

Rise in gas and power tariff

What is the rationale?

IT is not unusual for governments to adjust the prices of goods and services, but when such regulatory arrangements disregard the normal market forces it becomes an aberration. The hike in prices of gas and power to be effective from September 1, in our estimation defies logic. In the first place the decision to raise prices was not that of the energy regulatory commission's but rather imposed from the top. In doing that the commission has overlooked the problem of the consumers, its prime responsibility.

During the last six years oil prices has been raised on six occasions and gas price has increased twice during the same period. And we are baffled by the quantum jump of 50 percent in respect of gas burners. We are not aware that the gas sector is enduring losses as of now that would necessitate such a gross upward adjustment?

The spike in oil prices is even more baffling, particularly in view of the fact that the international price of oil has been more than halved in the last one year.

Admittedly, only one third of the electricity generated in the country is oil fired, and the government is still giving subsidy to the state owned energy producers, but raising prices is not the only way to reduce subsidy. And would it not have helped in lowering the price of electricity overall if all the oil fired electricity generating companies used oil at prices determined by the market?

The adjustments has not only been abrupt it has been sharp too in many cases. And that cannot be without the attendant negative consequences on the people and the economy.

Who do the pavements and footbridges belong to?

Return them to the pedestrians!

ANYONE who has ever taken a long walk through the streets of Dhaka can vouch that it is unfriendly to pedestrians. On an average day, a pedestrian must tread through pavements filled with makeshift stalls, potholes or waste dumps, or poorly maintained, dirty footbridges which are all but taken over by vendors. While these makeshift stalls provide sources of employment and sell everything from vegetables to books, clothing to trinkets, they also take up scarce urban space, obstructing pedestrians from moving around the city in peace.

However, it's not only the small-scale traders who encroach upon public spaces in the city, but also shops, construction companies and other businesses, which use the streets as their own storage unit or dumping ground, unapologetically blocking foot traffic with bricks, construction rods, containers, sewage, and so on. Residents throw their household garbage right on the streets, with no concern as to how it affects the urban living condition. Meanwhile, motorcyclists plough through the pavements in violation of the law, and even park their vehicles on walkways.

The two mayors and relevant authorities seem hardly alive about the pathetic state of affairs in Dhaka city. With Dhaka ranking the second worst liveable city in The Global Liveability Ranking for the third year in a row, it is imperative that these pavements and footbridges are cleared off and returned to the pedestrians. For this, instead of just arbitrary mobile drives, we need planned rehabilitation of vendors and hawkers, and strict action against those businesses or individuals who misuse the streets as if these were their private property. Law enforcers must implement existing laws instead of letting off wrongdoers for money and turning the other way.

COMMENTS

"LOSS on both sides" (August 26, 2015)

Kazi Zehad

It is India who will have to face financial loss for banning cattle export to Bangladesh.

Mahabub Zaman Munna

Why do we have to depend on Indian cattle? If we take proper plans, we can increase our cattle production locally.

Sakib Ahmed Sezan

Our government should take sufficient measures in this regard.

"6-month ban on screening" (August 25, 2015)

Yasin Imon

"Earlier in March, the HC asked the authorities to delete some scenes portraying horrors, cruelty and violence associated with the disaster." - seriously? Are you sure TDS that there aren't any other ulterior motives?

Nurul Alam Anik

If you watch the trailer you will see this is a cheap movie that is trying to make money off of a very sad event.

Sameena Hossain

They won't correct the garments owners' unfair practices that lead to thousands of people being crushed to death but they will ban a movie depicting the horror.

A UNIQUE SOURCE OF LAW (!)

Laws by conscience

MD. RIZWANUL ISLAM

AS a student of law, during the early days of my undergraduate studies, I have been taught by my esteemed teachers that in modern parliamentary democracies laws are basically of two types, namely: parent laws or laws made by the parliament and secondary laws or laws made by executive or judicial bodies by dint of the lawmaking power vested in them by the parliament. We obey these laws because being enacted by our elected representatives or their delegates, at least in theory they reflect our collective conscience. However, sometimes the practice of many of our bureaucrats and even politicians tells me that the teaching of my esteemed teachers and what I teach to my undergraduate students about the sources of law is inapplicable or incomplete in the context of Bangladesh. After all, there is another visible source of law in Bangladesh that can nowhere be found in the statutes or textbooks on law but is seemingly no less effective than the known sources of laws.

