

## New power connections

*Cheery but testing*

**T**HAT the government has decided to provide power connections in phases to nearly 12 lakh residential buildings and commercial units after a ban of two years is indeed welcome news. The Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) has already started giving connections to new subscribers. The fact that this is due to improved power situation in the country is obvious but doubly heartening.

However, the authorities have put certain conditions to be met by recipients. Under new arrangements, the users are to get solar energy systems installed at their premises to enjoy the facility. This may be a tall ask.

Residential buildings using up to two kilowatt of electricity a day will have to meet five percent of their power consumption from renewable energy sources. It is seven percent for commercial buildings and factories consuming 50 kilowatt of electricity and 10 percent for the users of power above 50 kilowatt.

With a number of new power plants going into commercial production Bangladesh now produces up to 4300 MW of electricity against a demand of 6000 MW a day. We still run short of the requirement. This may have impelled the authorities to add some conditions as referred to above to secure the connections. We would have expected the extension of power network to have had a timeframe.

Our power industry still has a go long way to go to meet the national demand with fifty one percent of the population remaining out of the power network. However, the BPDB's plans to produce 200 MW of electricity per month from the second half of this year to add 2000 MW to the national grid in 2011 should be implemented without fail.

Much as we commend the reported headway we are concerned about the management and maintenance of the network. We are still plagued by frequent power outage and lack of maintenance. With the addition of new users and power supply in deficit BPDB will be tested on its promise of providing more than a million new connections and yet overcome the outage crisis.

## Corporal punishment

*New move is commendable*

**T**HE move by the education authorities to train teachers in classroom techniques, particularly over ensuring discipline among pupils, is commendable. It ought to have come much earlier, but that it finally has encourages us in the belief that we can now look forward to some quality teaching in schools. That of course depends on how well and how soon teachers at the primary and secondary education as well as madrasah levels are imparted training on how they must conduct classes. Obviously, they will have to discard corporal punishment, which has generally been a bad tradition with education in our circumstances. The old idea of sparing the rod and spoiling the child does not hold good any more. In these more sensitive times, it is critically important that teachers bring into the classroom all those attributes which will make them role models for their pupils and thereby make education for the young a true and focused search for knowledge.

We understand that the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education is engaged in preparing the draft of a manual relating to teachers' training. That is a good move and once the education ministry sets about overseeing such training, it will surely be another feather in its cap. The ministry has performed well, thanks to an able and committed minister, over these past two and a half years. Its goal of turning teachers away from inflicting corporal punishment on pupils promises to set education along a modern path. Such new generation philosophy must make it clear to teachers that corporal punishment degrades pupils and far from ensuring that no child is left behind only leaves large swathes of pupils psychologically scarred, perhaps for life. Corporal punishment is but a mirror image of the societal violence we are all keen to stamp out. Worse, inflicting corporal punishment on the young exposes a yawning gap in a teacher's suitability for teaching: he or she is incapable of exerting moral influence on the pupil.

Teaching loses meaning if the teacher bases classroom instructions on fear. The new guidelines on classroom techniques should result in meaningful change.

### Correction

The first line of the last paragraph of the editorial titled "Toxic ships for scrapping" printed on May 29, should read "while we would like the ..." instead of "while we would not like ...". The error is regretted.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 30

**1876** Ottoman sultan Abd-ul-Aziz is deposed and succeeded by his nephew Murad V.

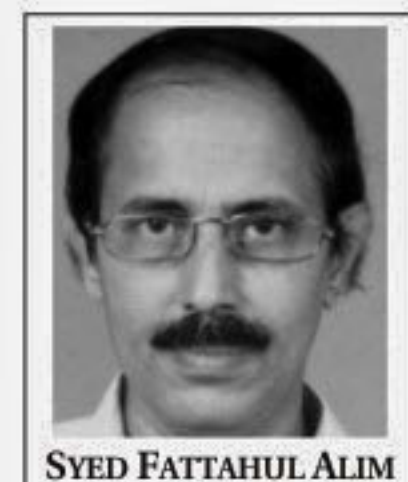
**1967** Egypt and Jordan unite against Israel. The King of Jordan and President Abdel Nasser of Egypt sign a joint defence agreement in case of a conflict with Israel.

**1968** Charles De Gaulle reappears publicly after his flight to Baden-Baden, Germany, and dissolves the French National Assembly by a radio appeal. This is the turning point of May 1968 in France.

**1981** Bangladeshi president assassinated. The president of Bangladesh, Zia Rahman, is assassinated in Chittagong in a coup attempt.

**1989** Tiananmen Square protests of 1989: the 33-foot high "Goddess of Democracy" statue is unveiled in Tiananmen Square by student demonstrators.

