

## Energy diversification planning: How it all went sour

### Fortune-seekers rescued from Sri Lankan coast

*Incident an eye-opener to the desperate condition of the unemployed*

WE are relieved at the news that some poor lives who embarked on a misadventure were saved from a sinking vessel on the eastern coast of Sri Lanka. The question must be asked, however, as to under what circumstances people feel compelled to take such desperate measures to move out of the country, oblivious to the risks involved.

This incident comes as an eye opener -- to the sheer scale of people who remain unemployed in our country and to the human trafficking that is occurring as a result and the groups who exploit a manifestly gullible group.

Currently, there are over 60 lakh Bangladeshi migrant workers abroad. Migration and the resulting remittance has been a boon for the nation, earning a record amount of 14 billion USD and exporting the second highest number of workers last year. But, while we are caught up in a self-congratulatory mode, we must note and address the drawbacks of the process which puts the lives of thousands at risk as well as tarnishes our image. Already, Kuwait has stopped recruiting from Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia has reduced the numbers due to malpractices in recruitment. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) also found the labour migration sector to top the list in corruption rates last year.

Human trafficking cannot be tolerated and the state-level legal process of migration, too, must be strengthened, such as in the training of unskilled labour. There must be a comprehensive and constantly updated database of the unemployed and underemployed in our country as well as of our migrant workers abroad to enable us to keep track of who and where they are and in what conditions. There is also need for a consultation window for the former so that they may be properly advised with regard to migration prospects and dissuaded from misadventure. Given the importance of migration and remittance to our country and the all too common stories of risk and misfortune, the issue must be addressed with due seriousness.

### Government's plans to fight corruption

*Seeing is believing*

THE government has revealed its plan to prevent corruption and improve governance. This was done at a meeting of the Local Consultative Group composed of our donors. It is just as well the issue of corruption was tagged with that of governance because at the very root of bad governance is the increasing incidents of corruption at all levels, and the conspiracy to indulge in corruption, of which we have been made so painfully aware of by the Padma Bridge loan episode.

The government's intention to fight corruption, an intention that we heartily welcome in principle, would have sounded more credible had the Padma deal issue been handled with more sagacity.

We take the rather lofty intention with a pinch of salt. Come as the strong resolve does, in the backdrop of the botched Padma loan deal, we can see a link between the two, in spite of the official insisting to the contrary. We wonder whether it will be able to remove any bad impression from the minds of our development partners, of the Padma graft allegations, as hoped by the government. The issue, we are afraid, has assumed a rather scandalous character. We wonder also what the public will make of the particular statement, which to most of us carry very little of conviction but more of an effort to save face that has been besmirched by the rather clumsy handling of the deal.

The government may well exult at the fact that our development partners have been very impressed with our national integrity strategy, and who have even expressed their desire to help us implement the plan and we would hope that all the steps spelt out at the meeting would be implemented. However, the nub of the issue is whether there is a political commitment to root out corruption. And unless the Padma deal investigation is brought to a credible conclusion, the government's intention to fight corruption will continue to carry a

SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THE state of gas exploration and finding significant new gas reserves has run into a brick wall. Although no official statement has been made available either by Petrobangla or the government for that matter, the fabled 2 to 3 trillion cubic feet that was supposed to come out of Sunetra (Sunamganj Netrokona) structure is in all probability not materialising. Cairn sold its stake to Santos its off-shore operations after having found no significant new gas reserves in the Bay. Our own exploration efforts through Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration Company (BAPEX), with the exception of perhaps the 40 billion cubic feet find in Sundalpur has also nothing much to show for itself.

As stated by Md. Jamaluddin, former Managing Director (BAPEX) in a recent article in Prothom Alo, costs associated with exploration of a single gas well is Tk60-80crore. And the ratio of number of wells to successful gas finds used to be 3:1, i.e. for every three sites explored; there is the possibility of one successful find. Instead of actual exploration, BAPEX has been relying on three dimensional seismic surveys, which unfortunately is not a concluding science. To base a national energy plan on a probable gas find of the scale Sunetra was portrayed to offer has proved suicidal, and as stated before, puts us back to square one. Forget about the cost, precious time has been wasted -- time that the nation can ill afford.

When the government took office in 2009, it was faced with a critical choice. Invest heavily in base load power stations (gas based) which were time consuming and expensive. It took the shortcut route to generate

power through rental power contracts that consumed liquid fuel. The plan was to depend on rental and quick-rental power plants for the short term, while work would go on finding new sources of gas that could take the pressure off expensive power coming from the rental plants. The downsides to this "lifeblood" option that Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) undertook have been well highlighted in the media over the