Here I am referring to the conscience or more appositely the perception of right and wrong of the bureaucrats and politicians belonging to the party in power (no matter which political party is in power) and even whether a political force is in power) and the 'efficient and worldly' way it is enforced. This powerful source of 'law' is manifest in bureaucrats and politicians inflicting punishments on ordinary men and women which is not authorised by any law. This 'conscience-driven and vibrant' source of 'law' is expressed in the instant order of powerful bureaucrats or ministers (e.g.

manhandling a public servant by a minister or a Member of the Parliament for neglect of duties or punishing a citizen for violating a law). We have witnessed similar righteous enforcement of 'law' during martial law regimes too.

Unlike, the trials in formal courts based on the formally recognised sources of law, this type of instantaneous and colourful demonstration of the delivery of justice has many 'advantages' and so it should be lauded (!). In courts, the accused is not guilty unless she/he is proven SO and the guilt has to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. And often for various reasons, an accused may remain unharmed even though she/he may have violated a law. In any case, in regular courts there are many procedural safeguards which may stand in the process of quenching the desire for prompt justice. However, the enforcer of this efficient 'law' in our case is the witness, arbiter, and also the ultimate enforcer of the 'law'. In this unique and efficient delivery of justice mechanism, the technicalities of the law are totally immaterial, lawyers are absent, as is the complete absence of the question of self-defence of the accused. What a triumph of justice this is where there is no delay whatsoever in punishing the wrongdoer!

Clearly, astute politicians can feel the vibes of the people and what would win votes for them. They know that many of us are very keen on instant gratification of the desire for justice. As long as a 'wrong' is punished, many of us are too eager to be oblivious to the trivial nuances of the modes or forms of punishment or the identity or motive of the punisher. This is why they feel scant or no

need to care for the law as contained in the formal sources. They know that while some idealistic people may despise their actions, there will be many more to laud them for their bravado. Similarly, most bureaucrats know where the power belongs. They are also acutely aware that the pronouncement of Article 21(2) of the Constitution that, "Every person in the service of the Republic has a duty to strive at all times to serve the people" means nothing in reality. Ruling the people is necessary, serving them is futile.

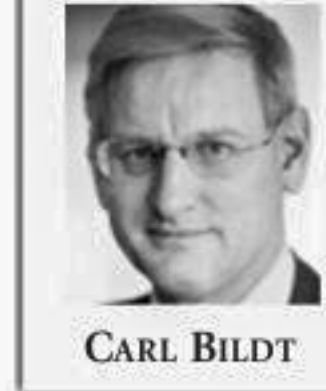
As a society, we have progressed from the perception of the past that the king's conscience could be the law. And let us always remember that the conscience of an individual, however powerful or conscientious the individual may seemingly be, cannot be a substitute for collective conscience as is reflected in our codified laws. Hopefully, in years to come, we would have such an ingrained culture of accountability that 'righteous and instantaneous application of law' (you may read benevolent use of power with malevolent consequences at best, or cheap and distasteful projection of powers at worst) would be unimaginable even for the most powerful in the society. Unless and until that day comes, our society would be far from an egalitarian society and would resemble an absolute monarchy more than a republic. However, as we continue to hope for that day, seemingly, the only hope that we may pin on for now is the heavy hands of the law and the proper application of that law by its enforcer, to punish those who apparently believe that their conscience is as good as law.

