

FOCUS

Till Death Do Us Part Unpaid Bills in Bangladesh

"KAMAL, what a pleasant surprise. I haven't seen you in ages. You seem a tad upset! What's wrong?"

"Kamal, my friend the playwright, started his tale of woe. 'O.R., I got up one morning last week with a premonition of doom. Three days had gone by with nothing going wrong, the electricity, the water and the telephone had all functioned perfectly. The tension was unbearable. I knew this was too good to last. It was like a gathering storm...'"

"All right Kamal, get to the point."

"I'm just setting the stage, O.R., a little bit of atmosphere," he said with a hurt expression on his face.

"Go on", I said, a little impatiently.

"I opened the mail and there it was, the bill from DESA (the Dhaka Electric Supply Authority). It claims that I (actually my father who has been dead over a decade) owe 30,000 taka in unpaid electricity bills from twenty years ago. At the rate of two per cent a month, the total bill amounts to over a lakh. At first I thought it was some kind

of mistake — who has ever heard of an unpaid bill from twenty years ago? I was about to chuck it in the waste paper basket when Litu said "Bhaiya, they have cut off the next door neighbour's electric line for an unpaid bill from 1947."

"Litu, I said sternly, how many times have I told you not to make up things. You have been watching too much television and your grip on reality is slipping. I don't know what this generation is coming to..."

Shireen interrupted and said, "Kamal, Litu is right. I just spoke to Nasreen Bhui and she was in tears about this bill. I think you should clear this up with DESA, otherwise they might cut off our electric line as well."

I started to explain patiently to my dear wife the implausibility of this scenario, but looking at her face decided that discretion was the better part of valour and said reluctantly that I would stop by and clear up this



REFLECTIONS by Dr Omar Rahman

minor misunderstanding on the way to the office.

"Then what happened — Kamal?"

"Well, I stopped by the DESA office and found this unperturbed older gentleman who was drinking his tea and pouring over this massive ledger with tiny writing in it. I waved my bill at him and said, 'How is it possible to have an overdue bill from 1976?'"

He looked at me calmly and said, "Sit down, have a cup of tea. Twenty years is nothing, we have overdue notices issued for bills from fifty years ago. If you haven't paid your bills we will

cut off your electric line — it's as simple as that, sir!"

"But we have paid our bills faithfully — my father never missed a payment in his life."

"If you have paid it, it should be in this ledger, and if it were a notice, that means you haven't paid it," the man from DESA said belligerently.

I asked in a suitably deferential tone, "Is it at all possible, I mean due to no fault of your own, by some mysterious process, that some paid bills may not get into your ledger?"

He pondered about the improbability of this happening and after a long silence replied

reluctantly, "Well, sometimes, mind you, very rarely, some bills may not get entered into the ledger — for example if the counter-foil (the copy of the bill that comes to DESA) gets lost — we get thousands of counter-foils each month and if the fan is on, some of them may get blown away and not get entered. You can see how that can happen."

I nodded, understandingly and then with a start realised, "what am I doing," I said, "if it's not in the ledger, how do we prove that we have paid it?"

"Oh that's very simple, just produce your copy of the bill and we will check it with the ledger and make any corrections, if necessary."

"But this is a bill from twenty years ago"

He looked at me with puzzlement. "You mean you don't keep a copy of all the bills that have been paid for three generations in your family?"

thought ten years worth of bills was all that is required."

He looked at me in wonder and said, "Mr Kamal, a utility bill is a sacred trust, passed on from one generation to the next. I remember my dear father on his death bed calling me and entrusting to me, as the eldest in the family, all the bills (electricity, water, telephone) that he had paid including the ones that his father had paid and his father before him. He said, 'Son, all I have to leave you is this tin box full of paid in full bills. Guard it with your life. If ever in the future any of you are faced with the misfortune of an overdue bill, you can produce this evidence.' I can tell you, sir I have kept that sacred trust and when my time comes, I will pass it on to my eldest son who in turn will pass it on to his. This is what tradition is all about."

"So what happened next, Kamal?"

"O.R. I left with tears in my eyes. I came back to the house and told my wife about the importance of values and tradition. She wants me to see a psychiatrist!"

Dhaka Day by Day Finding the Alchemy of Friendship

by Fayza Haq



from '89 to '92.

Discussing the benefits that the institute offers to the country she says, "The public of the Alliance is very diversified in terms of professional and academic walk of life, skills hobby and perception of its cultural background and certainly Alliance will benefit from these resources. There are some who come only to learn French, use the library and cafe, but there are others who are more involved in the inner life of the Alliance. I hope to involve the members in participation of working groups."