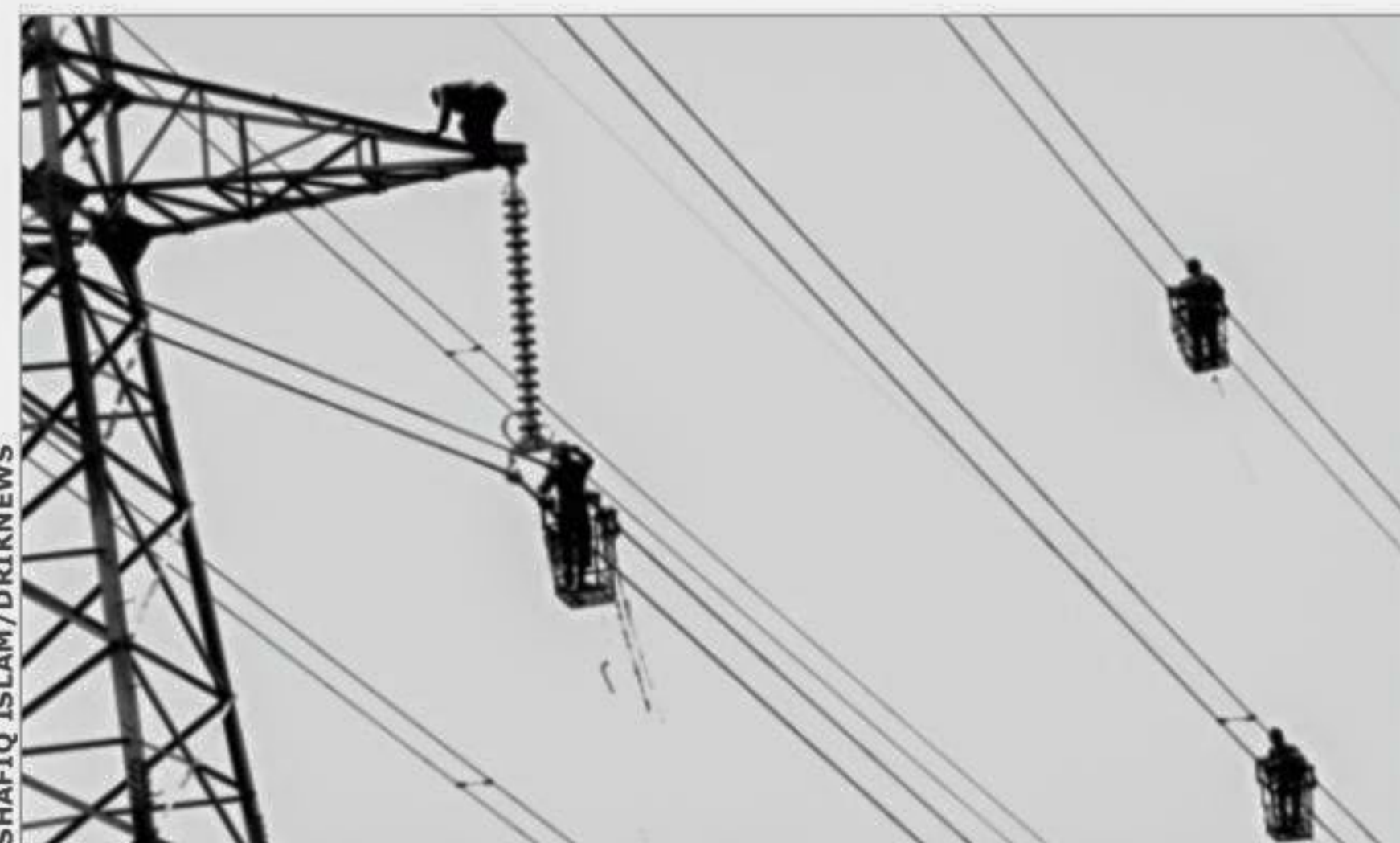
although the government has for many a year had plans to diversify its fuel sources, nothing much has happened on one crucial front, i.e. coal. And we are not talking about politically-charged Phulbari-Asia Energy debate here. In 2006, Petrobangla was given the license to develop Dighipara coal field for development. Today, it's 2013 and not a single activity has taken place, i.e. no survey, resource assessment,

not manage to get any international party to come onboard as a strategic partner to move forward on Dighipara. Because under such conditions, no company in its right mind would make the substantial investments that would inevitably be required. Hence, for the 7th year in a row, PB is still sitting on that license so generously provided by the government and nothing has happened.

It is precisely because of this sort of half-baked planning coupled with near-zero prioritisation by policymakers to get a move on what is essentially national energy security, we find ourselves stuck in the quicksand. Time has come to take responsibility for actions, or the lack of it for that matter. Without power, the wheels of the economy will not move. Providing unrealistic pricing for expensive power will not be accepted by industry. Hence, all those thousands of megawatts generated by what are essentially short-term contracts and billions of dollars expended annually will have been for nothing.

For the benefit of the reader, this information may be useful that the government officially put together a master plan (Power System Master Plan, 2010; published in 2011) with assistance from JICA. The plan states that 50% of total generated power must come from coal. And majority part must come from domestic sources. It is little wonder that on a regular basis, we are confronted with big headlines in national media about the shortage of energy and all attributes associated to it. The average consumer must now face the full brunt of "talkers' plan, not doers'."