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PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Development's Digital Divide

Carl Bildt Series



CARL BILD

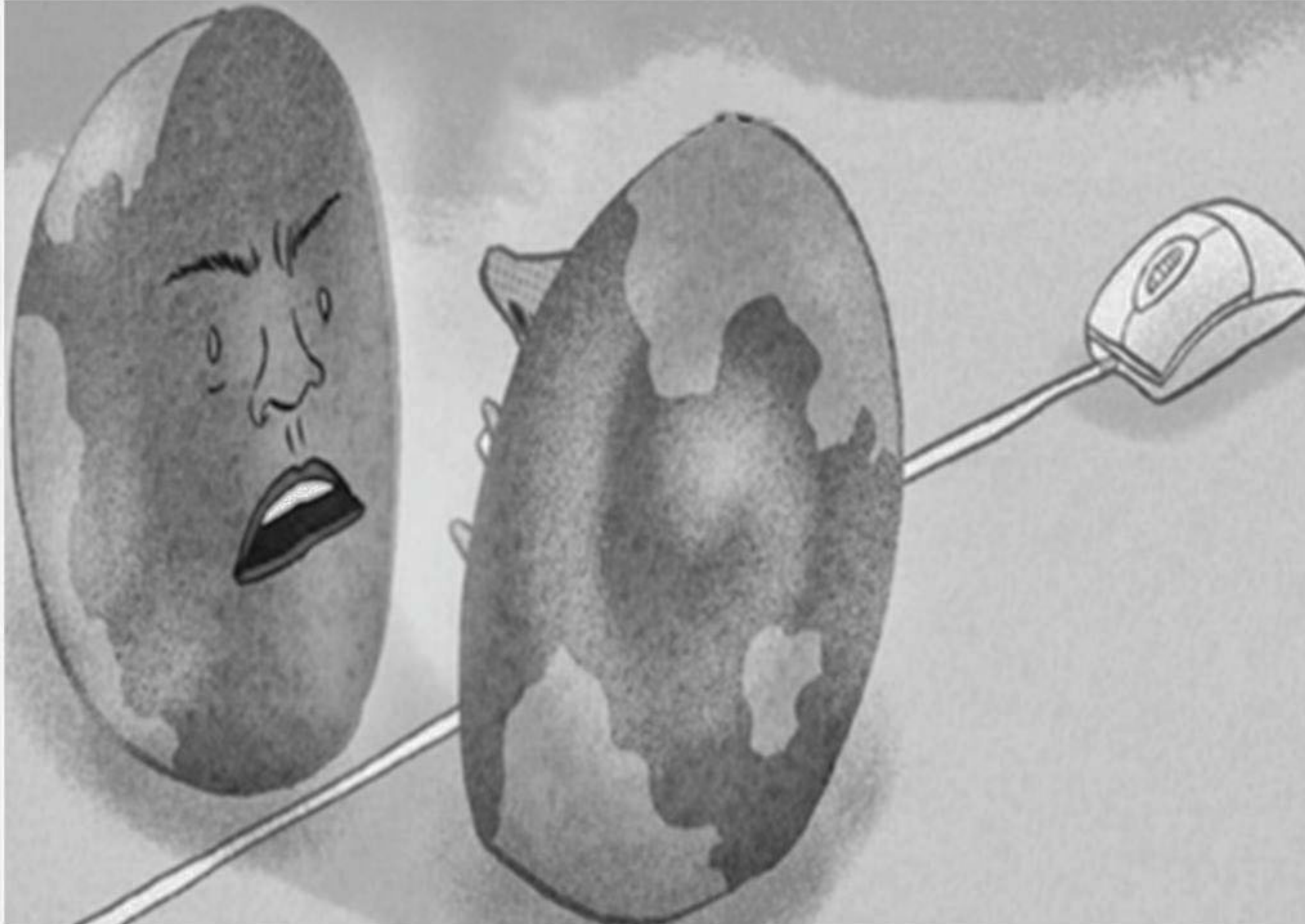
ON September 25, world leaders will gather in New York to adopt the new Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs, comprising 17 goals and 169 related targets, are the result of extensive political negotiations, and will set the benchmarks over the next 15 years for achieving the international community's overarching objective: to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere."

The SDGs are noble and certainly ambitious. And yet, in a time of profound scientific and technological change, they remain remarkably conventional. Information technology – this century's defining social and economic development – receives only a brief mention (in one of the sub-targets). Nowhere in the document is there even a hint of the revolutionary role that the nascent explosion in connectivity, information, and data could play in ending poverty.

