

## White Paper on Energy

The Daily Star has reported that there is no chance of the present twice-a-day load shedding to improve by even an ampere till June this year — a four-month ordeal. But this is in a way good, knowing what to prepare for. When there is no escape from it, it could be made more tolerable by making out a routine for shedding and inform the consumer through daily radio and TV announcements and newspaper advertisements. People then could better cope with the problem. And, this needs no saying that PDB is expected to be very judicious about distributing their black-out on the principle that such things should be shared by all, including the so-called VIPs and cantonments.

The government has, however, been failing the nation on an account bigger than this kind of distress management. The official quoted in The Daily Star report yesterday has been helpful in giving a kind of outlook for the months to come. The government has been shying of just this kind of sharing with the people the state of our energy health and what prospects does it hold. This makes it appear that the government has things to hide, which is not a fact as far as electric power is concerned. Problems of power are not created in eight months — the time this government has been in power — but are an accumulation over years and years of neglect and bad performance. What the government must do is to spell out clearly what they propose to do to salvage the nation from the hole it has been stuck up in.

We request the government to exactly come out with a white paper on the power situation, nothing less. Letting us know everything of energy from the word go in 1972, this paper should allow us a dependable peep into how things came to this present pass. And that will help us judge better the ways the government is negotiating to overcome the present problems and the forward-looking investments they must make to insure against crisis hitting us as soon as the present impediments have been crossed over.

Energy, fuel, power — by whatever name we call it, this is the prime mover of a modern state and society. There is no way but through this to develop socially and economically and build a future for our posterity. We know energy has not been addressed by previous administrations the way it should have been. We hardly can afford the present government to make the same mistake. A white paper will go a long way to convince us of the government's seriousness in the matter.

## Legal Failure

Once again a victim of gang rape and her family have been further victimised after a mock trial of the rapists by village elders. The family had to leave at night the village where they had been living in the face of threat from the same members of the *salish*, who held the mock trial. Now their whereabouts is unknown. To the *salish* members, most of whom are relatives of an influential man whose son is one of the rapists, the overriding concern was to prevent the family from reporting the incident to the police. And how farcical that of the Tk 15,000 realised as a fine, Tk 12,000 was pocketed by some *salish* members and local journalists, leaving just Tk 3,000 for the victim's father.

So here is a case where the village trial is found guilty on two legal counts: first, it is a criminal case and the village elders had no business to prevent the victim's father to lodge a case with the thana and they have no right to handle a criminal case of such a grave nature; second, they have forced the family to flee them and on top of it distributed the money realised as fine among themselves. The incident happened in a village under Savar thana on February 11 and until it came to the knowledge of the general secretary of Savar Press Club and he submitted a written complaint, nobody bothered about the case. The OC of Savar thana is nonchalant and casually informs his knowledge about the incident.

This is exactly where we want to know if the man in charge of a thana should or should not feel duty-bound to catch the culprits. He might seek excuses for not lodging a case by anyone or not having specific proofs of the rape incident at his disposal. But does he not feel any obligation to conduct an investigation if the information he has received about a crime and criminal injustice is true or false? Do our law enforcers, one might wonder, consider a rape a serious crime? If they did, there is perhaps no need for the victims to seek justice. The administration has to be there with the specific responsibility to protect the week and, in case of failure to provide protection, stand by the victims. This concept is more often than not distorted at different levels of the administration, only more so at the thana level. Unless the legal system is made to be sufficiently responsive to this need, the miscarriage of justice cannot be avoided.

## Costly Negligence

The Jatiya Sangsad failed to sit on time for the second consecutive day on Monday. The reason is none other than the failure of the law makers to turn up right on schedule. This is a clear case that the members of the august house do not attach the importance they should to be present on time for the business of the day. And these are the people whom the electorate has sent to parliament to take care of the respective constituency's cases and national and international issues. People who show the attitude that they could not care less for the Tk 16,000 spent per minute when the house is in session, seem to have forgot what is expected of them by the whole nation.