Talking about the benefit that the institute derives from the country Ms Lasnier says, "It is a Bangladeshi institution and its aim is not to benefit from its host country but to enrich the relationship between France and Bangladesh through the diffusion and understanding of our respective culture and language."

Dealing with the facilities offered at the institute Ms Lasnier mentions the movie club, book-video-cassette-CD library, cafeteria, cultural activities and French language teaching.

Discussing the new facilities that she is thinking of introducing, she mentions a live music club, for which a programme of audition has already been set. She is also thinking of launching a Bangla course for the expatriates and of starting language courses in Italian and Spanish. She is also planning to introduce sport activities like table tennis.

Dwelling on why they teach French at the Alliance Ms Lasnier says, "We teach French to develop relations between the two countries. We must have people who can communicate with us. French is an international language so there is the demand for French. Again, French is the fourth commercial power in the world. Also, French is a key to Europe as French is deeply rooted in the Latin languages of Europe."

Discussing Alliance's tenure in Bangladesh Ms Lasnier says, "Alliance began in '59. Its respectable age has provided it with a deep insight into our society. One remarkable feature is that it has been able to adjust to the changes of society. The policy is to professionalise its activities whether cultural or academic."

Asked why the Alliance keeps a low profile, she says, "Alliance has a number of programmes each month. In a country when a mass of people are fluent in English, French emerges as the most favoured fashionable foreign language. People study French in Bangladesh in order to have further studies in France. We have a lot to do at the centers in Dhaka and Chittagong. The idea is to be a focus point radiating over the country rather than be a network of institutions."

Ms Lasnier has an eighteen month son with her called Mathieuson. Her leisure interests include taijichuan, reading, photography horse-riding and walking in the countryside.

A VISION OF THE YEAR 2020

Science for the Future of Bangladesh

by Professor Syed Safullah

THE year 2020 is less than a quarter of a century away from now. Our reserve of natural gas nearly spent by then, a population of 180 million crammed in 55,000 square miles and the reckless ecodegradation caused both by lack of perception and timely intervention; the year 2020 forbids any hope of happiness for Bangladesh people. Yet, conscientious application of science and technology can rescue Bangladesh from an impending socio-economic disaster in 2020.

Presently, there are 1250 PhDs and 14000 MSc level science graduates engaged in various fields of research. The ratio of trained scientists in applied and basic sciences is highly lopsided. Research activities of the universities and various organisations show that both quality and quantum of research have declined compared to British and Pakistan periods. Some research groups, however, have shown exceptional capabilities. There is, therefore, necessity both for identifying the real research leaders and improving conditions for research. The decline in research may be ascribed to a number of reasons, to look of governmental support to science. A paltry sum of Tk 1900 million for revenue expenditure and less than Tk 500 million for research are allocated to 60 national level research organisations in Bangladesh. The allocation to Science and Technology was Ministry for 1996 Tk 1320 million.

The research support to 10 government Universities is even more appalling. Only about Tk 10 million allocated for the research support at the universities as teaching aid. Comparison with India shows

that the ratio of GDP to research support in Bangladesh is smaller, nearly by two orders of magnitude. To mitigate the situation, a rational allocation should be raised to at least Tk 5500 million. At the same time, a scheme for supporting the research leaders costing no more than Tk 40 million, should be started. Grants ranging from Tk 1 million to Tk 50000 should be made out to genuine researchers based on publication and relevance of their work to Bangladesh economy.

Science in Bangladesh, given its tradition and present state, has the capability to be fruitfully employed for a better tomorrow for the nation. Considering the urgency and a vision of prosperous Bangladesh in 2020, following sectors should accord priority:

- a) Agricultural production should be sufficient to support a population 180 million at that time.
- b) In the energy sector, the situation is rather grim. By 2020 the electricity demand will be well over 8000 MW at the current rate of growth in consumption. Natural gas generates 60 per cent of the electricity. If the current rate of consumption of gas (0.17 trillion cft) is stretched a little more, then there will be serious paucity of gas by 2020.
- c) Considering everything, research in the energy sector should be directed along the following lines:
 - i) Step up exploration of fossil fuel. The geographical location of Bangladesh does indeed hint at finding more and, per-

long before 2020. Science, in Bangladesh therefore, should insist on its participation in the environmental and large-scale geological implications of tapping of hydro-electricity from the Himalayan sources.

