

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Will this time be different?

Attempt to foil BNP rally

The govt should rather help than hinder

BNP'S acting secretary general has alleged that the government is trying to thwart the March 12 BNP rally. The allegation comes as extremely disconcerting news. In a democratic country every political party is entitled to hold rallies to press home its demands in a peaceful manner. However, a news item in yesterday's issue of this paper gives us a different picture altogether. Reportedly, hoteliers in the capital and bus owners all over the country are being intimidated by certain influential quarters to prevent BNP activists from joining the rally.

Any attempt to foil the upcoming rally, that too on the part of the government, stands in stark contrast to people's fundamental democratic rights. Earlier, BNP's request to hold the rally at the Paltan Maidan was rejected with no plausible explanation from the concerned authorities, given the fact that the BNP had declared this programme a long time ago. And we wonder whether the police have allowed the AL's counter programme to be held at the Maidan, or whether permission has been sought at all.

The nod has been given to hold the rally in front of BNP party office; we wonder whether the authorities consider holding a political rally on a major thoroughfare a sensible alternative to Paltan Maidan, given the tremendous traffic snarl up it will cause. And even then we are seeing some surreptitious mechanisms at work to foil the rally.

We are perturbed also by unwarranted utterances by some senior AL leaders, meant as warning to the BNP of any attempt to create chaos, and the likely dire consequences, and more so when it comes from a senior AL office bearer.

A political party's right to hold a rally is guaranteed by the constitution, and it is the government's bounden duty to ensure that a constitutional right is upheld, not obstructed. If the government has any forewarning and authentic information it should take appropriate actions as deemed necessary and share the same with the public, otherwise people are likely to ascribe motives to the police actions. Contrived precipitate action will be counterproductive and will not go down well with the people.

Woes of our female expatriate workers

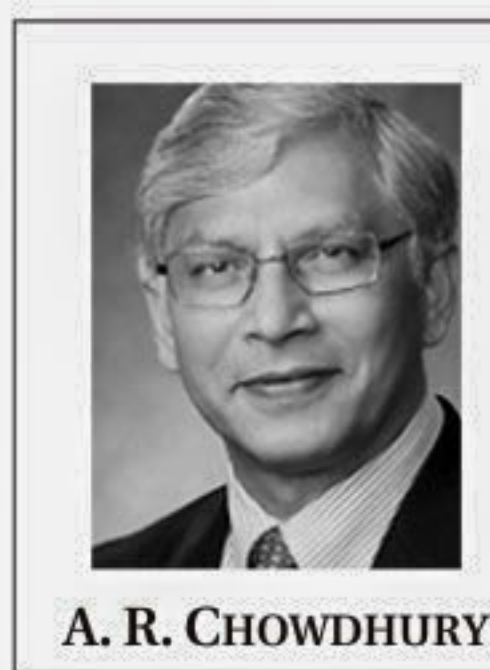
Take prompt, stern and long-term measures

RECENT reports of Bangladeshi female migrant workers in the Middle East being subjected to physical, psychological and sexual abuse are highly disturbing. Migrant workers recently returned from countries such as Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates and Oman, have made such allegations -- in addition to those of overwork, confinement within the workplace and lack of weekly holidays. Despite international labour laws on migrant workers guaranteeing their rights, time and again they have been violated with impunity.

Two years ago, our government made certain commitments towards the protection of our labour force abroad but those remain unfulfilled. Among them was the promise of cell phones and local SIM cards for workers overseas to enable them to communicate for help in times of trouble. Another commitment was to establish a Bangladesh embassy in Lebanon -- which has become the major destination for female domestic workers from our country with some 60,000 workers migrating.

The decisions remain to be implemented, with the absence of a means of communication as well as proper authorities to contact in times of crisis, leaving workers helpless in strange lands. The sector also lacks formalisation, with brokers rather than authorised recruiting agencies arranging job visas for the workers.

