

Country plunging into darkness

Plug systemic and technical loopholes

THIS is a rude reawakening to the longest power breakdown in recent memory the country has writhed under. In fact, it has been the fourth blackout disaster since October 2003 with the Sidr-inflicted one being the longest in 2007. What lessons did we heed in last seven years to avert the catastrophe on Saturday? Precious little.

The authorities, however, can be credited with having brought an end to the crisis within reasonable time. We should also laud people for their mature handling of the blackout with responsibility and resilience. There was no crime during the outage, which is rather unusual in such a situation.

The most important lesson from yesterday's disaster is that the government did not modernize the transmission system as it increased the power generation capacity, thereby creating an imbalance that the system could not handle. In 2007, we produced 3,500 MW whereas today it is 7,400 MW. This twofold increase in generation capacity should have been accompanied by a modern computerized distribution system which should have automatically shut down demands when supply is disrupted.

The fact that more than 100 small, medium and big power generation companies are all supplying to the national grid, made balancing more difficult. So the point is, given the imbalance described above, a disaster was waiting to happen and it did.

While we have grown as an economy and our power consumption has increased twofold in the last few years, so has our vulnerability to power outage. Though we do understand that accidents may occur in the future, let us not be victims of obvious faults as we have been.

Recruitment of Bangladeshi workers

Open up jobs in all sectors in Malaysia

WE are optimistic about the bilateral talks between Malaysia and Bangladesh to accelerate the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers under the government-to-government (G2G) system to the Southeast Asian nation.

As Malaysian employees only hire Bangladeshis for the plantation sector currently, it would be a highly beneficial move for Bangladesh as well as for migrating workers if Malaysia opens up new jobs in the construction, manufacturing and service sectors, providing legal employment to at least 20,000 to 30,000 Bangladeshis.

Since the G2G Memorandum of Understanding was signed in November 2012, only 8000 people have been legally employed in Malaysia, which is an insufficient number considering that a few lakh Bangladeshis aspire to obtain jobs in the Southeast Asian nation. Strict quotas for legal employment means that a lot of our workers are forced to obtain jobs illegally and lead risky and insecure lives.

Our government must ensure that Malaysia opens up all its sectors for Bangladeshi workers, and that it does so without a long delay. In addition, the government must prepare itself so it can successfully handle the employment and migration of workers on a large-scale. It should introduce a system to involve private sector in manpower export to enable our workers to compete successfully in the Malaysian market.

Although it is hoped that the G2G process would reduce the intensity of trafficking of Bangladeshis, it cannot by itself resolve illegal trafficking. The government must also introduce and implement a strong monitoring system to ensure that workers are not duped by fraudulent traffickers in the guise of manpower agents.

Role of insulin in making breast-milk

FAHMIDA HASHEM

SCIENTISTS have discovered a link between insulin and breast milk production. Mothers who have low levels of insulin may have trouble producing enough milk. It may be an even bigger problem for mothers who have pre-diabetes or undiagnosed diabetes. If they do not control their insulin levels, it could make it difficult for them to produce enough milk.

Insulin plays an important role in making breast milk, according to a new study, which may help explain why many mothers have difficulty producing enough milk to nurse their baby. For a long time, insulin was not thought to play a direct role in regulating the milk-making cells of the human breast. But scientists now know that the mammary gland in breast becomes sensitive to insulin during lactation.

It is now evident that insulin does a great deal more than simply facilitate the uptake of sugars. Previous research had shown that for mothers with markers of sub-optimal glucose metabolism, such as being overweight, being at an advanced maternal age, or having a large birth-weight baby, it takes longer for their milk to come in, suggesting a role for insulin in the mammary gland.

In Bangladesh, where infant formula isn't readily accessible, affordable or safe for most families, 98% of babies are breastfed and the average age of weaning is 33 months (source: WHO Global Data Bank on Infant and Young Child Feeding). Despite the important role that insulin plays in the human body, very little is known about its presence in human milk. Levels rapidly decrease during the first few days of lactation and then, unlike other serum proteins of similar size, achieve comparable levels to those in serum. The sensitivity to insulin of the human mammary gland could affect the ability to produce breast milk in new mothers, according to new research.