On Monday the proceeding could not start before a delay of 45 minutes, meaning not the required number of MPs for day's work arrived before that period. And look at the waste of money. What right do the law makers have to do this? Such neglect to the JS is indicative of a greater malaise: that they can be — not necessarily has to be — less careful in handling public money or national resources. This is a dangerous symptom and all concerned must put an end to this immediately.

In a poor country like ours we can afford to waste neither time nor money. We need to prove that time is money for us and the way must be led by our public representatives. After all they are duty-bound through their oath-taking to be available for the house's deliberations. Let them show no such laxity in future and only then they will be able to match people's expectation.

# The Other Side of Micro-credit

by K B Ahmed

**What Bangladesh needs is the convergence with the international markets. The capital needed for investment are readily available in the market provided that Bangladesh and the Bangladeshis are willing to compete in the market.**

ally viable. Perhaps from the hind side some would still wish that the world's economic growth and technological experience could have been better paced for human benefit if the philosophers of 'small is beautiful' had prevailed.

There had been a large scale criticism by the economists, politicians, philosophers and social thinkers against the mega-systems and they defended their arguments on the basis of scarce resources, over consumption by the wealthier people and dis-advantage caused to the poor who could not participate in the system. While one would definitely accept these arguments, one would be better off to also accept that during the last fifty years two-thirds of the world's growing population were pulled out of the depression of the thirties, from the bondage of slavery and hunger and from the shackles of feudal oppression; freed from disease and now poised to eliminate poverty. All these were achieved within a span of fifty human years and due mainly to a massive reconstruction programme initiated soon after the Second World War. No one can discount the pains of the victims of poverty but it would be un-natural to be so impatient as to wish remedy of all ills of this planet with a magic wand. In the context of Bangladesh perhaps one can understand that donor-fatigue may have caused to divert some resources to al-

ternative development programmes in order to hedge the bets and to put a brake on the unbridled demands for investment assistance and for technology. Bangladesh unfortunately has gone through a series of tragic experiences which consistently hindered her natural growth; and now to put the central thrust on micro-credit instead of mainstream economic propulsion will have catastrophic consequences and perhaps will dwarf the nation for good.

Micro-credit by nature is a credit which is available to small investor who has no access to any other form of credit.

The units of input are very small and therefore, operate under punitive charges. The investor having left with no other alternative commits him/herself to the rigor only to move out of the social cul-de-sac. The skill initially depends on poor and rural demands of the produce and in most cases do not take-off until marketing is arranged by the credit managers which in turn make the investor (user) vulnerable. The credit default has no room and therefore the defaulter is ostracized by the other investors as the collective moral form of liability is applied to avert any wholesale losses. This restricts the creative investors as natural expansion of production and marketing needs sanctions of the collective investors and

the credit managers.

It is no doubt that in any economy there will always be some pockets where development momentum and dynamics will not operate which will give room to alternative programmes like micro-credit to initiate those into the mainstream economic activities, who are otherwise left out of the loop and in desperation or despair. In such conditions micro-credit as it propagated now can at best complement the mainstream economic activity. Micro-credit inherently operates contrary to free market system as it is usually managed by the credit managers under central command structures.

As it is not possible to introduce technology as means of production, microcredit offers to develop skills in rudimentary form and management of skills remain on the basis of instinctive reaction of experience than any systematic approach. Wages are treated as profits and therefore, cost of production is not calculated in strict economic units and its return; and therefore, no incentive is given to investor to employ any one other than him/herself or to develop any one else's skill. The principles which are used in planning micro-credit programmes have more relevance to moral obligations of the conscious citizens than any economic purpose in terms of profits and markets. However, it will be callous

on any one's part to accept that all citizens' social and economic well-being can only be served by the forces of the market. This has also some relevance to the obligations of the politicians in or out of power who caused to build a consensus to establish welfare states to guarantee some social and economic protection by levying the able to assist those who are not. Over the years experience has shown that in addition to requiring to build huge monolith of bureaucracy in serving the less able citizens, it has also caused to create a social stigma for the recipients of the service as the public borrowing exceeded the limits of management and inflation became a factor in cost of production. The natural reaction of the investors was to introduce more efficient technology and replace the human factor to save wages to become competitive in the market. Market therefore has caused expansion of the recipients of assistance from the welfare State. This scenario, however, is more prevalent in the industrialized nations than in the agrarian rural backdrop of Bangladesh. Where the market efficiency is less obvious way expanding the vulnerable rural unemployables in moving them out of their own habitat and converting them into floating and expanding population bound mostly to urban and industrial sites — like 'fire-flies' attracted by 'fire'.

