

Rana Plaza compensation

Why the delivery shortfall?

RANA Plaza disaster will continue to remain for a long time a blot on the country's RMG sector. And whatever we do or fail to do to address the multifarious issues related to the disaster, that will have a far reaching effect on the relationship between the buyers and the industry, and the longer it will take the country to remove the blot.

Compensation and rehabilitation of the survivors are two such issues that we cannot give a short shrift to. And we cannot but view the matter of compensation to the victims and their relatives, as it stands now, with a degree of consternation given the poor delivery of compensation even after nine months of the disaster.

It is not as if there are not enough funds with the government. Reportedly, the PM's fund has nearly a 100 crore taka of which only 18 crore have been disbursed. We fail to understand why not all of the families of the 1135 dead workers have received the compensation as yet. The problem we feel lies with the process of ascertaining the exact number of victims and confirming their identity. And as long as that remains indeterminate, the victims, dead, injured and missing, and their families, will be deprived from getting the proper compensation.

While there is reservation about the amount of compensation, we feel that it is more of a management issue which must be removed in order to make the matter of Rana Plaza compensation more efficient, speedy and transparent.

Hill damaging spree

Deterrent legal action needed

NOTHING seems to put an end to the indiscriminate cutting of hills in Chittagong. Builders under the guise of housing projects, which themselves are unauthorized, are extending their claws in and out of Chittagong city. They are committing a double crime, working on unauthorized projects by grabbing lands.

Last year hill cutting between Nasirabad and Hathazari not only went unabated, but stretched as far as Cox's Bazar to make ways for townships. More than a hundred hills of Chittagong city have allegedly been razed in varying degrees in the last three decades in the name of development projects.

Recently as two housing projects named "Shapla Residential Area" and "Model Palli" were developed by razing more than a dozen hills at north Pahartali in Chittagong city, we were appalled to witness how ineffective and helpless our law enforcers have become. Levelling of hills is affecting the eco-system of greater Chittagong with a heightening incidence of landslides.

Let's do first things first. We have a monitoring system in place for bringing our hilly terrains under a scanner and do a thorough stocktaking. Then we undertake well planned and coordinated measures to stem the malaise.

We draw government's urgent attention to the imperative of implementing Bangladesh Environment Preservation act 1995(amended in 2000) together with Bangladesh Building Construction Act of 1952 that prohibit damage to hills.

Power, wealth and corruption

ALAMGIR KHAN

ANCIENT Indian economist Kautilya wrote: "Just as it is impossible not to taste the honey or the poison that finds itself at the tip of the tongue, so it is impossible for a government servant not to eat up at least a bit of the king's revenue." Our Finance Minister A.M.A. Muhith broke Kautilya's record in the 2013 intellectual Olympic by saying that political power and wealth go hand in hand. He asked us to look at world history and said: "When humans were barbarians most of the tribal leaders became wealthy. This is normal."

When education is in such a dismal state in our poor country, it is difficult for us to read world history as per our wish. We believe his statement that it happened in man's barbarian state. And we saw that not only our political leaders, but even their wives, excepting some, made a mountain of wealth in the past five years. Therefore, that there are many poor people still in Bangladesh is the fault of the poor who have not entered into our fortune-making politics. If every poor man did so, we would not have to wait till 2041 to have our dream come true.

Some think that politics has turned into a business enterprise in Bangladesh. This is wrong. In business, a transaction occurs in a market where both the trader and the consumer exchange their commodities and both get benefited. But think of a situation in which a blind man is begging on a street. A rich man passing by him stands, takes out Tk.1 from his pocket, puts it in the beggar's pot, takes away Tk.10 from there and puts it in his pocket. The beggar, because of his blindness, prays to Allah for His blessings on him. The rich man is a swindler. But if he can do it a hundred times with impunity, he is a politician somewhere on earth. Friedrich Engels wrote in 1884: "America is the classic example" of the "plain corruption of officials" where wealth and power go hand in hand.

While launching the Global Corruption Report 2004, Transparency International founder Peter Eigen said: "The abuse of political power for private gain deprives the most needy of vital public services, creating a level of despair that breeds conflict and violence." That TI Report detailed the extent to which world political leaders embezzled public funds. The heads of our poor people will spin on hearing the figures. Compared to them, our ministers are nearly saints.

The writer is Research and Publication Officer, Centre for Development Innovation and Practices.