According to the World Bank, migrant workers in the Middle East have made Bangladesh the world's eighth largest remittance earner. From Lebanon alone, earning from female workers is around \$150 million. It is high time that the sector is formalised, with migrant workers being properly trained and sensitised before going abroad, following proper procedure and provided with full legal, social and psychological support when there. We urge the government to take up the issue with the host countries. While they have a duty to protect expatriate workers, our own government is no less responsible for the security and protection of the rights of Bangladeshis



A. R. CHOWDHURY

ROBERT Zoellick's announcement that he will not seek reelection as President of the World Bank has led to a media frenzy about who should be the next chief. Demands are growing to break the 68-year old tradition of automatically selecting an American as

the next head of the World Bank.

The Bank's 25-member Executive Board said it will accept nominations until March 23. Three candidates would be selected for interview. The Board wants to finalise its selection by the time of the April 20-22 Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Beginning in the late 1990's, confronted with the fall of communism, the Bank began an intense process of self-reflection. This opened the way to interesting new fields of operations, such as governance and anti-corruption, in addition to the traditional role of providing aid and loans. But the changes were incremental, and deeper questions about the organisation and its governance were never addressed. Two major organisational challenges face the World Bank today. First, structure and internal function; and second, governance reform.

With the majority of its professional staff located in Washington, DC, consisting of life-tenured experts and countless consultants, the Bank needs to reorganise its workforce. This would help to overcome the rigidities that affect the organisation. Furthermore, the organisation, conceived first and foremost as a bank, is still the turf of economists and finance specialists, even though lending operations are gradually losing importance within the Bank. In order to function more efficiently, a decentralised, and, most importantly, flexible workforce should be among the Bank's top priorities.

Moreover, a lack of inertia impedes the organisation. This requires governance and management reforms. Take China as an example. A key development player and the world's second-largest economy, China still accounts for less than 5% of the

Bank's voting shares, while the European Union controls around 37% and the United States holds 16%. With eight Europeans on the Bank's 25-member Executive Board, the Bank remains a poor reflection of today's emerging world order.

The Bank's major shareholders also face another important choice. Emerging markets, including the BRIC countries, rightly demand a greater voice in running the Bank, especially if the Bank's focus shifts towards global public goods. But if the US and European countries are unwilling to give up control, the system of official international financing established by Bretton Woods in 1944 will become increasingly fragmented. Many of the leading emerging markets, like China and Brazil, may decide to go on their own. This would have negative consequences for multilateralism.

Over the last few decades, a number of emerg-

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Most likely, no.

ing markets have achieved significant economic growth. The list of their development successes is growing. This means that many of these countries have already graduated, or in the near future will graduate, out of the need for concessional lending from the Bank. Also, easier access to private finance will force a re-evaluation of the methods and magnitude of the Bank's non-concessional loans.

These daunting challenges mean that the World Bank's next president will have to be someone whose primary task is to initiate and sustain change while commanding support and legitimacy across the Bank's membership. He or she will also require a demonstrated capacity for political leadership and a core conviction that the Bank needs a new vision and path forward. The new president should understand that development is

more than a growth in overall economic activity measured by GDP. So where could the Bank find such a leader?

The next World Bank chief shouldn't be selected in a behind-the-scenes stitch-up. Certainly, selection criteria should include understanding and experience of the concerns of developing countries. A candidate from an emerging market would be a welcome change.

But who could that be?

Last week Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina proposed Professor Yunus's name. He would have been a formidable candidate. But he has declined to be considered. A number of other names have also been floated -- Lula da Silva of Brazil, Ernest Zedillo of Mexico and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala of Nigeria -- to name a few.

There is no guarantee that a non-American will be selected to head the Bank, although China, Brazil and other countries with growing economic clout have been exerting pressure for a change in the US-European arrangement of controlling the top positions in the World Bank and IMF, respectively.