There can be no doubting the impact that information technology will have on economic growth. Governments, politicians, and international organisations must harness the potential of the Internet to serve global development and individual empowerment.

Issues concerning security and governance have dominated discussions of cyber policy over the past few years. This is to some extent justifiable: The breadth of topics is staggering, ranging from international norms for state behavior in cyberspace to challenges like cybercrime and growing censorship. But it is also clear that the countries that will gain the most from the ongoing information revolution are those that manage to keep their eyes on the real prize: using this explosion in technology to strengthen their economies and improve the lives of their citizens.

A 2009 study by the World Bank found that a 10 percent increase in fixed broadband penetration boosts a developing economy's GDP by about 1.4 percent. These findings likely vastly understate the impact of the technology; after all, much of the developing world is seeing a rapid rollout of mobile broadband, with much higher capacity than what was available at the time of the study.



The phenomenon is most evident in Asia and Africa – which together account for three-quarters of the global growth in smartphone use this year. As smartphone subscriptions increase from 2.9 billion to 7.7 billion worldwide in the next five years, 80 percent of the new accounts are expected to be opened by users on these two continents.

The widespread adoption of information technology in the developing world opens up myriad of possibilities; we are only at the beginning. Data analysis has been used to fight Ebola in West Africa, and mobile phone networks have been used to bring modern banking to unserved populations throughout the developing world. These new technologies empower people – most notably the rapidly growing youth population – and create new avenues for economic and social development.

Indeed, mobile connectivity may turn out to be the most important develop-

ment tool ever for the billions of people in emerging Africa and Asia. Of course, there will still be a digital divide. But, increasingly, it will be generational rather than geographical. Within a decade, the majority of young people in Africa will likely be as well connected as those in Europe or North America. This will change the world profoundly.

The big question is whether governments are aware of the potential power of this development. If the SDGs are any indication, it is likely that they are not. The goals and targets that the world is about to embrace do not adequately reflect the significance of this epochal change.

The absence of awareness is also reflected in the preparations for a high-level UN meeting on international policy concerning the internet and development that will take place in December. The event, a review of the progress made since the 2005 World Summit on the

Information Society, is the culmination of a three-year negotiation process. Unfortunately, political wrangling over issues of internet governance and cyber security has dominated the preparations for the meeting, and there has been little discussion of the revolutionary possibilities that an open, dynamic, and free internet can provide.

Governments are being left behind as entrepreneurs and innovators race ahead. But maximising the potential of the new technology requires the stable and predictable operating environment, as well as the support for basic research, that only governments can provide. It is time for world leaders to put the potential of the Internet at the top of the development agenda.

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The writer is a former prime minister of Sweden. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2015. www.project-syndicate.org Exclusive to The Daily Star.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Textbooks -- a thing of the past?

It is often heard that nowadays education, particularly at the university level, is limited to lecture synopsis; students hardly use reference or textbooks. This practice may limit the students' learning to some fixed topics and chapters.

Online resources are ample and they are continuously updated with the changing course of subjects. University teachers should maintain their own webpages to keep students abreast of courses. At the same time, students should devote their time to prepare their own notes by collecting information from different books and online archives.

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Priorities of Bangladesh

- It refers the article "Towards a consensus on Bangladesh priorities" (August 14) by Bjorn Lomborg. The first priority must be building a consensus among the politicians and civil society about the form of government that will oversee the elections. The second priority will be to educate the illiterate persons through a crash program within the next five years. The third priority will be to modernise the education system by abandoning the three streams- Bangla medium, English medium and Madrasa medium— bringing them under one national curriculum. The fourth priority should be to educate the young population (who are left out

of the tertiary level) with polytechnic courses. The fifth priority will be to modernise the railways and develop the highways and major ports. The sixth priority should be to reduce traffic congestion by developing mass rapid transport facilities like high-speed elevated train or underground train. The seventh priority will be to contain the black market and bring all capable people within the tax net so that internal resource can be mobilised for sustainable development. The eighth priority should be to reform the judicial administration, the election commission and the police so that they are efficient and justice is never delayed or denied.

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