# Diplomatic faux pas and our politics



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

**S**INCE long we have got used to foreign diplomats passing comments about sensitive national issues that go beyond diplomatic decency or norms. Disgruntled politicians have often expressed their unhappiness over such comments, but often they prefer not to make hurt feelings official. To give vent to their resentments, piqued citizens write in the letter/opinion columns of newspapers or express their reservations at the talk shows in the electronic media. But seldom have the political governments been found to come up with fitting responses to such diplomatic faux pas by foreigners.

While we would expect professional and punctilious utterances from foreign diplomats on our soil, our political leaders, too, have to be cautious when conversing with foreign diplomats. Though unfortunate, our leaders have often been found to unnecessarily open their hearts to foreign diplomats or visiting dignitaries. They even think nothing of letting down their political counterparts in opposition before them.

Had such instances of political gaffes by our leaders remained confined within the national boundary that would be excusable. But when they speak ill of their political opponents on foreign soil, it is really regrettable. And this habit of washing our dirty linen in public in front of foreign diplomats or on foreign soil only provides outsiders the encouragement to make unbecoming remarks.

In democratic parlance, harsh criticism of political opposition by

the ruling party or vice versa is nothing wrong. The media, too, plays a very positive role in exposing the lapses and failures of the ruling party in office in running the affairs of government. In the same way, they also critique the opposition about the way they carry out their programmes in opposing the government or performing their part as a shadow government. A section of the media may be pro-ruling party, while the other pro-opposition. But even when they follow their respective party lines, they should not be blind to the wrongs or lapses committed

truth.

Foreign diplomats who have an axe to grind may take hold of the advantage of this infantile political culture to make statements that hardly befit standard code of conduct of the host country. And, one cannot blame them if our political leaders unwittingly or deliberately invite the trouble on their own.

Consider the inadvertent criticisms leader of the opposition Begum Khaleda Zia or Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina hurled at their respective rivals on foreign soils recently. Neither of them could main-

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by their party of choice, neither should they be insensitive to the opposition's realities.

However, in our prevailing political culture, display of such prudence is a rare commodity. Neither the ruling party nor the opposition adheres to this basic norm. A large section of the media follows its party line, rain or shine. And it is no exception for the other section of the media. Objectivity becomes the ultimate victim of the situation. It is only a handful of them that are trying to maintain a balance between the two opposing trends and treating either political camp in an even-handed manner. In consequence the politicians whether in office or in opposition do not care to know the

tain their composure while blasting their opponent. Addressing a gathering of the Switzerland Awami League in Geneva the PM said on May 17: "The leader of the opposition is asking the government to quit power after failing to enjoy the huge wealth she amassed illegally..... The opposition leader and her two sons have earned huge money through corruption during the last BNP-Jamaat regime and they whitened their black money by paying fines to the government."

The opposition leader in a similar vein told US Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake when the latter met her in Washington on May 26 that "...the judiciary in Bangladesh has become partisan. When a

respectable person like Prof Yunus is deprived from fair justice how the commoners would get justice."

The problem is, even if the comments made by either leader may not be without merit, it sounds OK at home. When the same words are uttered in foreign lands they sound awkward to the rank strangers or our expatriates present there.

There is nothing wrong in taking on the opponent party or its leader at home with harshest language, so far as it adheres to the rules of the game in parliamentary democracy. But uttering the same abroad is apt to portray a very poor self-image of the leaders themselves or the nation they lead. A line has to be drawn between what we say at home and when on a visit to another country.

True, no diplomat or politician was ever completely free from such slip-ups. But that is excusable, if only because such unintended bloopers occur few and far between. But have our leaders given a second thought to the matter? Foreign diplomats from developed countries, on a visit or performing regular diplomatic service in an underdeveloped country, cannot overcome the temptation to talk in a patronising or even overweening tone. But then how would our government respond to those in a befitting manner, if our leaders themselves speak offhandedly outside the country?

In order to show due respect to the democratic values we hold so dear, we, especially our national leaders, need to be more careful about what we say at home or abroad. If charity begins at home, foreign diplomats, too, will also not fail to notice it and show equal respect to our values and culture.

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# Pakistan's agony

DILARA CHOUDHURY

**P**AKISTAN is in great trouble. Never in its sixty-four year history had the country been confronted with such a grievous crisis like the one it faces right now. It seems that the very existence of Pakistan as a sovereign state is at stake. Why is Pakistan in such a sorry state? There are compelling reasons to be considered.

First, Pakistan's strategic relationship with Washington, which it heavily depends on for economic aid and military hardware, had been seriously ruptured when US violated Pakistan's sovereignty and killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin-Laden. The Pakistani government and its military were embarrassed beyond any measure. Islamabad seemed to be at a loss. Eventually, the government reacted angrily.