KEN BETWA INTERLINKING PROJECT

The making of a disaster

M INAMUL HAQUE

RAINFALL over Indian peninsula varies widely from 300 mm in Rajasthan to over 3500mm in the Arunachal Pradesh annually. However, the average rainfalls on major river basins are, the Brahmaputra 2500 mm, the Barak 2300 mm, the Ganga 1500 mm, the Narmada 1000 mm, the Godavari 1100 mm, the Krishna 800 mm and the Cavery 1000 mm. The Sabarmati basin in Gujrat has 900 mm annual rainfall and the Luni basin in western Thar Desert has average annual rainfall less than 300 mm. India plans to divert the waters of Brahmaputra River to the western Thar Desert, and to the drought prone Southern India. But Bangladesh lying on the downstream of the Brahmaputra River, fears its ecology shall be severely affected, if water from this basin is withdrawn.

After partition India and Pakistan embroiled in dispute over sharing waters of the Indus and Ganga Rivers. The Indus Waters Treaty was signed in 1960, between India and Pakistan. But due the political turmoil, sharing of the Ganga waters remained unresolved until 1977. Dr K.L. Rao, ex Water Resources Minister of India in the fifties, proposed the Ganga- Cavery Link in 1972. This would transfer over 1400 Cubic Meter/sec water from Ganga to the south. This proposal was abandoned because of financial reasons. India completed the Farakka Barrage in 1975, and took total control over the Ganga River flows towards Bangladesh. The Indian government in eighties proposed a link canal from the Brahmaputra River to the upstream of the Farakka Barrage. This canal would pass through the Bangladesh territory, with aim at augmentation of the Ganga water in India. Bangladesh rejected this proposal as unacceptable, as it would affect major human displacement, huge land loss, and colossal damage to the estuarine and marine environment, towards the mouth of Brahmaputra River.

The proposal for interlinking rivers in India resurfaced after the Bharatia Janata Party gained power in the centre, winning the Lokshabha election of 1999. This time, the proposal was very particular, to transfer the excess water from the north eastern Indian states to the drought hit Thar Desert, and the southern states of India. The proposal gained momentum as it got support of the Hindutva lobby, in the Indian government, and the intellectuals from Rajasthan, Gujrat and South India. The Supreme Court of India in February, 2012 directed the Centre to implement the interlinking of rivers project in a time bound manner and appointed a high powered committee for its planning and implementation.

