

## SUNDAY POUCH

## Introducing digital power meter

*Widen coverage and bring down cost*

**T**HE government's decision to introduce pre-paid power meters on a wider scale across the nation from next month is welcome.

Given the magnitude of system loss at around 13 per cent, and uncontrolled consumption of power by users, especially at peak hours, the government has finally taken a step in the right direction.

The government has hiked up power tariff a number of times. The argument of consumers against these hikes has been that before going for such tariff raises, the government should have rather plugged the leakage in the distribution regime to save cost.

But the only option open before the government so far was to manage load through power cuts instead of curbing system loss including pilferage. Now with the digital prepaid power meter, the authorities will be able to rationalise the power cuts and deliver more relief to power users from frequent outages.

Admittedly, a big chunk of electricity the power companies generate is lost or remains unaccounted for in various ways.

This is partly due to the technical losses at the power plants and in the transmission and distribution lines. There is another 5-7% loss due to non-technical reasons at customer level such as tampering with meter, illegal connection and so on.

The use of pre-paid meters to reduce system loss and manage load is not something new. Albeit on a limited scale, it is already operational in Uttara, Tongi and Gulshan areas of the capital. Even with the planned expansion of its coverage in December in a few more districts including Chittagong, Bogra and Sylhet, the vast majority of the consumers numbering some 1.25 crores will still remain beyond the ambit of pre-paid meters.

Therefore, the government needs to expedite the introduction of this system among as many users as possible within the shortest possible time.

Managing load, combating theft, controlling peak hour consumption and simplifying bill collection apart, prepaid meters have also the potential to benefit the consumers through stopping inflated or ghost bills.

Therefore, side by side with further expansion of the user-base, the government should also consider keeping the cost of the meters within the buying power of common consumers.

## Celebrate life

*Acknowledging the past; rejoicing in excellence for a better future*

**F**OR the last five years, The Daily Star in collaboration with the Standard Chartered Bank has been honouring budding talents in the fields of arts and culture like, lyric, cinema and photography. This year's theme was "Celebrating Youth of Bangladesh." The spirit of the evening was well encapsulated in the rendition of classical music by two famous Indian classical artists.

This is in a way meeting our obligation to the nation, of fulfilling our corporate responsibility to the future generation in particular, by offering opportunities to the many hidden young talents a platform to expose their potential. And we did so too this year by recognizing the works of several lyricists and photographers who were chosen from a large number of participants from all over the country.

Alongside recognizing the promising artistes of the present, Celebrating Life justified the event and indeed the day by honouring four of the country's famous icons, Firoza Begum, Ferdousi Rahman, Abdur Razzak and Amanul Haque for their achievements in the field of Nazrul Sangeet, folk song, cinema and photography, respectively, with the Lifetime Achievement Award. Firoza Begum, a renowned exponent of Nazrul Sangeet, and Ferdousi Rahman, noted for her devotion to folk songs, are inspiring personalities. Abdur Razzak and Amanul Haque are also beacons in their own fields.

In recognizing the icons for their contribution to the society we have tried to link the past with the present, to help those who are aspiring for higher accomplishment to draw inspiration from those that have preceded them in their own fields of endeavour.

It will be our hope that the young creative minds who were recognised on the day, and the many young minds who had participated in the event through their works, would feel motivated to continue to pursue the path of their creative endeavour. They will do well to take cue from what the winners of the Lifetime Achievement Award said about how they had progressed in their

# Khaleda Zia tempting history?



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

**K**HALEDA Zia, the leader of the opposition, is in Delhi on an official visit. She was invited by the government of India and accorded a red

carpet welcome. Besides calling on the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and having lunch with him, she was also hosted by the leader of the Indian opposition Ms. Shushma Swaraj of BJP.

Khaleida Zia's official host, the newly appointed Indian Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Salman Khurshid, also held substantive discussion at Hyderabad House, which is usually the venue for receiving visiting heads of government. Her tour ends with meeting Sonia Gandhi, the head of the ruling Congress Party, and President Pranab Mukherjee.

The last time Khaleida went to India was in 2006 when she was the prime minister. The outcome of the talks with the leaders then was inconsequential. It was reported that the Indians found it difficult to do business with her. She referred to many of the unresolved bilateral issues and the fact that India had consistently failed to honour its commitments made to Bangladesh, both in letter and in spirit. At that time bilateral trade and the high tariff barriers in India, the unresolved issue of sharing of the waters of the common rivers, and the matter of demarcation of land borders were high on her agenda.