But the forces perpetuating the status quo -- European and American resistance to change and emerging-market countries' passivity and lack of unity -- remain powerful. This was evident last year during the selection of Christine Lagarde to head the IMF Election-year politics in the

US will strengthen these forces further, with President Barack Obama's administration unlikely to relinquish a symbol of global power, which would invite Republican opponents' charges of weak leadership.

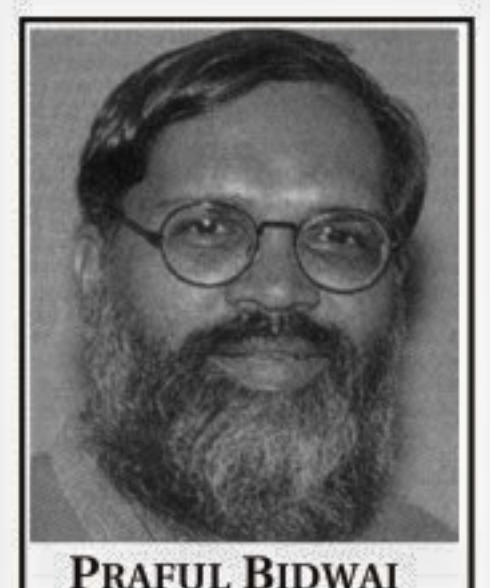
It seems implausible that the World Bank's clients -- the countries that have to live with its policies and programmes -- have little say in who leads this institution. With a new international economic architecture emerging, the Bank needs a different selection process that would help to choose the most qualified person, regardless of nationality. Such a leader should be able to carve out a new role for the Bank in a globalised and interconnected world.

So, will this time be different? Most likely, no.

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PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

Vilifying anti-nuclear protesters



PRAFUL BIDWAI

IS the Manmohan Singh government doing to the Koodankulam anti-nuclear protesters what the Bush administration did to Saddam Hussein's Iraq -- invent an excuse for using military force? Going by the government's slanderous claim that the agitators are acting at the behest of foreign NGOs, the answer is yes.

Official dirty-tricks departments are hell-bent on "finding" the equivalent of "proof" of existence of "weapons of mass destruction" -- diversion of funds to support the agitators. Not a day passes without their planted stories.

Dr. Singh has himself stooped to the abysmal level of invoking the "foreign hand" and charging that the Koodankulam plant is being blocked at this pre-commissioning stage by a handful of people connected to US and Scandinavian NGOs hostile to India. Otherwise, he told Science magazine: "The thinking component" of the people favours nuclear power.

The anti-plant movement at Koodankulam isn't new, but has been around for over a decade. This is richly documented in Koodankulam Chronology (dianuke.org and lokayat.org.in).

The agitation has mobilised one lakh farmers and fisherfolk in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Its latest phase is an uninterrupted relay hunger-strike since October 18, with hundreds, at times thousands, participating.

Such mobilisations cannot succeed with money alone. No juicy plots written by policemen and spies will convince anyone that the movement lacks deep roots, strong moral convictions and broad-based support.

Those who level the "foreign hand" charge are obsessed with making India's energy economy dependent on foreign reactors. They have also tried to dilute the nuclear liability act under foreign pressure.

Yet, every citizen of the world has a legitimate concern about nuclear hazards, no matter where they originate. "A nuclear accident anywhere is a nuclear accident everywhere." The fallout of Chernobyl (1986) can still be detected, even on the South Pole. So can radiation from Fukushima.

Fukushima caused a tectonic shift in people's perception of nuclear hazards the world over. Even in France, which gets three-fourths of its electricity from nuclear power, an opinion poll says the people's confidence that "government action will protect them from nuclear risks is severely damaged."

Nuclear risks have climbed to the fourth-highest public concern, behind unemployment, the financial crisis, and social exclusion.

Nothing could be more absurd than the allegation that "the thinking component" of the Indian population supports nuclear power. Numerous eminent thinkers have called for a moratorium on nuclear power expansion pending a broad-based audit and safety review of India's nuclear programme by a high-powered committee composed of independent experts, social scientists, civil society organisations and representatives of actual or potential victims.