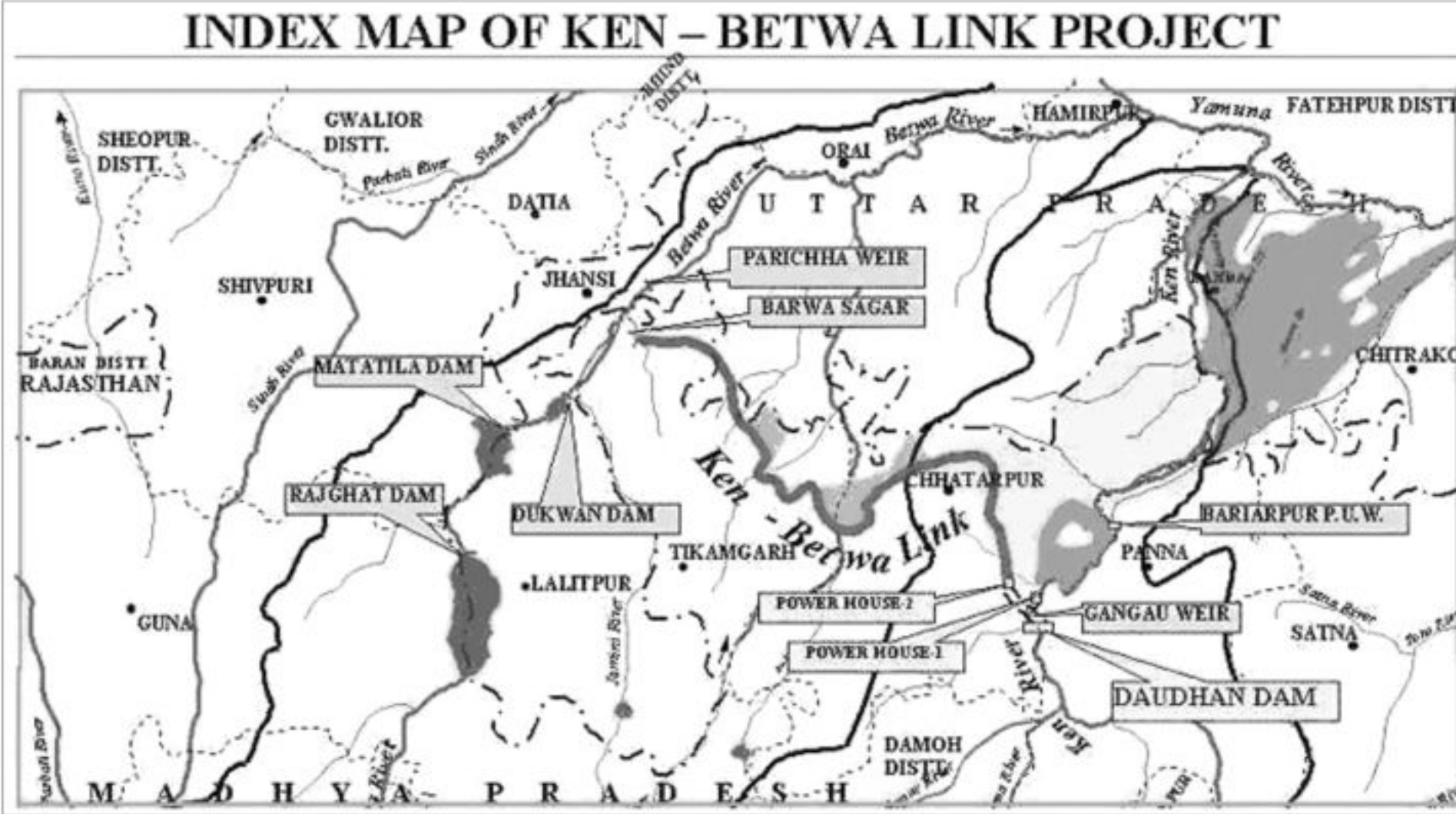
According to the Times of India (02.01.2014), the Ken-Betwa river link is one of the 30 inter-linking projects to be green lighted by the Supreme Court committee, following a tripartite memorandum of understanding signed between the water resources ministry and chief ministers of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Indian Water Resources Minister Harish Rawat claimed that, on completion of all 30 projects, water will be available for irrigating 35 million hectares, generate hydro electricity to the tune of 34,000 MW and control floods in many states. Since all the related matters including environmental issues have already been resolved, for the Ken-Betwa and couple of more projects, the move will see beginning of actual works on the ground for linking Ken

and Betwa rivers in early 2014.

The Ken Betwa Project envisages a 73.80 m high Daudhan dam across the Ken, about 2.5 km upstream of the Gangau Weir in Madhya Pradesh. Two powerhouses, one at the foot of the dam and other at the end of a 2-km tunnel, are also proposed. The project shall link the Ken and Betwa rivers by a 231.45-km concrete-lined canal to divert 1020 MCM of water. The diverted water shall irrigate 3.7 lac ha land, support water supply and augment the flow of the Betwa River to the tune of 659 MCM. The dam at Daudhan shall store 2775 MCM water, and shall produce 72 MW power in total.

But some experts oppose the project and say, the Ken has no excess water. Professor Krishna Gandhi of Abhiruchi, an NGO related to environmental issues said, 'it is stupid and silly'. He said, 'big dams never helped people. They only promoted corruption and resulted in displacement of people' (The Hindu, 14.02.2012). V K Joshi, former regional director of the Geological Survey of India commented earlier that, it will damage the ecosystems of both the rivers. Thakkar and Chaturbedi (2006) criticized the project for inadequate water balance studies and said, not enough benefit to arrive to outweigh the cost. The cost of the project was Rs 4500 cr (Business Line 2005).

