

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA TUESDAY MAY 23, 2017, JAISHTHA 9, 1424 BS

## The streets belong to the influential

Who will go after the extortionists?

**A**N investigation by this paper has confirmed what we unofficially know – that the reason why it is so hard to clear the city's footpaths of hawkers is because of an entrenched system of extortion involving influential groups. While the toll collector or 'lineman' is responsible for taking this illegal fee from each vendor, the total amount is distributed amongst political leaders, law enforcers and influential persons.

But the amount of money that is being fleeced, through intimidation, from these poor vendors - TK1,825 crore a year says a study - is beyond imagination. It is apparently as big as the combined budget of Dhaka's two city corporations.

Needless to say our mayors are faced with an immovable mountain when it comes to clearing the streets of illegal occupation. Dhaka South Corporation (DSCC) has in fact filed cases against individuals engaged in such extortion. But this has hardly deterred this nexus of extortionists. The obvious casualness with which these toll collectors operate and the apathy of the law enforcers about taking cases against them, points to the collusion reported by the study and alleged by many vendors. In fact the DS report reveals that whenever the city corporations try to clear footpaths and roads of hawkers, certain groups that have no connection to the actual sufferers, the hawkers, crop up to protest the move.

It is about time that our home ministry takes stringent steps to rid our city of these extortionists who include, reportedly, people belonging to very powerful quarters. Meanwhile a permanent solution for these hawkers have to be found so that they can sell their wares peacefully, without having to dole out protection money.

## Overcrowded classrooms

More schools and teachers needed at secondary level

**T**EACHER-student ratio is a key quality indicator of education system. In crowded classrooms, it becomes difficult to take lessons while the teacher gets less time to spend on each student. It also affects the overall education environment putting extra pressure on the school infrastructure and facilities such as common room, toilet, and playground.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh has been sliding down the achievement scale of the international standard of 1:30 at the secondary level. The recently released draft of Bangladesh Education Statistics-2016 reveals that there was one teacher for 41 students last year compared to one for 30 students in 2011. The situation is worst in the state-run secondary schools with one teacher for 103 students.

Despite encouraging progress in enrolment at secondary level, teacher shortage remains a major concern. It has turned acute due to slow teacher recruitment process and disproportionate distribution of teachers in rural areas. There is also a huge gap in the numbers of teaching staff for compulsory subjects such as English, maths and science. The education authorities should revamp the present structure of recruitment and training of teachers to employ enough new teachers. They should also set up more secondary schools to accommodate the increasing number of students.

To support these moves the government should increase budgetary allocation in education sector, particularly at the secondary level. Over the last seven years, the education budget allocation has remained stuck at around 2 per cent of GDP which is one of the lowest in the world. We urge the government to address this gap in the upcoming budget.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### A fervent appeal to the city mayor

The footpaths on both sides of the very busy New Eskaton road are completely occupied by illegal hawkers, restaurants, car and motor cycle shops. School children, their mothers, elderly people, and other regular pedestrians of the area have no space at all to walk through the pavement.

I appeal to the city mayor to come up and save us from this agonising experience every day. We are taxpayers and expect to be looked after at least to the bare minimum. The women and children should not be risking themselves to go about their daily activities.

Mahboob Malik  
By email

### IPL gambling

Gambling has become a common trend because of the running IPL tournament. It has become especially common of late not only in the main cities, but also the district towns and countryside. People bet from Tk 500 to 1500 per match. Even the law enforcement agencies haven't been able to prevent it even after being informed. I believe that the authorities, as well as the people, should work collaboratively to put an end to this illegal practice.

Md. Tajbedul Islam  
Sirajganj Government College

# Welcome back load shedding!

## NO FRILLS



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

**A**S the mercury itches upwards in the closing week of May and meteorological bulletin informs us gleefully that the temperature will be getting hotter in

the coming days, people living in both urban and rural areas have been greeted with power outages (popularly known as load shedding). For hours on end, particularly throughout the night, Dhaka city residents now enjoy the cacophony of generators for hours. They are of course the luckier residents. The less fortunate residents rely on Instant power supply (IPS) systems which sputter out after a while leaving people to suffer an unwanted sauna. And then of course there are the toiling masses constituting the lower tier of society, for them there is no respite at all. The children and the elderly suffer the most in this situation and millions resort to the good old *haat pankha* to make the best of a bad situation.

According to Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) data, last Saturday the country generated about 8,244 megawatts (MW) against an installed capacity of 13,179 MW. We are informed that "technical glitches" were responsible for about 1,965MW of electricity load-shedding and the



PHOTO: STAR

*It is well known that power demand peaks during May – June period. So why exactly did BPDB decide to undertake maintenance for some of its biggest power plants during this time?*

other 776 MW of lost power production was due to a lack of sufficient gas supply to power plants. What all this points to naturally is that our energy supply is far less secure than we had been led to believe. If we look at what is happening in some of the rural areas outside Dhaka (which fall under

the purview of REB), the situation is quite terrible, where load shedding ranges from anywhere between 6-8 hours a day.

