

City faces water crisis

Seasonal contingency plan lacking

EVERY year around this time, Dhaka city dwellers face acute water crisis. With the onset of the heat that comes with summer, utility service provider Dhaka Water & Sewerage Authority (WASA) is in doldrums as to how to cope with the demand for water to many of the 15million or so residents of Dhaka. For the poorer sections of the population who call the city their home it is down-right nightmare. Long queues of people can be seen lining up to WASA pumps on a daily basis. Such spectacle is hardly entertaining as it takes away precious hours of the day for the average citizen who is unfortunate to be living in those quarters of the city that have been hit by water shortage.

The reason for such shortage is no great secret. Falling ground water tables is one which cannot be mitigated in the shorter term as it has a lot to do with over use, lack of rains and polluted surface water. However the problems related to technical difficulties that keep a number of WASA pumps dysfunctional can surely be addressed. That we have to face these known issues year after year is frustrating. Knowing full well that the sweltering heat during this time of the year will invariably increase demand for water, city utility services can take advance measures to meet the excess demand. Additional pumps can be brought into play during the few months when the mercury level is at its peak. It is also time we did something about rain water harvesting.

Motorbikes a threat to pedestrians

HC ruling of 2012 ignored

TWO years down the line, authorities have failed to tackle the issue of free movement of people as pavements are regularly used by motorcycles to avoid snarling traffic jams in the city. Not only is this a violation of a High Court (HC) ruling issued on March 5, 2012, it constitutes a threat to the physical safety of Dhaka residents who use the walkways to move around. It is especially disheartening to witness that even mobile police use pavements whenever there is a traffic jam. Motorcyclists speed along with little regard for people plying what is rightfully their area for movement. It appears from the behaviour of drivers of two-wheelers that it is the responsibility of pedestrians to get out of their way to avoid a collision that may, and in many instances, do cause serious bodily harm.

The sad reality is that authorities entrusted with traffic control are little concerned with either HC directives or safety and wellbeing of people on the roads of Dhaka. We find it abhorrent at this utter lack of concern as to why the police have failed to take into cognizance the court's directives on ensuring unhindered movement of people in the city. That people in general have shown amazing patience in ignoring these marauding two-wheelers is no guarantee that scuffles will not break out in the future. With children and senior citizens using pavements, the threat of serious accidents cannot be ruled out and hence we strongly urge police authorities to take effective action against this new menace.

The missing link that can save the day!

MOHAMMAD ZAMAN

AN unfortunate series of events pitted the physicians of reputed hospitals, both private and public, against certain unhappy patients, and eventually bringing the powerful media into the fray. This, very well, may be a reflection of overall societal entropy; but physicians – supposedly the lambent light for the sick and the torpid, can not accept their life's mission be undone! I am a physician and I feel the anguish too. I totally understand the defensive posture on the part any physician; but, to me, that is no posture at all ... Physicians should have one and only one position, and that is to provide the best possible care for the sick. If we provide the right care, as determined by the local standard of care, misgivings are sure to resolve in no time.

Good medical care rests on a single hinge upon which it revolves with a certain dignity and grace. And this hinge, commonly known as professionalism, is nothing new. Unfortunately, many of our esteemed physicians, in their sorry heart, harbor not iota compunction for the sorry state of our current professionalism. Adequate professional knowledge is a relative term, the function of which depends on multiple variables. Knowledge, in fact, is less important than the humility of admitting the lack of it, thus paving the way for a referral process. This process of timely referral can bring the necessary knowledge and expertise thus minimizing the ugly consequences of lack of knowledge.

The physicians in Bangladesh, contrary to some voices, should never oppose the legitimate right of an ailing citizen to seek treatment of his desire. Lastly, I shall argue against the so-called "Professorial Hubris." As a medical student I have seen many professors using their elite status as teachers in medical school, for ends other than teaching and medical care for the needy. They rather were busy tending their own mint-houses called "Chamber". If those well-trained (mostly in Britain) physicians behaved a little more like British physicians (their teachers), our current predicament would have been much lighter.