The Ken Betwa Interlinking Project appears to be a disaster in the making. A large area of the Panna Tiger Reserve



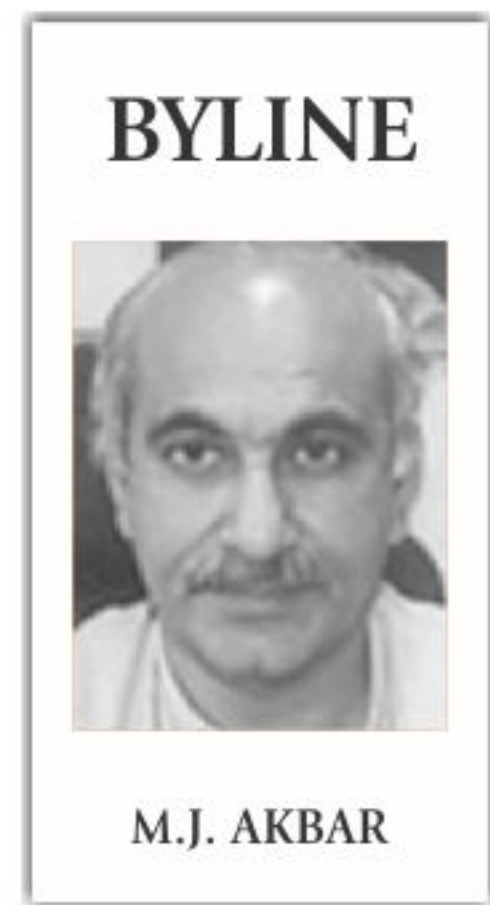
The Ken Betwa Link Project under the Rivers Interlinking Project of India should be opposed by the people of Bangladesh and India together

forest shall go under water of the Daudhan Reservoir. Eminent human rights activists Medha Patkar and environmentalist Vandana Shiva condemned the project calling it a recipe for ecological disaster. It will force people out of their homes. The author of this article observes that, the project cannot deliver the planned amount of water to the Betwa River due to scarcity in the Ken basin. In that case, most of the structures to be built by costing money, people's eviction and land loss shall lie unutilized. The Ken River water has storage at Gangau Weir. The additional storage of the Daudhan Dam shall leave the Ken River downstream totally dry. Due to high potential evapo-transpiration in the area (1630mm at Panna), more reservoirs and more irrigation systems shall lead to more loss of water. As a result, the accumulated flow in the Ganga River further downstream shall also go down.

The Ken Betwa Link Project under the Rivers Interlinking Project of India should be opposed by the people of Bangladesh and India together. The Helsinki rules on the uses of the waters of international rivers, 1966, and the UN water convention of the non-navigational uses of international watercourses, 1997 opposes transfer of water from one basin to another.

The writer is Chairman, Institute of Water & Environment
Email: minamul@gmail.com

Why Kejriwal should understand that it pays to be patient



M.J. AKBAR

tease in Verona while Juliet washed her grandchildren's nappies. Nice, but no story.

It is impatience which ends in tears. Politics includes its share of theatre. Every politician knows that. Love is not a political word, so relationships are based on mutual benefit. The dalliance between Congress and Arvind Kejriwal's party augured well precisely because it was not high morality: the two planned to use each other.

Congress needed a surging Kejriwal as their last big, if indirect, bet against Narendra Modi. The party has abandoned hopes of forming the next government; its senior spokesman P Chidambaram said as much at Davos when he projected a split Lok Sabha after the next elections. Congress is not worried about being replaced by BJP; it gets antsy only at the prospect of Modi as PM. Congress thought Kejriwal could fracture BJP numbers.

Kejriwal thought he could use Congress to get the PM's job for himself. It was his due, after all, as this century's scarf-wrapped Mahatma. There is nothing wrong in ambition. It is a democratic virtue. But ambition requires nurture and care. But with elections due soon, Kejriwal became a man in a hurry. An impatient teenager is someone in love. If you are in late middle age, you must be in politics. Kejriwal was also smitten by a very Delhi disease, ego-elephantiasis. The head swells to such an extent that it becomes an obstacle between you and the next rung on the ladder of upward mobility. Kejriwal thought that the distance between the office of a Delhi chief minister and the PM's chair could be covered in a quick sprint because both are in the same city. This is a marathon. You have to pace yourself carefully.

The battle for prime minister of India is fought in

Gorakhpur and Nashik and Jhumritaliya and Chapra and Kasargodh; not just on a capital spot called Khirki Extension. Words change their meaning once you leave the pampered limits of Delhi. Water in Andhra is not 700 litres of freedom, drowned by punitive tax if you take a drop more. It means whether the flow from Krishna and Godavari will reach Seemandhra if Telengana is formed. Many thousands of villages would not understand subsidised electricity for pampered consumers; they have to see a bright bulb first.

