

Abduction and killing

Distressing phenomenon

THE attending circumstances of a BNP leader being abducted from his in-laws house in Kushtia, and whose handcuffed body with police marking was found 20 miles away several hours later, are very disturbing indeed. The victim was picked up, allegedly by RAB personnel, according to his relatives. But RAB has denied any knowledge of it. The intriguing bits are that the abductors wore RAB uniform and the car they drove away had RAB stickers on it. And the family was advised by the abductors to contact RAB office in Jhenidah.

The matter is extremely worrisome. If we are to accept the RAB version then are we to believe that there are gangs on the loose which are masquerading as law enforcing agencies. And handcuffs with 'police markings' apparently held the victim captive. If so, how could they find their way into the market assuming that the police had nothing to do with it? These are supposed to be restricted items and should the police have not seen to it that these are taken off the shelf, knowing that they are there and can be misused.

The statistics of forced disappearances and killings have been alarming. In three years between 2009 and 2012, around 157 people were victims of forced disappearance, some of who were political figures belonging to the opposition.

Such killings and disappearances, many of which have been linked to the law enforcing agencies by the victims' relatives, have cast a question mark on the performance of RAB, whose contribution otherwise, particularly in stemming the activities of proscribed religious extremists, has been exemplary.

Under the circumstances the burden of proof that its men were not involved in the abduction and death of the BNP leader is on RAB, and it will have to move quickly to apprehend the masqueraders if such incidents are not to happen in future. The agency must immediately go into the roots, to unearth the culprits of this and all the other cases of forced abduction. Otherwise it will have to bear the stigma of culpability for these deaths.

Amartya Sen's heartening observation

No scope for complacency, however

NOBEL laureate and economist Amartya Sen's observation that Bangladesh has outperformed India in all social indicators is certainly heartening news, but there is no room for complacency. Granted, our nation's concerted efforts to promote gender equality has contributed significantly to this positive trend, with Bangladesh's life expectancy, gender inequality index and infant mortality rates faring better than India's. However, much remains to be done.

While gender parity has been achieved in primary and secondary school enrolment, drop out rates remain higher for girls than boys. A significantly lower percentage of Bangladeshi women than men participate in the labour force, and are concentrated in lower level jobs earning half the wages of men. This is also true of the booming garments industry of which women make up 80% of the work force, but are limited to low-level positions and poor wages and working conditions. Maternal mortality rates remain high. The trend of early marriages persists and, despite laws to prevent violence against women, the number of incidents is high and the percentage of cases in which the laws are properly implemented, low. The recent cases of rape highlighted in both the Indian and subsequently Bangladeshi media have accentuated the need for greater security for women and more stringent laws and their more effective implementation. In terms of political representation, too, while quotas and other special measures have been adopted to boost women's participation, the majority of women serve an ornamental function.

A more participatory approach for women in development as well as the political, economic and social sectors, is required to make women count. Until then, we may be well on our way, but still have a long way to go, towards fulfilling the Millennium Development Goal of promoting gender equality and empowering women in the true



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THE government has been making a lot of noise on the issue of introducing "Q-Tariff," i.e.

uninterrupted power supply for industry. While intention is noble, implementation has hit a snag with no entrepreneur / industrialist willing to pay the high cost of power that has been proposed.