Women should do research into their own individual situation to find out what their chances of being able to breastfeed are and to learn about possible solutions. If you have latch problems, plugged ducts, or other breastfeeding problems, address them right away. Consult your healthcare provider and experts in the field who are knowledgeable about lactation. The longer you wait, the more likely these regular nursing problems are to have an impact on your supply that may not be easy to recover.

The writer is Nutritionist, BCA Dept., Labaid Cardiac Hospital.

Jail killing: An attempt to cripple Bangladesh



Syed Nazrul Islam



Tajuddin Ahmad



Captain (Rtd.) Monsur Ali



AHM Quamruzzaman

ZAHID HOSSAIN

THE killing of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sk. Mujibur Rahman on August 15 and the jail killing of four national leaders on November 3 were done by the same group of conspirators to turn back the Spirit of Liberation.

The brutal killing of Bangabandhu Sk. Mujibur Rahman along with many of his family members was the first major success of the conspirators in their efforts to bring back military rule and dictatorship. The next step was to kill the four leaders of our War of Liberation who, by virtue of their patriotism, leadership qualities and sacrifice, made it possible to free the country through a war against one of the known military powers of the world.

Since these patriotic and democratic minded leaders refused to join the illegal military government of Khandakar Mushtaque, the self-confessed perpetrators made them their next target as they played the leading role in the 1971 War of Independence. When the local agents of the international conspirators became afraid of losing power in the face of an army move to dislodge them from Bangabhaban, they decided to kill the jailed national leaders so that the country would be deprived of their leadership.

The six-member bench of the Supreme Court, in its verdict in the jail-killing trial, indicated that political conspiracy inspired the killers to carry out such a heinous act inside the jail. These national leaders were, in fact, in the custody of the state, and it would possibly be very difficult to find an example where a peacetime government instructed or inspired certain individuals having no official position to commit such a dastardly act. Thus, one can say without any hesitation that it was part of a well-calculated move to destroy the gains of our hard earned independence. The conspirators for whom the killers committed this criminal act made their plan so that everything the people of this country fought for and dreamt about would be destroyed.

Following the tragic events of August 15, 1975, the self-confessed killers started to consolidate their position from Bangabhaban without holding any official position and undertook the overall responsibility of ruling the country. This caused serious reaction amongst the senior army officials as they did not like the violation of service discipline and military hierarchy even in day-to-day administrative matters. The issue of restoration of chain of command became a concern and there was heavy pressure from different army units for asking the rebels to come back to their respective units for performing their duties. It was also learnt from different sources that some directives issued through letters from army headquarters were also ignored by the rebels, which caused serious concern for the headquarters.

In such a situation, some officers of Dhaka Cantonment under the command of brigade commander Col. Shafaat Jamil and with the overall guidance of Brig. Khaled Mosharrif organised themselves to attack and dislodge the rebels by force from Bangabhaban. Even the air force was used with helicopters and other aircrafts to

terrorise the rebels, although there were differences of opinion about the mode and time of the operation between the chief of staff Major General Ziaur Rahman and the Chief of General staff Brig. Khaled Mosharrif, as it was learnt from different sources. General Zia wanted to do it gradually, especially after bringing back the tanks and armoured vehicles from the Bangabhaban area. But Brig. Khaled wanted to do it at the first available chance and teach them a lesson.

However, after the operation in the early hours of November 3, 1975, the situation became very tense as both groups readied themselves for a direct confrontation. Air Force chief Air Vice Marshal M.G. Tawab, who was an appointee of the rebel group, approached the members of the rebel group and was able to convince them to go for a settlement through discussion. Col. Malek, Col. Mannaf and Col. Chisti went to Bangabhaban and had a discussion with the rebel group members with the mediation of General M.A.G. Osmany, who was at that time working as Defence Adviser to Khandakar Mushtaque.