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last few years. BPDB sources indicate that it costs the government Tk.300 million per month to keep all oil-based power plants operational. Obviously, this is financially unsustainable. Today, authorities are forced to keep certain plants shut due to the huge daily expenditure associated with keeping them running. The end result needs no further explanation.

It is interesting to note that

drilling, mine facility development, nothing at all in Dighipara. From the very outset, Petrobangla searched for a strategic partner who would make the necessary investment into a feasibility study. But, no guarantee was given by Petrobangla or the government for that matter that were any significant find was made, the contract would be awarded to the strategic partner. It is hardly surprising to find that Petrobangla did

### BETWEEN THE LINES

## Revival of two-nation theory?



KULDEEP NAVAR

MUZZAFAR Beg is one of the sensible voices in Kashmir. But I could not understand why he was mentioning partition

or the 1947 killings when commenting on the controversy over the BJP's demand for Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde's resignation on his remark that both the RSS and the BJP gave training at shakas (small gatherings) to Hindu terrorists. On the other hand, a Pakistani lawyer told an Indian Muslim on a television channel that he was worse than a Hindu because he blamed the ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) for launching and supporting terrorists. Famous Indian actor Shahrukh Khan says that as a Muslim he has felt unsafe.

In an e-mail message to me one well-read Muslim from Karachi says: "We do not have any problems with our Hindu brothers in spite of the fact that our Muslim brothers are being killed simply because they are Muslims in Gujarat." An Indian prisoner was severely beaten and killed at Kot Lakhpat jail by the staff which made "racial remarks against Indians." (Incidentally, the same jail has Sarabjit Singh on death row.)

One common theme that runs through all observations and the death in jail is the same old estrangement between Hindus and Muslims. Partition was considered a solution to the problem when the British rulers were quitting. But it is still a problem. After partition, relations between the two communities have been spoilt. Now it is not only Hindus and Muslims but also India and Pakistan.

I am a witness to partition. The separation was a settlement between the two countries, and based on religion. Nothing could be more futile than an argument now about who

was responsible for the partition of the subcontinent. With the sequence of events stretching back for more than six decades, such an exercise can only be an academic question. But it is clear that the differences between Hindus and Muslims had become so acute by the beginning of the forties that something like partition had become inevitable.

For Beg to remind of partition is to raise a scare, knowing well that another partition is out of the question. I concede that the Indian polity is not as secular as our forefathers wanted or envisaged. Hindus have a feeling that they are a majority and Muslims suffer from a complex of being a minority. Yet India is far better than Pakistan whose founder

secular face. The result is that Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi has become a pariah throughout India. Muslims in Gujarat, West Bengal or in any other state are Indian citizens, equal before the law. Some extremists or the states with weak administrations do not make them lesser citizens by their behaviour. True, their backwardness is a point of concern, something which the Sachar Commission made. However, the report remains largely unimplemented even after six years.

In fact, the problem I that Beg and others whom I have quoted have not got out of the two-nation theory mindset. Religion does not determine nationhood. The liberation of Bangladesh, East Pakistan separating

ally shed their animosity towards each other. The only relieving patch was when even during the Muslim rule, they were together in their struggle against emperors. The British were the villain of the piece. By introducing communal electorate and reservations for Muslims they injected the poison of separation in Indian body politics and it has not gone out of the system yet.

Soon after independence it looked as if we had got rid of the virus. Muslims voluntarily gave up reservations and even when the Constituent Assembly wanted to have a provision of reservations for Muslims, they said no. Little did they realise that they would face discrimination subsequently. So much so, the Sachar Commission has said that the plight of Muslims is worse than that of dalits.

The immediate point of concern of Muslims is that an extremist group of Hindus is indulging in acts of terrorism and the Hindu community on the whole is suspecting Muslims for the killing or bomb blasts. Young boys from the community have been picked up by the police as terrorists and kept in jail for years till the courts acquitted them. True, their innocence is established but by then they spend best part of their youth in detention. There is no accountability and none in the police has been punished for having put them in jail wrongly.

The most serious slur is Shahrukh Khan's statement that he, as a Muslim, feels unsafe. He is not the kind of person who will exaggerate or try to invent. Terrorist Hafiz Mohammad Sayeed exploits the expression and welcomes SRK to Pakistan. Of course, the latter has pooh-poohed the offer. Yet India fails in its credentials of being a secular society as long as SRKs do not feel safe as Hindus do. I see the revival of a two-nation theory in such developments.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist.

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 5

1859

Wallachia and Moldavia are united under Alexander John Cuza as the United Principalities, an autonomous region within the Ottoman Empire, which ushered the birth of the modern Romanian state.

1958

Gamel Abdel Nasser is nominated to be the first president of the United Arab Republic.

1963

The European Court of Justice's ruling in Van Gend en Loos v Nederlandse Administratie der Belastingen establishes the principle of direct effect, one of the most important, if not the most important, decisions in the development of European Union law.

1994

During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina more than 60 people are killed and some 200 wounded as a mortar shell slams into a downtown marketplace in Sarajevo.