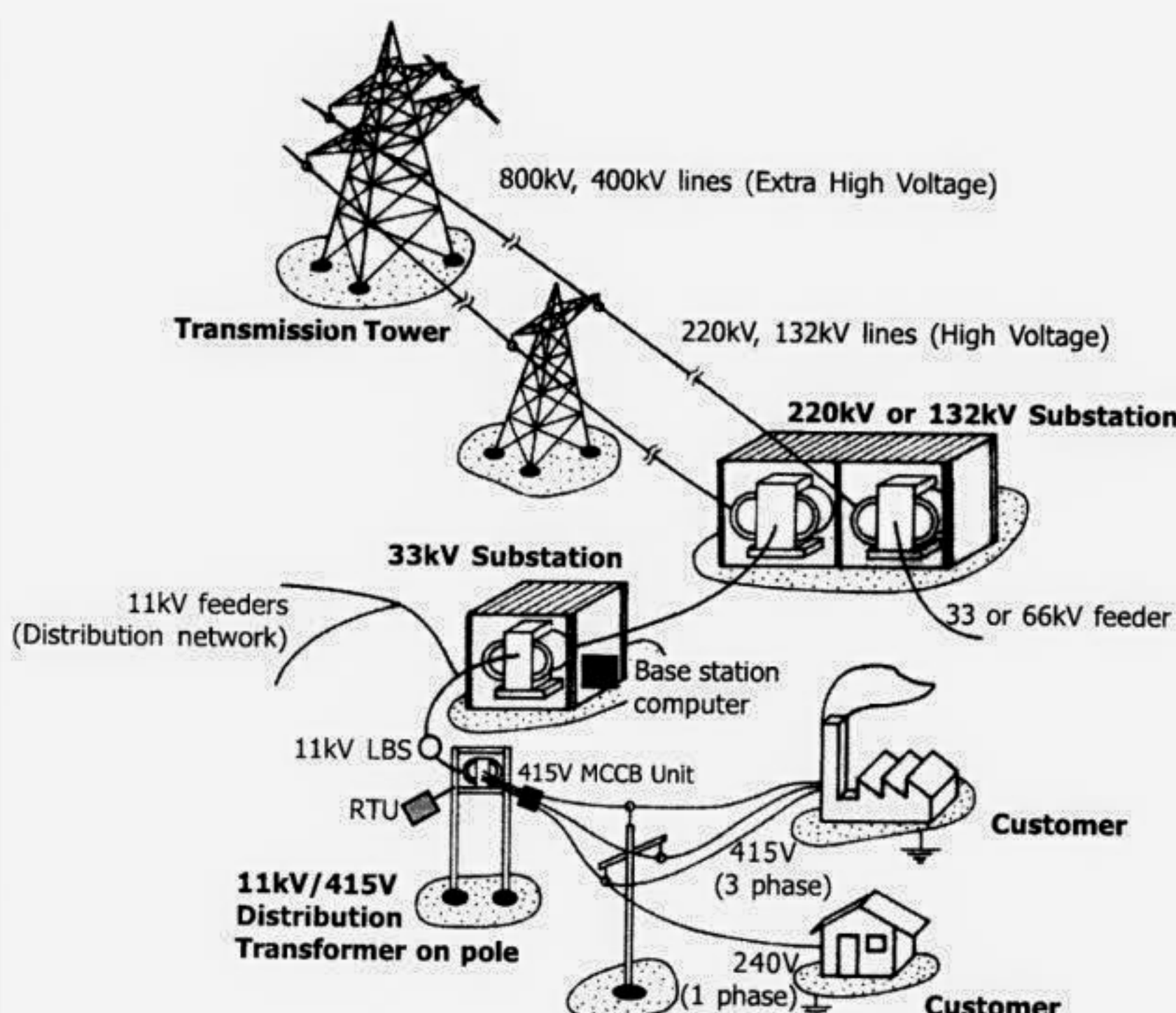
Why is this not surprising? The existing tariff per unit of power is Tk.6.81 (flat rate) transmitted over an 11KV line for the industrial users. The proposed tariff for uninterrupted supply is Tk.16/unit for the same group of users, i.e. nearly three times more than what small industry pays for its erratic supply of power.

Contrary to statements coming out of Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission, reasons for industrialists' apathy are not ill-founded on this latest government move. Let us consider what has been stated on record. According to what Brigadier General (retired), Nazrul Hasan, MD DPDC has stated in an interview to Energy & Power recently, "the power distribution companies already supplying 350 megawatts (MW) of electricity across the country through express feeders from the substations, including 200MW in the DPDC command area, 10MW in the DESCO area, 45MW in REB areas..."

So, for argument's sake, even if someone agreed to pay the high tariff Dhaka area, s/he would not get the power because of the simple fact that Dhaka Power Distribution Company (DPDC) has only infrastructure for 200MW within its command area and Dhaka Electric Supply Company (DESCO) has an additional 10MW.