What Bangladesh needs is the convergence with the international markets. The capital needed for investment are readily available in the market provided that Bangladesh and the Bangladeshis are willing to compete in the market. The state needs to understand the rules and dynamics of the market and must bring about the changes in the structures, particularly changes in the legal frameworks, to assure the investor and to protect consumers as well. Politicians and social leaders and trade unionists are needed to establish clarity of their purpose where national interest is considered as the common objective. The politicians have also an additional task to tame the bureaucracy to implement the national consensus.

Bangladesh needs massive capital investments, introduction of efficient technology as means of production and political and social cohesion to galvanize a national aspiration to achieve an economic miracle.

Models for such achievements are plentiful in our region of South-East Asia. This miracle is possible if we as a nation can trust each other and commit ourselves to strive to converge with the international markets. Our destiny can be guided by those business and political leaderships who are willing to compete in that market.

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# Analysing Defeat, Absorbing Victory

**Pakistan's major problem is that while it is a land of great opportunity it is also a land of great opportunists. The NA session leading up to the election of the PM and the swearing in of the PM at the Presidency thereafter was a classic study in opportunism in full cry.**

reason for existence was not loyalty to the State but to one man, Asif Zardari. To help him in this task, he had a coterie of school-mates from Petaro, near relatives, friends and acquaintances from his days as a bachelor. Unlike the first Benazir term where he got involved with petty extortion, this time money-making was raised to a grand scale. With senior bureaucrats shamelessly joining in with him to run the country, he acquired the technical expertise to profit from government. People raised to such heights always have the option to run a good government instead of a criminal one, invariably they opt for that course which brings them personal benefit. A leopard does not change its spots, what was seen in good evidence in Zardari's days as a vagabond predator in Karachi was force-multiplied many times over into deliberate malfeasance to enrich himself and his friends at the cost of the country. Not even military dictators like Zia-ul-Haq exercised such total control over government, courtesy the darling of the West, their great white hope for democracy, Benazir. While authority must be delegated, whoever delegates the authority must carry the responsibility for its misuse.

Having handed over total power to Asif Zardari, Benazir laid the seeds of impending disaster. Who knew Asif Zardari's dark traits better than her? One had to speak only a few sentences with the man to realize the depth of his ignorance, why did this graduate of Harvard and Oxford continue to shield this nearly illiterate man even though she knew more than anyone else that except for greed and vindictiveness nothing else drove him? There is no other logical explanation except that she was a full partner in crime and the only reason she is not abandoning him publicly is to derive maximum political benefit from his eventual come-uppance. It is not too long ago that she played the bereaved sister to the hilt, in the presence of the widows very accusing finger not so believable. A major part of the electorate did not believe her 'sisterly' act and heaved her out into the political cold but a grieving widow can be a different ball game altogether. Her speech at the National Assembly (NA) was the

summation of her political career, it was ridiculous, bordering on hysteria. The arrogance of power has driven her out of the world of reality and set her publicly on the very edge of madness.

One must never forget that cunning and madness go almost hand in hand. One can only exhort her real friends to risk their friendship and have the courage to take her to a doctor.

## AS I SEE IT

**Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi**

She needs help badly! On the face of it, her husband has a longish stay in jail scheduled (unless he is found guilty of murder of his brother-in-law when it may come to a sudden end) and in the presence of a half-demented mother she is the only one left in the family to take care of three small children. To sum up, all the ingredients of bad governance are there for us to analyse and to take lessons from. If this country was not in such economic shambles, this could be useful academic exercise, unfortunately the lessons learnt have to be applied with discretion being the better part of valour because the expectations of the masses have been raised sky high by Mian Nawaz Sharif's overwhelming victory.