Physicians should learn humility, should learn to take time, and should show appropriate empathy and respect for the patient; after all, a patient still is the best teacher for an astute physician. Only then the physicians should expect respect from their patient's and expect to see a slowing down the ominous tide of centrifugal care.

The writer is a physician.

Of April, of God in heaven

GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

to liberty. For the first time on foreign soil, in Calcutta, Bengali diplomats raised the Bangladesh flag. It would flutter, beyond April, beyond decades.

It was in April 1975 that Vietnam became one whole nation again, through the fall of Saigon and the departure of foreigners obsessed with thoughts of halting the march of communism. In April 1930, all those long years ago, Masterda Suriya Sen drove fear into the British colonial power through his armoury raid in Chittagong. He would fail, but in failing he would set in motion an inexorable march to Indian freedom.

April 1978 was once a beautiful time in Afghanistan, for it brought in the Saur Revolution and saw the rise of the cerebral Nur Mohammad Taraki as the country's first communist leader. In Pakistan, April is the season when its first elected leader is remembered, in intense love as well as undying hate. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto went to the gallows in April 1979.

In distant America, on a day in April 1968, Martin Luther King Jr was murdered by men uncomfortable with his struggle for the dignity of the black man. Seven years earlier, on an April dawn in 1961, Cuban exiles supported by the Kennedy administration emerged on the beach at the Bay of Pigs, dreaming of an overthrow of the Castro regime in Cuba with American help. They ended up dead at the hands of Castro's men, who were waiting for them.

Abraham Lincoln, one of the greatest of men in history, was silenced forever by a gunman on an April evening in Washington. The year was 1865. His successor Andrew Johnson would nearly be impeached by the Senate a few years later. Many years later, in April 1945, it would be the turn of another American president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, to die in harness. Harry Truman succeeded him in office. Good old Richard Nixon passed into the ages in April 1994, almost twenty years after Watergate had driven him from the White House.

April 1994 was also that season of bloodletting when Rwanda's Hutus went on a rampage, leaving no fewer than 800,000 Tutsis dead in a matter of days. It was the world's embarrassment when the United Nations or the European powers proved themselves not up to the job of saving the Tutsis. It would remain for Paul Kagame to march into Kigali with his forces and restore order in the country.

William Shakespeare opened his eyes to life and fame in April 1564. And the poet-philosopher Muhammad

SALMAN HAIDAR

AS the election moves into high gear, foreign affairs remain no more than a distant concern of aspirants to office. In the earlier phases of the campaign the subject barely figured in the electoral discourse, and though the pace has picked up since then, nobody seems to have made a pitch on foreign policy as the key to voter appeal. The few references on the subject that have caught attention, including a mention or two of the neighbours, look more like an overspill of local issues and attitudes rather than an attempt to bring foreign affairs into electoral contention. There seems to be no prominent external issue that could divert attention from the familiar domestic themes that have become the testing ground between the political opponents, and the main contenders have not plunged into question of foreign policy, either in their manifestos or in their campaigning. No radical policy changes in this field thus appear to be in the offing.

Foreign Offices tend to be averse to sudden change, especially where populist sentiment has been invoked, so New Delhi's professional foreign policy establishment may well be taking comfort from being more or less bypassed by the current electoral clamour. It can be claimed on their behalf that keeping away from the lime-light could be a sign of good management, in that no fresh external threats have been permitted to develop and no demand for revised ways of doing business has been raised. Yet no matter who gains at the polls, there will be change at MEA and a new ministerial team will shortly be installed in South Block. They may well find that there is a good deal of unfinished business to be dealt with, some of it harking back to the decisions of the outgoing team.