The members of the rebel group finally agreed to leave Bangabhaban and wanted a safe passage to Bangkok. The representatives of the army headquarters group demanded that Brig. Khaled Mosharrif be made the next chief of army staff after promoting him as major general with immediate effect -- that is November 4. The incumbent chief Major General Ziaur Rahman was retired from service and interned in his house in the cantonment. A series of meetings of the senior military officials were held at the army headquarters with General Khaled Mosharrif in the chair, and it was decided to appoint Justice A.M. Sayem as the next president of the country on November 5, replacing Khandakar Mushtaque Ahmed. Justice Sayem, after becoming president, issued a press release terming the jail killing of November 3 as a heinous criminal act and formed a high powered three-member judicial commission to probe the matter. The commission was also asked to find out as to how the criminals involved in the jail killing were allowed to leave the country freely.

All those changes clearly indicate that Khandakar Mushtaque was president of the country till November 5, but his cabinet, although it existed officially, had practically no job to do. In the same way, the new chief of army staff Major General Khaled Mosharrif had officially nothing to do in the affairs of the state, but two major decisions were made on his behalf. One allowed the self-confessed killers safe passage to Bangkok in the afternoon of November 4, although they had killed the four national leaders inside the Dhaka central jail in the early hours of November 3. The other decision was not to allow to burial of the dead bodies of the martyred four national leaders near the graves of H.S. Suhrawardy and Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq at the High Court compound where the graves were already dug for them. What prompted them, who were mostly freedom fighters, to take such a negative attitude to the national leaders who were the pillars of our glorious War of Independence in 1971 is still not known.

The writer is a freedom fighter, and former Director, ISPR.

Rethinking hunger

VISIONARY VOICES



JOMO KWAME SUNDARAM

THE world has a nutrition problem. Though great strides have been made toward the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of undernourished people in developing countries, the problem remains persistent, pervasive, and complex. After all, the issue goes beyond merely providing more food; effective efforts

to reduce undernourishment must ensure that people have access to enough of the right types of food -- those that give them the nutrients they need to live healthy, productive lives.

Since 1945, food production has tripled, and food availability has risen by 40%, on average, per person. Over the last decade alone, vegetable production in the Asia-Pacific region, where more than three-quarters of the world's vegetables are grown, increased by one-quarter.

But, despite these gains in expanding the food supply, at least 805 million people still go hungry every day, of whom some 791 million live in developing countries. Many more go hungry seasonally or intermittently. And more than two billion people suffer from "hidden hunger" -- one or more micronutrient deficiencies.

Hunger and undernourishment damage the health and productivity of adults, undermining their ability to learn and work. Moreover, they impede children's physical and cognitive development, and leave them more susceptible to illness and premature death. Stunted growth due to malnutrition affects one in four children under the age of five.

Adequate nutrition is most vital during the first 1,000 days of life (from conception to a child's second birthday). But, even after that, hunger and undernourishment continue to diminish children's chances of surviving to adulthood, much less reaching their full potential.

Ironically, in many parts of the world, pervasive hunger coexists with rising levels of obesity. More than 1.5 billion people are overweight, with one-third of them considered obese. These people are particularly vulnerable to non-communicable diseases like heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.

Contrary to popular belief, obesity is often related less to an overabundance of food than to inadequate access to affordable, diverse, and balanced diets. The challenge facing the international community is thus to ensure adequate consumption of the right kinds of food.

This means developing food systems that are more responsive to people's needs, particularly those of the socially excluded and economically marginalised. Mothers, young children, the elderly, and the disabled are among the most vulnerable to the pitfalls of undernourishment, and should be given special attention in efforts to end food insecurity and undernourishment.

In order to ensure that today's efforts benefit future

generations, strategies to improve global food systems must emphasise environmental sustainability. Specifically, world leaders must reassess prevailing food-production processes, which often put considerable stress on natural resources by exhausting freshwater supplies, encroaching on forests, degrading soils, depleting wild fish stocks, and reducing biodiversity. Making matters worse, the lack of adequate infrastructure for storing and transporting food to consumers contributes to massive losses.