The first lesson is not to keep all the powers centrally but to delegate authority to responsible persons. The choice of aides is thus of paramount importance to good governance, it is they who are at the cutting edge of decision-making, whether it is made in the motivated interest or in the public interest will be the difference between success and failure. In the selection of people, those with obvious failings should never be accommodated whatever may be the political compulsions. The very fact that Mian Nawaz Sharif did not rush into cabinet-making was a singular achievement marking the maturity of decision-making. We will see what to make of the composition of the Federal Cabinet in the months to come, their actions will speak for

themselves. Servility is an endearing eastern trait that even leaders like Mian Sahib find difficult to cast aside. A couple of loyalists around Mian Nawaz Sharif have made themselves a laughing-stock in the intelligentsia by their public acts of obeisance. Servile people invariably have dual character, that double-face trait makes them dangerous to their mentors in the final analysis as

public displays of servility may hide a very real disloyalty to the concept of good governance. While loyalty must be rewarded as its due, it cannot be done at the expense of the State, both literally and figuratively. Motivated interest must be watched with great care. There may be a nexus between motivated purpose and the national interest, the government has to be careful to sift out selfish propositions from the public

good. One has to be careful not to turn away summarily those ideas which may benefit the State without a proper analysis of its advantages and disadvantages.

A lot of people supported Mian Nawaz Sharif not out of the expectation of personal reward but because they believed he is synonymous with the national good. Those who aspire for appointments are only a few when compared to the masses who do not crave any post for themselves but want Mian Nawaz Sharif to do his best for the country. There are many others who aspire to serve but without expectations of a government post in return. While he must accommodate all those who burnt all their boats when they embarked on this great journey with him, he must also remember that thousands and thousands are willing to physically volunteer contribution to the great national cause. One of the greatest problems of Benazir's regime was that merit became a primary disqualifier instead of being the paramount qualification. Unless the Client-Patron relationship can be broken up and merit made paramount in name and deed, this country will have got the

core of leaders which is a prime requisite of prosperity. If he can harness the great potential effectively he would have taken a great step towards his goal of making this country fit to enter the 21st century.

Pakistan's major problem is that while it is a land of great opportunity it is also a land of great opportunists. The NA session leading up to the election of the PM and the swearing in of the PM at the Presidency thereafter was a classic study in opportunism in full cry. A fair amount of social gadflies and butterflies who frequented the corridors of power during the previous reign were seen thronging and milling around the new PM, seemingly thrilled to the core of their craven hearts! Asif Zardari could not have got away with all that he did without active collaboration from a lot of persons whom we label as the 'elite'. A whole lot of the 'elite' were pushing and shoving their way to the new PM's side, some of the PM's aides were in evidence preening along with them, a mutual recognition that 'collaboration' was alive and well in Islamabad, for a price, in kind or in cash. When Mian Nawaz Sharif is able to keep such opportunists within and without his Party from eating at the vital organs of this land of opportunity, we would have taken the final lesson in analysing defeat and absorbing victory.

## OPINION

# Twelve Universities of Science and Technology

**Dr A Majeed Khan**

The news of the government plan to set up 12 new universities of Science and Technology which appeared as banner headline in a local daily on 14 February — the Valentine's Day — was probably the most positive expression of official concern about higher education in years. I am not aware as to how institutional memories are kept in the Ministry of Education. The current proposal is reminiscent of one which may still be there lying in a dust-covered file. That earlier proposal made in early '80s was to establish up to 20 universities over 4 five-year plans (in 20 years). They were to be raised upon existing colleges at old district headquarters (18 in all) and Jagannath and Eden Girls' Colleges in Dhaka. The proposal was a sequel to an earlier review which found some 34 colleges were teaching Honours without the provision to teach MA classes in those same colleges. Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong universities were most reluctant to enrol Honours graduates from colleges into their MA final year. Two other important considerations which entered at the time were: 1) burgeoning number of youths eligible and anxious to enter higher education, and 2) lower student costs at district towns.