They include historians Romila Thapar and Mushirul Hasan, economists Amit Bhaduri and Deepak Nayyar, political scientists Rajeev Bhargava and Achin Vanaik, former ambassadors Nirupam

Nuclear projects can only be pushed through with brute force and mass-scale suppression of liberties, paving the way for a police state. That's the horrendous price the imposition of nuclear power will inflict on Indian democracy.

Sen and Madhu Bhaduri, artists Krishan Khanna and Vivan Sundaram, writer Arundhati Roy, and scientists P.M. Bhargava and P. Balaram, the director of the prestigious Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore.

They were joined by former Navy chief Admiral L. Ramdas, former Atomic Energy Regulatory Board chairman A. Gopalakrishnan, and Aruna Roy and Harsh Mander, both members of the government's own National Advisory Council. This shows an unprecedented fit between the intelligentsia's and the public's concerns about nuclear safety.

Dr. Singh's cavalier dismissal of these concerns follows the logic of his dogmatic assertion that nuclear power's grave safety problems highlighted by Fukushima have been resolved, and India can now massively expand nuclear power generation.

However, the global nuclear industry hasn't a clue about the causes and consequences of Fukushima, the world's first multi-reactor meltdown. The plant operator has failed to bring the reactors under control, and doesn't even know the

location of the molten fuel.

It has just been disclosed that at the height of the Fukushima crisis, Japanese leaders didn't know the extent of damage at the plant and secretly considered evacuating Tokyo. A new investigation by the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation vividly shows how "Japan teetered on the edge of an even larger nuclear crisis" than the one at the Fukushima plant.

In India, only the delusion-prone nuclear establishment believes the nuclear programme can be run safely with Russian reactors riddled with 31 design flaws (according to an official report), or the French company Areva's European Pressurised Reactors (EPR).

The EPR has not passed safety tests anywhere, including Finland and France. Their EPRs are over four years behind schedule, 95% over budget, and mired in nasty legal disputes. The French EPR may well be scrapped if the Socialists win the coming elections.

Yet, India wants to install six of these huge, unwieldy, untested 1,650 MW reactors at Jaitapur on Maharashtra's ecologically fragile Konkan Coast. Nuclear plants are also planned in Gujarat, Andhra, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, where they face stiff, determined and informed opposition.

These nuclear projects can only be pushed through with brute force and mass-scale suppression of liberties, paving the way for a police state. That's the horrendous price the imposition of nuclear power will inflict on Indian democracy.

Yet, if our policy-makers want to resolve the power crisis, and promote safe climate-friendly energy, they should embrace the renewable energy revolution sweeping the globe.

Renewable Energy (RE) accounts for one-fifth of the world's power capacity and delivers 18% of global electricity as well as final energy consumption -- in contrast to only 2% for nuclear power. Unlike nuclear reactors, which take 10-15 years to erect, RE facilities are installed in just months and can quickly relieve our power crisis.

Globally, solar electricity is growing by 53% annually and wind power by 32%. Solar-thermal, biomass and tidal and geothermal sources are also growing rapidly. Developing countries are playing an important role in driving the renewables revolution. India can take the lead here.

The number of nuclear reactors worldwide peaked at 444 in 2004. It's now down to under 400, and will soon decrease to less than 300. It would be foolhardy to chase this exhausted, outdated and unpopular energy source and miss the renewables revolution.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 6

1946

Ho Chi Minh signs an agreement with France which recognizes Vietnam as an autonomous state in the Indochinese Federation and the French Union.

1953

Georgy Maksimilianovich Malenkov succeeds Joseph Stalin as Premier of the Soviet Union and First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

1964

Nation of Islam's Elijah Muhammad officially gives boxing champion Cassius Clay the name Muhammad Ali.

1975

Algiers Accord: Iran and Iraq announce a settlement of their border dispute.