Consider for example the Indo-US nuclear deal, which can be regarded as the crowning achievement of the UPA foreign policy over the last decade. The deal was expected to usher in a new era in which India, rid of sanctions on its nuclear programme, would play its proper part as an equal in the global conclave on civilian nuclear issues; it would purchase nuclear power technology from the best global providers, which had been earlier debarred, there would be a spurt in India's civilian nuclear power programme and abundant clean energy for economic development would become available. These beneficial possibilities remain but expectations of rapid growth in nuclear power have not been fulfilled. Slowing down has come as a result of the strong dose of caution injected by India's Parliament, to ensure that in the event of an industrial accident provision should be made to establish how far the supplier was responsible and to ensure due compensation to the victims. As yet, it has not been possible to come to terms with potential suppliers, with the result that little progress has been possible. It will be a challenge to the new government to find a way out of the current impasse and to obtain the anticipated benefits from the nuclear deal. Maybe the new incumbents will be able to have a fresh look at the issues and seek a way forward.

A not unrelated issue is that of nuclear security. Last month, the Netherlands hosted a conference on this theme, the latest in a series of UN-sponsored meetings. India participated, as did other declared and undeclared

Iqbal went to his grave in April 1938. In April 1974, an ageing former self-styled field marshal named Ayub Khan died nearly forgotten in Pakistan. Unhappy with the result of a referendum on changes he thought were needed in the French constitution in April 1969, Charles de Gaulle bade farewell to the Elysee Palace and walked away into the sunset. More than a year later, he would die, leaving France impoverished with his passing.

A once dynamic Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq died on an April day, in 1962, bringing to an end a life lived intensely and mulled over endlessly. Tragedy struck Bangladesh in a recent April, with scores of the poor and the hardworking experiencing the end of life in a tragedy that will forever be remembered in infamy. We speak of those the Rana Plaza pushed to death, of the helpless families they left behind.

The French philosopher-statesman Andre Malraux, who stood ready to fight for Bangladesh in 1971, travelled to the new country in April 1973, told Bengalis Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would lead them into light and dreams, only if they did not kill him. They killed him. Darkness and nightmare took over.



Through the horror of genocide, Pakistan's soldiers killed cheerfully in Bangladesh in 1971. In April of that year, they abducted the venerable Dhirendranath Dutta and murdered him without shame, without the fear of God in their hearts. Adolf Hitler killed without pity, destroyed countries and then destroyed himself. He died, or vanished without trace, in April 1945. Did you know that he was born on an earlier April, in 1889?

In April 1970, three astronauts lifted off into space, intending to be a fresh batch of travellers to the moon. Their spacecraft failed them. With a world nearly giving up hope of the men returning home to earth alive, they came back, miraculously, in their crippled machine. Everyone knew there was a God somewhere.

The stars shone bright, their brilliance reflected in the waters of the Pacific, as the Titanic, with 2,224 people on board, sank in an icy Atlantic off Newfoundland in April 1912.

God was in His heaven; and nothing was right with the world.

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Unfinished business

nuclear powers, and the conference was able to measure some progress in accounting for stocks of nuclear materials - nothing dramatic but a few incremental steps. This also proved to be an occasion when the demand for Pakistan to receive equal treatment with India came under discussion once again. The India-US deal has always galled Islamabad which regards it as discriminatory against itself; backed by China, it has demanded equal treatment with India and has been aggrieved not to receive it. Internal uncertainties in that country and the daily count of death and destruction that betoken a state barely able to maintain necessary security at home have only reinforced international resolve to maintain nuclear controls as they exist, to the considerable chagrin of Islamabad. The latest attempt has succeeded no better than earlier ones but it has served to identify another thorny issue that will doubtless come up before long for discussion in international forums.

A near-miss by the UPA was the ultimately infructuous backchannel negotiation between Dr. Manmohan Singh and Gen. Musharraf on Kashmir. This is still something that remains only partly known, and that too more through deliberate leaks than through official statements, but the picture that emerges is that the two sides had come within a whisker of a mutually acceptable settlement on Kashmir. Having come so close, however, they were unable to take the final step. The reasons are not clear: some in Pakistan were of the view that Dr. Singh had ultimately drawn back, though it became obvious that internal issues in Pakistan progressively deprived Gen. Musharraf of authority, of position, and eventually even of liberty, so he was in no position to conclude the arrangement. Whatever may have been the conflicting dynamics of the situation, it was a tantalisingly close approach to something that could have placed relations between the two conflicting neighbours on an altogether different basis. Subsequently, India kept encouraging the successor regime in Islamabad not to let the matter lapse and to be prepared to take it up afresh. More recently, both sides have tried to re-activate the backchannel, but circumstances have not permitted much to be done. Yet this should be seen as an important piece of unfinished business on the foreign policy agenda of the new incumbents in New Delhi. After the recent change-over in Pakistan, and with the impending one in India, it cannot just be a matter of trying to resume talks from where they had reached with Dr. Singh and Gen. Musharraf but if the earlier interlocutors were able to draw close, so too can their successors. And there is no bigger prize than to succeed in this endeavour.