The second point of contention in this Shakespearian comedy of errors is the fact since authorities have stated, again on record, that parties interested in availing "Q-tariff" will have to bear the expenses of installing

Industrial-grade power: Wishful thinking?



express feeder lines.

Hence, to put all this in common parlance, a would-be industrial consumer would have to pay for expensive express feeder lines -- never mind where a prospective electricity consumer would have to go to avail this facility in terms of procurement and installation.

Furthermore, mere installation of such line would not automatically guarantee the dedicated supply of power, for there is the question of installation of electrical substation. Feeder lines transmit power from generation points to the consumers using 132Kv 33 Kv, and 11 Kv power lines and substations, play a crucial role to either 'step up' or 'step down' power supply as per consumer needs.

So, what it all boils down to is that a prospective industrial consumer will end up paying for sourcing and installing (a) express feeder lines, (b) installing substation, and (c) paying a tariff that is nearly three times the present tariff.

It is little wonder that there have been no takers for this "problem solving" solution.

Engineer and energy analyst

Mushfiqur Rahman in an article published in *The Daily Star* on January 1, 2013, wrote: "The power outage and poor quality power supply have been costing the local enterprises dearly in their efforts to 'gain and hold on to external markets.' Also the limited energy supply limits the expansions of manufacturing investments. Still, no industry has agreed to pay for such a high price for getting power from the grid so far. It may be mentioned that most of the larger industrial units in the country generate their own power using large-scale generators and cost per/kWh is significantly less."

If we look at the actual energy generation capacity in the country today, this hovers around 7,000MW. Assuming for the sake of argument, entrepreneurs are willing to pay the higher tariff. This would not exceed 4,000MW given that we are talking about industry and not general consumers. But the transmission and distribution system that is currently available can at best support 350MW in the whole of the country. So, remaining would-be consumers (if any) cannot in reality avail this "unin-

The transmission and distribution system that is currently available can at best support 350MW in the whole of the country. So, remaining would-be consumers (if any) cannot in reality avail this "uninterrupted power supply" even if they desire to do so.

interrupted power supply" even if they desire to do so. They could go for it only if the substantial investments are made (at their own expense) to install ancillary hardware such as substation and feeder lines.

It is little wonder that there has been practically zero response to this latest formula dreamt up by authorities. Going by what has been reported in the press, numerous chambers of commerce in the country, including the president of Chamber of Commerce Chittagong, has stated that its industry is open to the idea of "taking connections for uninterrupted power supply if the price is set at a reasonable level."

From what has been discussed so far, the price is anything but reasonable. Factoring in cost of new equipment and distribution network coupled with the revised-tariff rate, competitiveness of industry would come under serious threat.

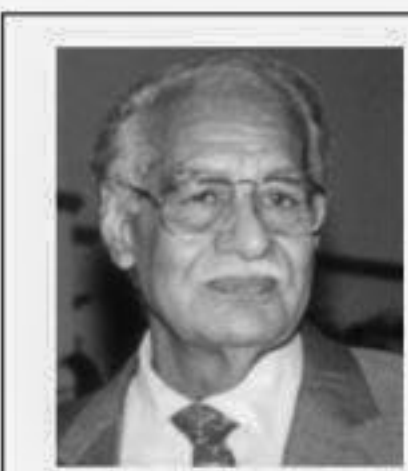
In fact many industries have found to their advantage that it is cheaper to generate electricity using diesel generators at the industry premises in light of the low voltage power available through the various government power companies.

While this may be a cost-effective solution for larger industry, it certainly does not apply for small and medium enterprises. The current scenario has in many ways turned into a farce.

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BETWEEN THE LINES

Youth comes of age



KULDIP NAYYAR

HOW heavenly to be alive when the youth is asserting itself. Even the sons and daughters from well-off families joined

the protests. I recall the Quit India movement in 1942 when on the call of Mahatma Gandhi people came on to the streets to demand the British to quit. There was a spirit of sacrifice and dedication in their demonstration.

This time one felt his or her personal loss in the death of the 23-year-old after being gang raped. Young faces, lighted by the candles they carried, adumbrated the idea of India which knew of no caste, no religious identity.