India was of course concerned about Bangladesh "allowing the use of its territory to some of the insurgents" from the north-eastern states of India, causing serious security problems. India was also keen to have transit rights from Bangladesh to connect these north-eastern states with mainland India. But then it seemed that any cooperation with India was not in Khaleida Zia's immediate agenda. The outcome was a stalemate in bilateral relations.

When Awami League swept into power in the 2008 general elections, one of the priority tasks of Prime Minister Shiekh Hasina was to travel to New Delhi and meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and extend a warm hand of friendship. Both sides then sat down and pledged much to do for each other. A new era of friendship seemed to have begun. It is four years now, but



STAR

*Khaleida Zia may also have reasons to be optimistic regarding future India-Bangladesh relations. She is a no-nonsense politician. The changing geo-politics of the region and the dictates of losing economic opportunities that can come through sub-regional cooperation could have finally dawned on her.*

much of what has been pledged by India is yet to see the light of day. Bangladesh, at its own initiative, had promised to bring the insurgents creating security problem in north-east of India to task. It also promised not to allow Bangladesh soil to be used for insurgency against the central government of India. In fact, Bangladesh incarcerated some top insurgent leaders who were then handed over to the Indian authorities.

While Bangladesh was sincere in carrying out its commitments, India responded with little else than assurances. It had pledged to exchange the enclaves and the adversely possessed territories, and to finalise the demarcation of the land boundary. But all this was held up at India's end due to legal and parliamentary obstacles. Even the eagerly awaited agreement for equitable sharing of the waters of the Teesta river could not be initiated as the chief minister of West Bengal took umbrage that she was not consulted before the event.

So all went up in smoke. Only the matter of disbursement of a \$1 billion Indian credit was taken up in right earnest. This was mainly to buy Indian rolling stock to ease the movement of Indian goods through Bangladesh if

the issue of transit was finally agreed upon by Bangladesh. The other project that India pursued diligently was to connect India with Bangladesh through a grid in order to sell electricity. To many in India this narrative may sound like the usual litany of complaints by Bangladesh. But can anyone overlook the reality?

Now that Khaleida Zia and her party have a fair chance of capturing power in the next elections, India perhaps thinks that a less adversarial BNP could be to its advantage. All the security advantage that the Awami League provided should not be reversed in case the BNP returns to power. Hence, the invitation and all the bonhomie. Khaleida Zia, by committing herself publicly to a new era of friendship with India, also has an eye on her own electability. She would not like to give voters any excuse that could upset her chance to return to power. Her party has therefore urged all Bangladeshis skeptical of Indian intentions not to look at the rearview mirror.

However, Khaleida Zia may also have reasons to be optimistic regarding future India-Bangladesh relations. She is a no-nonsense politician. The changing geo-politics of the region and

the dictates of losing economic opportunities that can come through sub-regional cooperation could have finally dawned on her. After all, it was her late husband President Zia, the founder of BNP, who had initiated the idea of regional cooperation by proposing Saarc. But has BNP calculated the political cost if this policy of embracing India backfires?

No one will be more pleased than the people of Bangladesh if the two countries sincerely work to resolve the outstanding bilateral issues. The next stage would be that the leaders start sharing a common vision of building a prosperous region. Khaleida Zia has already mooted the idea that India could join a consortium with China to build a deep-sea port in Bangladesh. This is well and good. In many ways the Awami League had also encouraged such process and had shared some visions with India. But then what happened?

The question that beggars an answer is, what has changed so dramatically that we can expect India to work towards our mutual good? To be honest, nothing substantive has led to this fresh dynamics. The Indian Congress is just keen to ensure that Khaleida Zia is not adversarial if BNP returns to power. So, by all measures, it could be just a confluence of interest that has Congress and the BNP playing the same tune.

If BNP now thinks that a fresh look at India is imperative, it may be a little early in the day. General elections in India in 2014 could change yet again the parameters on which BNP is now crafting its policy towards India.

But in any case, Khaleida Zia has made a good start. At least the people of Bangladesh can rest knowing that both the major parties here do not have an anti-India agenda. The ball is definitely now in India's court. It has to play the cards well so that whichever political party wins the next elections in Bangladesh it can ensure that relations are built on solid foundations and can stand the test of time. The acid test would be how soon India can redeem the pledges made to Bangladesh and deliver them.