The matters mentioned here may not be immediately central or urgent for the new government in New Delhi. But these are the sort of far-reaching matters that will challenge any new administration, irrespective of its political hue or inclination. India needs to put fresh dynamism in its relations with major countries abroad, especially the USA, and it needs to work for a tranquil neighbourhood as a step towards achieving its international goals. This is the major part of the unfinished business that will have to be taken in hand by whoever comes to govern the country.

The writer is India's former Foreign Secretary.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Mugging on the rise

This refers to The Daily Star news report dated 9th April 2014. It said, bike-riding muggers shot a bkash employee and snatched away around Tk 10 lakh from him on Rokeya Sarani in the capital's Mirpur on April 8.

I would like to add that such mugging has now become the order of the day as I had also fallen victim to such muggers on April 6. I was returning home after a medical check-up from Popular Diagnostic Centre at Dhanmondi, Road no: 2 at about 9 pm when suddenly a man bumped into me. I said it was ok. But he didn't leave and started talking to me about his power and which party he belonged to. He held my hand and let me feel his revolver and bullets and demanded taka 50,000/-. I told him that I had only taka 2000/- in my wallet. He took the money and vanished into the darkness.

Not a single week passes without a Daily Star report on mugging. It is clear that law and order has gone from bad to worse. But our top leaders say every now and then that the law and order is now better than any time in the past. It is imperative that the government takes immediate measures to improve the situation in the Capital.

Abu Imran
Azimpur, Dhaka

Import of mealybug in Bangladesh from UN mission

It is very alarming that mealybug is spreading in Bangladesh which will destroy crops and fruit bearing trees. Mealybug (foreign bug) has been brought in along with equipment (mainly vehicles) after use in UN Mission areas - mainly in the African countries. It has spread in some Bangladesh Army units destroying jackfruits and other trees. The Army units have tried all types of insecticides but to no avail. The only effective measure is to destroy the bugs by fire. After rainfall it takes shelter underneath the earth where they release eggs and breed bugs. I suggest using flamethrower to destroy these dangerous insects. The government can take the help of the Army.

In future, all used equipment returning from UN Mission areas must be disinfected before entering Bangladesh.

Maj Gen ATM Abdul Wahab (Retd)
Bari dhara, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Schools closed for minister's reception," published on April 20, 2014

Mofi

I wonder if the ministry will now make a law to stop this malpractice. Only request or directives from the ministry apparently don't work.

Molla A. Latif

The education minister's directives were violated.

Hardreality

Our MPs and ministers hanker so much after attention and praise and applause that they seem hell-bent upon getting those by any means. This senseless practice is going on despite nationwide criticism, which indicates that public outcry falls on deaf ears.

Shahin Huq

We don't need any schools or colleges. Keep people poor and ignorant and then rule them. Is this Awami policy?

"India and China: Are they mismatched?" (April 20, 2014)

Somdutta Sinha

Well said, Mr. Rahman. These Asian countries will become the leaders in every aspect in the near future, if they come to a consensus.

Turja

Cooperation in technology, R&D, human resources might be possible but there remains a big question regarding territorial dispute. It will be difficult for any Indian government to solve the dispute over land boundary with China (and with Bangladesh) because of some fundamental-ists.

"Any land-related case your wife filed?" (April 19, 2014)

Mofi

What a country we live in! After reading this report, I feel very unsafe. See who exactly runs the country, who holds the power! It's a country of powerful 'Bhais'.