It was a united nation mourning the death of its proud daughter. It looks from protest marches and condolence meetings that the gang rape has awakened the nation to brutalities against women as well as non-functioning rulers. That the stir was peaceful despite lathi-charge and water canons shows the maturity of participants.

The rulers had no clue of why such defiance had taken place and what they should be doing. Initially, they did not want to come in the open to address the gatherings because there was no connect between them and the students. None in the ruling leadership had fathomed the anger. Then the government panicked and leaders like Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit wanted to interact with the students squatting at Jantar Mantar, India's Hyde Park, but she was refused entry to the place.

Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde, belatedly, asked the political parties to make proposals, indicating that the Manmohan Singh government was at a loss.

Hurriedly, it appointed a probe

committee and a judicial commission to suggest new harsher laws. Former Chief Justice of India J.C. Verma was appointed to head the commission. I wish this process had been gone through after a joint session of parliament as demanded by the opposition. Then suggestions made by MPs could have been incorporated in the proposed laws.

The nitty-gritty of improving the legal apparatus is all right up to a point. But what the government fails to realise is that its thinking is out of date. It is still stuck in the status quo while the youth wants parivartan (change).

The system is too effete to restore confidence in the majesty of law and to ensure protection to all, particu-

larly women. The government's own record is poor. It has done very little to combat corruption which dominated the debate until a few months ago. To inspire confidence, the least that New Delhi could have done is to have made the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) independent. The agency continues to function at the whim of the ruling party.

One thing which has come as a surprise to me from the current protests is that the youth wants to remain apolitical. No notice was taken of the presence of Aam Aadmi Party, born out of Gandhian Anna Hazare's movement to have Lokpal (ombudsman) at the centre to combat corruption. The youth seems to prefer people's movement to a political party.

I find that there is some awakening

in the political parties too. They appear to have started introspecting their own conduct. From the statements they have made, it is evident that they want to rise above party considerations on violence against women.

This evokes hope that the government and the opposition will reach a consensus on the steps to stop even molestation and eve teasing.

The problem is the male. Without changing his mindset, there can be no gender equality. He still treats women as a thing of pleasure. His chauvinism has not lessened over the years as the remarks by some people's representatives, MPs and MLAs, made after the gang rape. The society is seething with anger and wants immediate justice

I wish Rahul Gandhi would tear a page from Bilawal's book. The latter is clear and categorical in spelling out his ideology based on the values of liberalism and democracy. His particular mention of minorities' rights is a departure from the past dominated by bigotry and extremism. It is not to suggest that Rahul is not liberal or democrat. But his five-minute speeches do not give a peep into his thinking or his ideas for the future. This is important because he is the Congress party's candidate for prime ministership in the 2014 parliamentary election.

Both Rahul and Bilawal should join hands to fight against the brutalities perpetrated on women in India and Pakistan. The public in both countries feels helpless against the goonda elements. A girl was raped and brutalised in India but the nation could not save the girl's life. Malala Yousufzai in Pakistan had to escape the country because of Taliban's determination to kill her. Education for women was her demand which goes against the Taliban ideology. I believe that Malala wanted to come to India for medical treatment but the government was scared to let her in. She had to fly to London.

The fight for women's equal rights is a long and arduous journey and requires patience, courage and sacrifice. The society wants the youth to lead it because it has found the political parties failing. It wants a movement to give equality to women.

People have felt appalled over the gang rape of the girl at Delhi and the stoning of Malala in Pakistan. Do Rahul and Bilawal have the commitment to the principle that men and women are equal? As for support, they can depend on the youth which has come of age.

The writer is an eminent Indian Journalist.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 8

1961 French vote for Algerian freedom. The French people vote to grant Algeria its independence in a referendum after seven years of guerilla war.

1973 Watergate scandal: The trial of seven men accused of illegal entry into Democratic Party headquarters at Watergate begins.

1978 Bowing to international pressure, President of Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto releases Bengali leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from prison, who had been arrested after declaring the independence of Bangladesh.

1979 Vietnam forces Khmer Rouge retreat. Hundreds of Khmer Rouge troops are fleeing Cambodia after being crushed by Vietnamese-led rebel forces.

1996 France's former president Mitterrand dies. France mourns its longest serving president Francois Mitterrand who died today.