Needless to say, it is pointless to talk about the country as a whole. The major economic hubs in Bangladesh are concentrated around Dhaka and Chittagong and it is hardly surprising that the business houses and industrial estates are suffering the brunt of these power outages. Industrial output is severely hampered according to the FBCCI, whose president Md. Shariful Islam (Mobiuddin) stated quite bluntly recently: "The country has sufficient power production. But the problem is we don't have ample distribution networks that are consistent with the generation capacity." This has long been a problem that is not unknown to policymakers but while inaugurating new power plants is great for publicity, upgrading distribution and transmission networks is not. Industrial production has been hit badly across the board. While large RMG conglomerates may be able to face losses by running their industrial units with backup diesel generators, what happens to those industrial sectors that sell to the domestic market? Their sales proceeds are not in foreign currency. Indeed, even

industrial estates like Export Processing Zones are not above load shedding.

Latest newspaper reports tell us that we have several hours of power outages in Mirpur, Shewrapara, Kazipara, Khilgaon, Goran, Jatrabari, Dania, Matuil and Demra which are the worst hit. That does not mean people living in other parts of the city are doing much better. It is perhaps made tolerable in the more affluent parts of the city where buildings have some form of power backup which at least keep the fans turning as the rainless days continue. It is well known that power demand peaks during May – June period. So why exactly did BPDB decide to undertake maintenance for some of its biggest power plants during this time? According to BPDB's public relations department, the newly-installed Summit Bibiyana-II 341MW power plant (along with some other big plants) is down for maintenance. This is terrible planning, especially when we take into account gas shortages and other "technical glitches" have taken out more than 2,500MW of power supply from the equation during some of the hottest weather spells that occur at this time.

We are now finally waking up to the sad reality that our power transmission

and distribution systems are prone to weather fluctuations like tornadoes and cyclones. Our lack of foresight in upgrading these systems is translating into a power system that is unstable at best. We are informed that the World Bank has recently approved a US\$59 million loan for facilitating our power sector modernisation plans in April. WB has also approved \$357million and endorsed the first \$100 million under the Scale-up Facility Fund. This loan will be used under the Power System Reliability and Efficiency Improvement Project to reduce power outages, load-shedding cut electricity generation costs. This of course is very good news, but why has it taken so long for us to avail such concessional loans? And what is the timeline for its implementation?

At the end of the day, we are left in the dark as to what authorities are going to do about this chronic load-shedding problem. We stand on the verge of the holy month of Ramadan and have been assured that there will be "uninterrupted power supply" for the devout when they wake up for 'sehri' and breaking of fast during 'iftar'. What about the rest of the day?

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

# Only social media cannot influence law enforcement

## STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

**T**HE heightened media response and public outcry prompted by the rape of two girls at a Banani hotel in Dhaka city deserves commendation for obvious reasons. What, however, does not merit equal and unqualified commen-

andation, and in fact points to a systemic deficiency, is the unusual agility of enforcement organisations following the unfortunate occurrence. In the instant case, such deficiency principally relates to the alleged refusal of the police station to record the incident at the first instance, and thereafter resorting to action being goaded primarily by media exposure.

In the incident under discussion, the concerned police unit had no business whatsoever to verify the authenticity of the complaint as alleged. Their job, quite clearly as per regulation, was to record the occurrence of a heinous cognisable criminal offence and then proceed to investigate. Experience indicates that proper and prompt investigation would most likely reveal the facts and circumstances as has been proved subsequently. At the least, the police station should have entered the complaint in the prescribed General Diary and do the needful. Should the complaint turn out to be false, there is provision under the law to deal with the informant. However, it is clear that the Banani Police Station did not take the required procedural steps.

It would be appropriate to say that the defaults of the other law enforcing organisations need to be focused. Quite naturally, the question arises whether the Customs Intelligence outfit was waiting in the wings for the concerned jewellery businessman's son to commit some mischief to propel them into action and probing allegations of gold smuggling and tax evasion. Their sudden over-zealous actions have raised more questions about the organisation's evenhandedness and the official somnolence. Similar accusations

could also be levelled against the Department of Narcotics that vainly tried to shake off inertia and show some activity by seizing some unauthorised liquors from the hotel where the incident took place.

It is quite a distressing reflection on our polity that this high-profile rape case and the attendant media focus has in fact relegated into background the shocking gang rape of a young girl in Jurain on April 28 this year. Police has thus far arrested only the abettor, a security guard, and are

and was compelled to commit suicide. The Union Parishad member is now accused of inducing suicide but no action had been taken regarding the defaulting policemen.

Under circumstances as stated above, one may wonder, if incidents like the ones at Jurain and Sreepur will not be pursued by law enforcing agencies simply because there is no media hype on such depredations. And whether hyper activity by State agencies will be in evidence only in exceptional cases like the Banani

*One may wonder, if incidents like the ones at Jurain and Sreepur will not be pursued by law enforcing agencies simply because there is no media hype on such depredations. And whether hyper activity by state agencies will be in evidence only in exceptional cases.*



yet to nab the five rapists while the father of the victim continues to receive threatening telephone calls to withdraw the criminal case.

Media focus, unfortunately, is on the wane, also in respect of the heartrending suicide on the rail track of a father and daughter in Sreepur. To recollect, Hazrat Ali, the terrified father, approached the Union Parishad member and the police and sought protection of his minor daughter, being pestered continuously by the local bullies. He did not get any relief

incident? The question is, shall we fail to note that behind the agility and sudden speed of activity in exceptional incidents, like the one that took place in the Banani hotel, lie the unpardonable insensitivity in applying the law as a matter of course to the relief of all citizens? The commitment of a model investigation of the Banani incident as attributed to an official of the detective branch must not be, one hopes, an exception. Equity in law enforcement shall not remain an elusive goal.

The writer is a former IGP and columnist of The Daily Star.