Of course, it is essential to strike the right balance between producing enough nutrient-dense food and preserving the environment. Consider livestock production, which accounts for many foods -- including milk, eggs, and meat -- that have enriched diets in developing countries and provide livelihoods for millions. Unsustainable production systems, combined with wasteful and excessive consumption in some regions of the world, have had serious consequences in terms of climate change, disease transmission, and nutritional balance.

But, with a strong political commitment, global food-production systems can be transformed. An obvious step would be to ensure that all food-related programmes, policies, and interventions account for nutrition and sustainability. Likewise, food-related research and development should focus on facilitating the production of nutrient-rich foods and the diversification of farming systems. Finding ways to use water, land, fertilizer, and labour more efficiently, and with minimal adverse impact, is essential to ecological sustainability.

Equally important will be interventions that empower local communities to improve their diets. This requires comprehensive public-health and education campaigns, social protection to enhance resilience, and initiatives to boost employment and income generation.

Finally, producers and distributors need support and encouragement to transform their existing systems. After all, a shift toward sustainability cannot come at the expense of farmers' livelihoods.

Better nutrition makes economic sense. Malnutrition in all of its forms reduces global economic welfare by about 5% annually, through foregone output and additional costs incurred. The economic gains of reducing micronutrient deficiencies are estimated to have a cost/benefit ratio of almost 1:13.

The upcoming Second International Conference on Nutrition in Rome will provide a historic opportunity to galvanise political commitment to enhance nutrition for all through better policies and international solidarity. Failure to make the needed investments in food access, nutrition, and sustainability is morally -- and economically -- unjustifiable.

The writer is Assistant Director-General and Coordinator for Economic and Social Development at the Food and Agriculture Organization.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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"Fly while you have wings"

I would like to thank Mr. Abdul Matin for his article entitled, "Fly while you have wings," published in your daily on October 30, 2014. The write-up was very meaningful as well as inspiring. Of course, youth is more valuable than wealth and property, and I agree with the writer that we only understand its value after it is gone. The youth of our society should realise their strength and work hard when they still can.

Md. Zahid Hossain

Pallabi, Mirpur, Dhaka

Promoting new writers

In most of our newspapers' literature pages we find reviews of well known writers' books. Does this mean that new writers' books, published by ordinary publishers, are not worthy of review? Shouldn't the newspapers promote new good writers and poets? Otherwise, how will our literature be enriched with new visions and experiences? Many of our highly accomplished writers' works were promoted and reviewed by different newspapers and literary magazines in the past. It is my earnest request to the newspapers to give a little attention to the new writers who may not have a high profile but at least have the quality to write.

Pradip Das

On e-mail

Distributing warm clothes in right time

Winter is knocking at the door. Every year many organisations as well as individuals distribute warm clothes among the needy people in villages and cities, but not in the right time. Warm clothes should be distributed before the arrival of winter.



PHOTO: STAR

The various organisations that help the poor survive winter with less pain should start collecting warm clothes now and distribute those by the second week of November.

Shafkat Rahman

BIAM Laboratory School

Comments on commentary, "The meaning of Nizami's verdict," published on October 31, 2014

Asif Kamal

Definitely, it is a very nice and explicit write-up from Mr. Anam. What Jamaat did and is now doing is terrible.

Snr Citizen

Very good write-up.

A freedom fighter

Great commentary reflecting the views of all the freedom fighters who joined the War of Liberation out of conviction. Thank you, Mr. Editor.

Tajul Imam

I am a freedom fighter and now I can die in peace.

ShamimH

There are rules of warfare and they violated all of them. He murdered unarmed non-combatants.

Dev Saha

It took four decades to convict a man who has been known for his notoriety all these years. It is rather shameful that the previous governments kept silent about this mass murderer.

"Islam misused deliberately" (Oct. 30, 2014)

Dev Saha

Jamaat is not the only culprit who abuse Islam.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

I personally believe that Jamaat-Shibir don't practice true Islamic ideology because Islam