials.

Assuming that the common users will be ready to pay a higher price for power or the imported fuel, that is still not going to address the predicament of future energy crunch. Because of the reserved traditional source of energy, the fossil fuel is depleting at a faster rate than before globally while trying

to keep up with the rising demand for energy.

But then what other alternatives are there other than fossil fuel to satisfy our, or for that matter, the entire world's ever-increasing energy hunger? Many alternatives have meanwhile been thought of, but the world is yet to find a viable, sustainable as well as safe alternative to fossil fuel.



PHOTO: LUIZ FELIPE CASTRO

Nuclear option, for instance, could be a fairly good one, but to make the most of it the technology involved is yet to go a long way before the cost of installing a nuclear power plant becomes affordable to all and its safety standards of the reactor are further improved.

The entire scenario of energy worldwide should therefore leave a sobering impact on our worries about the energy future. For we are not alone in facing such uncertain energy prospect, except, of course, a handful of oil- and gas-rich nations! But then, the reserves of the oil exporting nations, too, are not inexhaustible. Their oil wells, too, are getting depleted quickly while trying to meet the world's demand for energy rising at a gallop. In that sense, the whole world is in the same predicament

of an impending energy crunch and that, too, in a matter of decades.

But that we, along with the rest of the world, are in the same boat is still nothing to be complacent about. For most of the developed countries and the newly emerging economies have been thinking hard on the future energy crisis and preparing for the inevitable.

The traditional energy source as the driving force of global growth and progress is losing its significance fast. But as noted in the foregoing, a viable alternative to this traditional source is yet to emerge.

The talk about alternative or green energy is but the spin-offs from this general concern. So, it is not hard to understand why the concern about ever-depleting global fossil fuel reserves could so conveniently make a common cause with the environmentalists' and the climate summits' urge to cut the use of greenhouse gases emitted by fossil fuels burning automobiles and industries and the search for alternative, greener source of energy.

To cut a long story short, the world at large has now become more energy conscious than before. The leadership colloquium that this paper hosted recently on 'Alternative Energy and Energy Technology,' too, was held with a view to putting Bangladesh into the context of the global consciousness on

the issue.

As it has come out of the colloquium, the alternatives to fossil fuel available at the moment are disparate and yet to meet the world's recent trend of energy demand.

According to the International Energy Outlook 2010 published by the US Energy Information Administration, the world marketed energy consumption will increase by 49 percent in 28 years between 2007 and 2035 and 84 percent of this energy will go to meet the need of non-OECD countries. And Bangladesh along with the emerging economic giants like China, India, Brazil as well as a large number of least developed and developing countries, falls in the category of the non-OECD nations.

Small wonder this increasing demand for energy is related to their growing population, expanding economies matching their rapid rate of industrialisation. What this mounting demand for energy does imply will be clearer from the following comparison. In the last two decades the world has consumed more than half of all the energy it created since the start of Industrial Revolution. Needless to say, the source of the energy so consumed was fossil fuel-based.

So, given the mentioned trend of energy consumption, the traditional energy source as the driving force of global growth and progress is losing its significance fast. But as noted in the foregoing, a viable alternative to this traditional source is yet to emerge. Will then the engine of growth here and elsewhere coming to a screeching halt?

Hence is the search for an energy formula to delay the arrival of the moment of truth. The engine of civilisation must run. Bangladesh, too, cannot stop. And since there is no one-stop solution to the energy problem, the pragmatic path will be to conserve fossil energy as much as we can and at the same time make do with a mix of the traditional and the alternatives at hand including the nuclear, green as well as other options.

Simultaneously, the vigorous research to find a viable alternative to fossil fuel must continue.

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When the nightingale came home...

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THERE was a sadness that enveloped him in the midst of that cheering crowd. As the truck carrying him and a whole phalanx of politicians and student leaders inched its way out of the old airport in Tejgaon, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman seemed tired after all those months in solitary confinement in Pakistan. More than that, he was clearly overwhelmed by the ecstatic manner in which his people, the newly freed Bengalis of his Bangladesh, were welcoming him home. It could have been a scene out of an epic tale. It could have been an image shaped by the imagination. It was neither of those. It was truly happening before us. We had watched history being made in Bangladesh in the nine agonising months of Pakistani repression. And here, right before us, stood the man whose inspirational leadership had finally thrown open the doors of freedom for us.

For a few moments, I watched Bangabandhu on that truck. He was leaner than he was when the Pakistan army abducted him and took him to Pakistan in March 1971. His hair was disheveled. There was fatigue written all over him and yet there was the power in those eyes that held you in its gleam. I tried to get on the truck. No luck there, for it was already loaded with people. As the vehicle slowly went past me, truly in the manner of a snail, I thought I would climb aboard at the back. With one foot on the truck, the other grazing the road and my hands holding on to a chain on the side, I made a huge effort to have all of my sixteen-year-old strength push me on to it. It was Colonel Osmany who then told me (he was on the truck) softly, 'khoka, neme porho...byatha paabe.' I didn't get down. With that one foot on the truck and the other dangling along

the road, I made it all the way with Bangabandhu to the Race Course.

It was a million-strong crowd that welcomed the Father of the Nation back home that winter afternoon. He spoke of the millions who had been

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murdered by Pakistan, of the homes and villages and towns ravaged during the war. He bade farewell to Pakistan and wished Zulfikar Ali Bhutto well. He quoted Tagore. And he wept. For the first time in his public career, before the world, Bangabandhu shed tears in remembrance of the terrible ravages Bangladesh had gone through in the preceding nine months. And we in the crowd and across the country remembered, at that instant, how seventy five million Bengalis had worried about his safety, how they had prayed for his life and for him to return home. For nine months we had no way of knowing where he was or whether he was dead or alive. It was only Pakistan's defeat in Bangladesh and the surrender of its 93,000 soldiers in December 1971 that perhaps saved him. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, having played a diabolical role throughout the war, nevertheless recognised the folly of keeping the leader of a now free nation imprisoned in alien land.

In the early hours of 8 January 1972, Bhutto bade goodbye to Bangabandhu



PHOTO: BANGABANDHU MUSEUM

at Rawalpindi's Chaklala airport. As the aircraft took to the skies, Pakistan's new leader told no one in particular, "The nightingale has flown." Hours later, on a cold dawn in London, Bangladesh's president, for that was what Bangabandhu had been since April 1971, descended at Heathrow. For the first time since the beginning of the war for Bangladesh's liberation, the world knew that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was alive. The Bengali leader cheerfully told a crowded news conference at Claridge's later in the day, "As you can see, gentlemen, I am alive and well." And then he went on to offer a near lyrical account of his sentiments on being a free soul once more: "Gentlemen of the world press, I am happy to share in the unbounded joy of freedom brought about by an

epic liberation struggle waged by the people of Bangladesh. No people have had to shed so much blood for freedom as my people have..."

Here at home, in the coldness of a January evening, we laughed and then we wept. Bangabandhu was coming back home. As we leapt and skipped and ran, in that order, all the way home in the twilight glow of 10 January 1972, we knew we now inhabited a land 'where the mind is without fear and the head is held high, where knowledge is free... where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection...'

It felt good to belong, with Bangabandhu, with the sovereign republic of Bangladesh.

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