A good book of proverbs would help Kejriwal. Cut your coat according to your cloth. Look before you leap. This sort of pithy wisdom has been distilled from centuries of human experience. In the first week of January, Kejriwal was a messiah, not least for the media. By the last week, he was being called mad. Neither epithet is correct. He was not a prophet then, and he is not insane now. He was shrill in his accusations then, and he is hyper in his self-righteousness now. His purpose then was power; his objective now is greater power. But when you rise by accusation, you can wilt from it as well.

Kejriwal is not even a proper anarchist, although he seemed to savour the idea when publicly provoked by the thought. He wants to control the system, not kill it. Anyone, or anything that stands in his way becomes ipso facto anti-people: this is the sort of argument populist dictators love. When India's largest media house had the temerity to question Kejriwal's dharna in defence of an indefensible law minister, there were demonstrations by his party.

If you want to be a Mahatma, you have to learn from Gandhi. The apostle of non-violence had problem ten weeks after he led a bedraggled, im impoverished India, armed with nothing more than faith, to victory in 1947 against the greatest empire in history. When Pakistan, another serial addict of impatience, invaded Kashmir in October 1947 a British journalist asked Gandhi, sarcastically why he did not try non-violence in Kashmir. Gandhi was unfazed.

Non-violence did not extend to submission be fore evil. A state had to do its duty. He compared the first Indian contingent that saved Srinagar to Spartans. Those who do not understand the responsibility that comes with office cannot last in power, nor will they be forgiven by the people.

And impatience has ruined more plans than true love.

The writer is Editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Citizens' role in improving Dhaka's liveability

Dhaka has been ranked as the world's worst liveable city according to Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) 'liveability' study. Only blaming the government will not get us any fruitful result until we, the citizens become aware of the situation. We can at least keep our environment clean. Creating massive awareness among the countrymen about keeping the environment clean will help improve the situation. At the same time, city corporations should provide waste bins in all areas and make people use those and take action against those who don't abide by the rules. Let's keep our environment clean.

Khandaker Zia Hasan
Special Correspondent, Weekly Jogajog, Canada

Textbooks yet to reach rural students

We have learned from media reports that many students have not got textbooks yet, even though a month has passed. This is a common scene across the country particularly in the rural areas. We request the government not to ignore the rural students and provide them with textbooks immediately so that they do not lag behind in pursuing their education.

A reader
Sirajganj

Need for more technical schools

BRAC has established a good number of primary schools in the country. This largest NGO of the world has also set up a few secondary schools in the rural areas.

We learnt from the print media a few years ago that the government incurred a loss of tk. 600 crore yearly due to the existence of more educational institutions than are necessary across the country.

Now the government has decided to establish 100 technical schools across the country. As technical schools are more suitable for us than the general schools, we ask BRAC as well as the other NGOs to establish technical schools in Bangladesh.

Mawduda Hasnin
Rajshahi

Jamaat-Shibir's misdeeds

Recently the extremist fanatics Jamaat-Shibir assaulted the police again in Gaibandha. They torched their vehicle, swooped on the law enforcers with sticks and sharp weapons and injured them severely. These people take advantage of the general people's religious sentiments in doing so. We should make the people aware of the misdeeds of Jamaat-Shibir.

Md. Yamin Khan
Shyamoli, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "BCB chooses not to play Test!" published on January 24, 2014

Aasfisarwar

What do you expect from BCB led by Papon when India proposes and endorses something?

Concerned Citizen

Why is there an Indian influence in each and every sector of our country? Are we really a sovereign country?

Snr Citizen

There will be NO future of BD Cricket at all without going through the rigours of playing Test matches. It is suicidal! There is still time to reconsider. BCB board officials are not farsighted. That is the least I can say. Are we incapable of playing Tests? Our players, the whole body, must oppose the decision ASAP.

mirage_tahmid

They are Awami politicians! What do you expect!

Anonymous

The government is so threatened by India that we have to stop playing a game that 160 million people love!

OpeeMonir

It may sound absurd and grossly unpopular, but the fact is Bangladesh is not yet in the Test class. But then again there are other opinions. It is alarming that they voted 20-3. Is this also due to strong INDIA factor? Is someone in the country propagating the issue? We must find who that agent is. Our cricket is in great danger.

Sakib Hossain

This is absolutely absurd. We are a good Test playing nation especially at home; we just lack good quality fast bowlers. Even a big country like India has never been able to produce one till date. It is my utmost request to BCB to please go against this move with all their might.

Snr Citizen

Will cricketer Shakib open his mouth with a genuine analysis?