Currently, the population growth rate is 1.8 per cent. The slowing down of the growth from 1970 figure of 3.2 to the present rate has been possible due to implementation of family planning measures with moderate success. If literacy could be raised to 70 per cent from the current level by 2010 if this rise could be coupled with a modestly successful poverty alleviation programme, then by 2020 zero population growth will be norm for Bangladesh. Population would have reached

170-180 million by then. With a high level of folk science and a high literacy rate, Bangladesh could support a population of 180 million by the year 2020. To stabilise the population and enhance its well-being, following research endeavours should therefore be undertaken:

- a) Ensure the production of family planning implements like condom and oral pills. Assimilation of imported technology will be required for this purpose.
- b) Carry out research on more acceptable methods of contraception, based on natural products.
- c) Search and introduce be-

nign anti-fertility principles in foods of mass consumption.

In the above-mentioned areas, there is tremendous scope for scientists and technologists. By 2020, science and industrial parks will be common phenomenon all over the world. To mark a beginning in this post-industrial production endeavour, Bangladesh should set up at least two such parks by the year 2000 — one at Chittagong and one at Saidpur.

In view of the fact that by 2020 metal recycling will be widespread and environmentally more acceptable practice, the proposed park at Chittagong should focus on the fabrication of small-scale custom-made alloys. Ilmenite from the beach sand of Cox's bazar could be ju-

iciously used for this purpose. For the fertiliser industry, efficiency of feed stock transformation will have to be increased. In place of large-scale plants, small-scale ones should be set up.

Environment

By the turn of this century, anthropic intervention in every aspect of Bangladesh ecology will be significantly intense. If, both long-term and on-the-spot trouble-shooting measures are not under taken, our people may suffer the impacts of chronic as well as occasional disaster, like environmental degradation. Following research and action-oriented programmes are envisaged for making response to environmental risks:

- a) Set up decentralised monitoring capabilities through the participation of NGOs and academia.
- b) Develop cost-effective measures.
- c) Build up national monitoring and mitigative capabilities both in government and non-government sectors.

The writer is Professor of Chemistry at Jahangirnagar University, Savar Dhaka and Secretary, General Institute of Environmental Studies and Disaster Management, Dhaka and of SCOPE, Bangladesh. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry (London).

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The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Tuesday 28th January
(All programmes are in local time. There may be changes in the programmes.)

BTv

3:00 Opening Announcement
Al-Quran Programme Summary
3:10 News in Bangla
3:15 Patriotic songs
3:20 Recitation from the Geeta
3:25 The Album Show
3:50 Cartoon film
4:15 Urush
4:50 Coach
5:00 News in Bangla
5:22 Sangeeta
6:00pm National Television Debate Competition
6:50 Open University
7:00 The News
7:25 Silver Jubilee of Freedom Fighter-A Documentary
8:00 News in Bangla
8:25 Silver Jubilee of Freedom Fighting-Mujibnagar Govt
9:00 Drama Serial
10:00 The News
10:25 Those Day of Freedom Fighting
10:30 sur Laharie
11:35 Wednesday's programme summary
11:40 Close down

BBC

6:10am BBC World Newsight
7:00 BBC Newsroom inc World Business Report/Asia Today
7:45 Hours 10:00 BBC World Headlines
10:05 Panorama
11:00 BBC Newsday
2:00 BBC World News
2:15 Panorama
3:00 BBC World News
3:30 Time Out
4:00 Tomorrow's World
4:00 BBC Newsday
6:00pm BBC World News
6:15 The News
7:00 BBC World News
7:15 World Business Report
7:30 BBC Newshour Asia & Pacific
8:30 Time Out
9:00 BBC World News
9:15 Panorama
10:00 BBC World News
10:30 Time Out
11:00 BBC World News
11:30 Time Out
12:00am The World Today
2:00 BBC World Headlines
2:05 Panorama
3:00 BBC World News
3:30 Time Out
4:00 BBC World Report inc World Business Report/24 Hours
5:00 BBC World Report inc World Business Report/24 Hours

CHANNEL V

6:30am The Ticket
7:00 Rewind VJ Sophia
8:00 Frame by Frame
9:00 Jump Start VJ Alessandria
10:00 Frame by Frame
11:00 The Vibe VJ Luke
12:00 Rewind VJ Sophia



Royce on Star Movies, Tonight at 9:30

STAR MOVIES

7:30am Classic: D-Day: The Sixth Of June 12 (Arabic Subtitles)
9:30 Classic: The Seven-Year Itch PG (Arabic Subtitles)
11:30 Adventure: Kidnapped 12 (Hindi Subtitles)
1:30 Adventure: Shattered Family 12 (Hindi Subtitles)
5:30 Family: The Human Pets 12 (Hindi Subtitles)
7:30 Film Club: Endless Summer II 15 (Hindi Subtitles)
9:00 Short Film Showcase: 9:30 Action: Royce 12 (Hindi Subtitles)
11:30 Comedy: House Party II 18 (Arabic Subtitles)
3:30 Comedy: Roadside Prophets 5:30 Film Club: My Brilliant Career PG (Arabic Subtitles)