But India and BNP must understand that both are challenging history. The way forward could still be a bed of thorns if either country reneges on its pledges.

The writer is a former Ambassador and a regular commentator on contemporary issues. E-mail: ashfaq303@gmail.com

# Power struggles make picking China's next leaders daunting

CHING CHEONG

**M**ORE than 350 top cadres of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will gather for the seventh and last time to finalise the leadership succession plan to be adopted at the 18th Party Congress, which opens next Thursday.

The plenum, as the gathering is called, will have a daunting task, given the short time it has.

Over the next few days, it will pick the select few who will sit on the CCP's powerful Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), which essentially rules China.

Besides the PSC, the plenum will also have to finalise the line-up of the Politburo, which is a rung below the PSC, and the Central Secretariat.

At the same time, it will need to vet the members of the next Central Committee, which is the highest authority within the CCP, to make sure they do not include those who are sympathisers of disgraced former Chongqing chief Bo Xilai.

The final make-up of the PSC has yet to be settled, owing to the fierce jostling for power between the princelings and the *tuanpai*, or those with ties to the Communist Youth League (CYL), which is President Hu Jintao's power base.

No fewer than six name lists have been proposed, reflecting the intense competition. There are 10 candidates

in the running for the seven PSC seats, reduced from the current nine.

The last seat is apparently the target of a fierce tussle involving three regional party chiefs: Wang Yang of Guangdong (CYL), Yu Zhengsheng of Shanghai (princeling), and Zhang Gaoli of Tianjin (a protege of former president Jiang Zemin).

Given this situation, where there are 10 candidates for only seven seats, China's next top leader Xi Jinping is

*The final make-up of the PSC has yet to be settled, owing to the fierce jostling for power between the princelings and the tuanpai, or those with ties to the Communist Youth League (CYL), which is President Hu Jintao's power base.*

said to have suggested using differential voting to determine the final seven. This means that of the 10, the seven with the highest number of votes will get into the PSC.

Such a voting method is unprecedented. Previous line-ups, for the PSC and the 25-member Politburo, were agreed on by "consensus," which in effect means members falling in line with a powerful figure's decision.

Advocates of political reform have long wanted differential voting to be introduced for the PSC. It is now about to happen, ironically not because of any conscious effort on the

part of the leadership to reform the system, but because of its failure to reach a consensus.

This points to three developments: First, in the post-Deng Xiaoping era, there is no longer a CCP "strongman" who can hold the centre or break a deadlock between princelings and *tuanpai*.

Second, Hu's *tuanpai* have finally come of age. When Hu took over as CCP chief at the 16th Party Congress in

2002, his faction did not have enough clout to negotiate for more seats in the PSC, which was then dominated by Jiang's men. Since then, the *tuanpai* have become more assertive, and Hu has been able to put his own men in top jobs.

Third, the Bo Xilai scandal has inadvertently dealt a major blow to both the princelings and Jiang. Bo, a princeling who enjoyed Jiang's patronage at one time, is widely expected to be charged with a litany of crimes.

His alleged attempt to unseat Xi forced the latter to enter into an alliance with Hu. His hand strengthened,

Hu was able to arm twist Xi into letting him stay on as chairman of the powerful Central Military Commission for presumably two more years.

Another difficult task for the plenary session will be to weed out Bo's residual influence. The pro-Bo bloc has already openly challenged the right of Parliament to strip Bo of his delegate status, thereby depriving him of his legal immunity.

Some Bo sympathisers have even gone as far as mounting mudslinging campaigns against Xi and Premier Wen Jiabao, accusing their families of amassing huge personal fortunes.

At the same time, the plenary session will have to endorse the Central Disciplinary Committee's earlier decision to expel Bo from the party and initiate legal proceedings against him. It will also have to make sure Bo sympathisers are shut out from the next Central Committee.

Finally, the plenary session is expected to adopt a decision that will see Hu's Scientific Development View enshrined in the party's Constitution as one of the ruling theories of China, together with Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory and Jiang Zemin's Three Represents.

The Straits Times (Singapore). All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement with Asia News Network.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

November 4

- 1798** Beginning of the Russo-Ottoman siege of Corfu.
- 1918** World War I: Austria-Hungary surrenders to Italy.
- 2008** Barack Obama becomes the first African-American to be elected President of the United States.