The magnitude of the anger could be discerned when Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani, in an unprecedented joint session of the Parliament on May 15, threatened US of dire consequences if such acts were repeated again, and of blocking the supply line for the Nato forces in Afghanistan if there was any more drone attack by the US. A review of US-Pakistan relations, never done before, would also be conducted, he added.

Obviously, Pakistan is indignant at the violation of its sovereignty. Any self-respecting country would feel the same way. But the point is: has not Islamabad's pro-American government already compromised on it? Otherwise, how can 3,000 US commandos, who are outside the jurisdiction of the government, function in Pakistan? How can some elements of CIA operate in the country without the knowledge of ISI? Has not the Pakistani government given implicit permission for US drone attacks on the militants who attack the Nato supply line in Afghanistan?

As such, it is no wonder that even after the speech and threats, a grim US president, on the eve of his departure for Europe, reiterated his country's firm resolve that more solo oper-

ations would be conducted if other al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders, suspected to be hiding in Pakistan, are found. In the meantime, more drone attacks have been carried out since the Laden incident, killing both militants and civilians. Pakistan's response has been a deafening silence.

Second, Pakistan is now the main target of attacks by the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban who want to avenge Laden's death. Since his death, suicide bombing by militants claimed numerous innocent lives in north-western Pakistan. But the recent

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Taliban attack on the naval airport of Mehran in Karachi, which is only fifteen (15) kilometers from Pakistan's largest naval airport Masrur, where nuclear weapons are supposedly stored, has sent a chill down peoples' spines. It is evident that Pakistan is at war with itself.

Clearly, Pakistan is in a mess. A mess for which Pakistan itself is primarily responsible, but US contribution to it is no less. How can Pakistan find a way out? The exit route is extremely difficult and slippery, and it would need all the wisdom, ingenuity and vision that the Pakistani leadership can muster.

First, it is commendable that Islamabad is going to review its strategic partnership with the US. In the process, it should be borne in mind that no relationship can bring lasting benefits if it is based on convenience only. Like in the past, the strategic partnership that was forged between the US and Islamabad following 9/11 in 2001 contained ingredients of

mutual needs rather than the convergence of their respective national interests. As such, the vital ingredient, "mutual trust," was missing in their bilateral ties, with Washington becoming impatient with Pakistan's alleged half-hearted commitment for its War against Terror, and Pakistan increasingly turning reluctant to accommodate US more and commit further political capital.

The situation was exasperating for both. Last month, top generals of both countries met in Oman in search of a compromise formula. For a compromise, a security analyst recom-

mends that US should demonstrate "long-term improved partnership whereby Pakistan will have its core interests protected," and in return Pakistanis "will have to jettison their working relationships with extremists and militant groups inside their own society."

Here is the crux of the problem. What does the US mean by the "core interest" of Pakistan? How does Pakistan view it? Pakistan considers that its "core interest" lies in the resolution of Kashmir issue with India and installing a pro-Pakistan government in Afghanistan. Perhaps, for this very reason, i.e. to protect its "core interest," elements within the military, may be without the knowledge of the civil government, maintained links with some Afghan and India-focused groups like Haqqani network, Quetta Shura Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Washington's interest, on the other hand, is to end the war, stabilise Afghanistan with pro-Indian Karzai

government ensuring strong US presence, and total indifference to the Kashmir issue. One can, thus, clearly discern that national interests of Washington and Pakistan are not aligned in any way. Obviously then, Pakistan, while revisiting its relations with the US, should make clear what strategic benefits it expects from their present relationship.

Second, now that Islamabad has pledged to review its ties with US, it should do the same for the entire gambit of its foreign policy, especially its India policy, and try to gauge what benefits accrued from its present policy towards India. Pakistan, at present, has that golden opportunity since, for the first time in its history, out of anguish and grief, the entire country -- the party in power, the opposition, and the army, which, for the first time is Pakistan's history submitted before the Parliament -- have coalesced. Together, they should do soul searching in order to find out what went wrong in their country. No self-respecting country should put up with the violation of its sovereignty, though it has been somewhat compromised, but the incident of May 2 should be enough to break the camel's back.

Lastly and most importantly, the leadership -- civilian and army -- and the elites should work diligently to strengthen its nascent democracy, bring the army under civilian control, try to destroy the jihadi outfits for its own survival, and establish good governance so that the people of Pakistan can get back their faith in their country's destiny.

Ordinary Pakistanis have waited a long time to get their country, which was hijacked by the army, back. It's about time that Pakistani elites live up to their expectations. Only American economic and military aid and carrots like proposed lowering of tariff for Pakistani imports will not alleviate Pakistan's agony. There is a need for a pragmatic foreign policy and efforts to build the country. There is actually no other alternative.

The writer is a Political Analyst