STAR PLUS

6:00 Ninaad
7:30 Star News
8:00 Sky Business News & Agenda
8:30 Star News
9:00 Sky News
9:30 Aerobics Oz Style
10:00 Yan Gan Cook
10:30 E! For Your Entertainment
11:00 Kates & Alle
11:30 The Oprah Winfrey Show
12:30noon The X Files
1:30 Santa Barbara
2:00 The Bold & The Beautiful
3:00 Hindi Serial: Intehaan
3:30 Khandaan
4:00 Hindi Serial: Tu Tu Mai Mai
4:30 Land of the Giants
5:30 Black Beauty
6:00pm Kate & Alle
6:30 Yan Gan Cook
7:00 Hindi Serial: Janata Ki Adalat
7:30 Star News (Hindi)

CHANNEL V

6:30am The Ticket
7:00 Rewind VJ Sophia
8:00 Frame by Frame
9:00 Jump Start VJ Alessandria
10:00 Frame by Frame
11:00 The Vibe VJ Luke
12:00 Rewind VJ Sophia

PTV

8:00am Tilawat Aur Tarjuma/Hamd/Naat
8:20 Cartoon
8:30 Khabraan
8:45 Beauty Care
8:50 Fun Kadha
9:10 Dhanak & Health Tips
10:05 Har Taan Holy Despak
10:30 English Film: Home Improvement
10:55 Milli Naghma
11:00 Khabraan
11:10 Anita (Serial)
12:00 Sports Hour
12:55pm Quran-e-Hakeem

ZEE TV

5:30 Suno Bhai Sadho
6:00 The News
6:30 Jagran
7:00 ZED
8:30 Hum Honge

STAR SPORTS

6:00am The Asian Football Show
7:30 India Tour Of South Africa
7:30 Indian Football Bharat Petroleum Santosh Trophy 2nd Semi Final
10:30 The 1997 Australian Open Day 13 Women's Singles Final & Men's Doubles Final
1:00 India Tour Of South Africa
1:30 Watersports World-5
3:30 Sports India
4:00 Inside PGA Tour
4:30 ITU Triathlon World Cup
5:30 The Asia Sports Football Show
6:30pm Trans World Sport
7:30 ITTF Pro Tour English Open 1st Semi Final
9:30 Triangular Series India Vs Zimbabwe H/L
11:30 The 1997 Australian Open Day 13 Women's Singles Final & Men's Doubles Final
1:30 Thai Kickboxing

EL TV

6:30 Music Time
6:30 Ched

DD 7

10:30 Janmadin
10:35 Classical

SONY ET

8:30am Khoya Khoya Chand

SONY ET

8:30am Khoya Khoya Chand

ZEE CINEMA

6:45 Songs
7:00 Khoon Kharab
9:00 Chalo Cinema
9:30 Aaja Sanam
9:30 Khan, Tanuja
12:15 Rudhr
12:30 Hamraah
12:30 Kapoor, Tanuja
3:15 First Take
3:45 Ek Pahel (Sanjeev Kumar, Feroz Khan)
6:30 Maa Cinema
9:15 Cinema Cinema
9:30 Movies Masti Magic
10:00 Paap Ki Punishment (Sunny Deol, Chunky Pandey)
12:45 Inspector (Joy Mukherjee, Alka)
3:30 Ikke Pe Ikke
4:00 Ramkali (Hema Malini, Shatrughn Sinha)

ZEE CINEMA

6:45 Songs
7:00 Khoon Kharab
9:00 Chalo Cinema
9:30 Aaja Sanam
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10:00 Paap Ki Punishment (Sunny Deol, Chunky Pandey)
12:45 Inspector (Joy Mukherjee, Alka)
3:30 Ikke Pe Ikke
4:00 Ramkali (Hema Malini, Shatrughn Sinha)



James Bond
DRAWN BY JOHN McLUSKY

JUST LOOK AT THAT BEAUTIFUL PAIR OUT THERE!

OKAY?

NOW WHAT?

OH DEAR! PITY YOU DIDN'T TAKE MY ADVICE ABOUT KEEPING ALL THIS BETWEEN OURSELVES!

GO WE'LL HAVE TO GO THROUGH ANOTHER OF THOSE TIRESOME QUESTION-AND-ANSWER ROUTINES!

NOT THIS TIME, ENGLISHMAN!