The upgrading of senior colleges to universities were to take place in two stages: 1) to upgrade them as 'university' colleges and equip them to be able to teach both Honours and MA courses still under old universities; and after five years of successful development and commensurate funding; 2) to grant them the autonomy and charter of full-fledged universities. In this scheme, both Jagannath College and Eden Girls' College were upgraded as university colleges and 10 others were listed to follow over the two successive five-year plans (1986-95). Those were: Mymensingh A M College, Faridpur Rajendra College, Barisal B M College, Comilla Victoria College, Sylhet M C College,

Khulna B L College, Jessore M D College, Rangpur armistead College and Rajshahi and Chittagong Government colleges. In the meantime, new universities have been established in Khulna and Sylhet in the late '80s and Jagannath University College became a university two years ago.

However, since the early '80s, there have been global changes in the understanding about and the escalating cost of higher education. Their impact has also reached us. We now better understand the role of higher education and also about the costs involved. The government in the meantime has passed the Private University Act 1992, and for the first time opened private initiative to come forward in this field. According to the official figure, there are now 16 private universities in the country. They are in different stages of quality and development. But the overwhelming fact is that people have shown eagerness to invest in higher education from both sides of demand and supply. There are now over three thousand students studying in private universities and entrepreneurs are investing to provide quality and standards to their efforts. Some of the people in private higher education might have been motivated for profit but they will soon learn. The caution is that none will survive the challenges of the field unless there will be large-scale philanthropy, state support and the growth of a healthy non-profit sector of the economy to push this development. The government must realise that education is a national agenda and that a new opportunity has been created to share it with private entrepreneurship. The new climate if carefully fostered and strengthened, the chances are that education in the country will be more demand-oriented and will find allocation of greater national wealth to provide the state-of-the-art education in the country.

Everyone will agree that one reason for the deterioration of educational standards of state universities is the lack of resource. The government is unable to significantly increase its grants to these universities. Therefore, no one can think that situation will vastly improve in the near future. The hopes that the government will establish 12 universities of Science and Technology of any standards on a purse of Tk 152 crore is totally misplaced. For a comparison, the recurrent budget of private Aga Khan University (Karachi) Medical Centre which includes a hospital and a teaching faculty, in 1994 was approximately \$30 million (Tk 120 crore). Its standards competes internationally.

Given our fund constraints, the growing needs and interest to provide international standards higher education in the country, the government should:

a) Vigorously support and strengthen the nascent private initiatives in higher education, provide tax relief on donations to education, and overseas teachers' salary income, allot real estate, wherever applicable at official rate for the purpose of building permanent sites and facilities; and buy services of the institutions instead of engaging itinerant foreign experts or agencies.

b) Establish a Fund-in-Trust to support programme or faculty development of private universities; and

c) Establish educational loan fund and authorise educational loans from the national Zakat Fund (*Karza hasana*). The amount of Tk 152 crore which the government has announced to spend for establishing of 12 new universities, it is better advised to spend the same fund to upgrade some of the premier colleges at old district headquarters. The establishment of universities should follow a course of progressive development of these institutions.

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## To the Editor...

### Of egos and self-centered attitudes

Sir, When my father retired, he got a card from my sister living abroad, saying a lot of things, but the gist being 'Congratulations of your retirement. Now you can do all the things you wanted to do always but never had the time before.' That is a true expression of what retirement should mean, rather than being seen as how it is portrayed in Bangla cinemas — the end of active life, tears all around and the poor guy succumbing to a heart attack (albeit thankfully rather than being treated as an outcast and a burden, shunned by ex-colleagues and even the family!).

One would think that the teachers of the apex educational institute of the country would at least rise above Bangla cinema. But the news covering how the teachers of Dhaka University in a Senate meeting decided that they were indispensable for the students, and therefore, obliged them and the society by extending their retirement age to 65 years is beyond comprehension. It is only fair to question, whose interest they were

serving — students or their own? While I do not question their ability to contribute to the society, the question remains if they really do so. In a system where seniority means lesser classes a week and more time in teachers' politics, the justification of the decision and the manner in which it was taken need to be transparent to the tax payers, since, although an autonomous body, a significant amount of funding is done from tax-payers' money.

Contrast this to the other issue that was taken up — the question of raising the teaching skill and English language skill of teachers through training. The egoists, naturally, rejected such a cheeky proposal!

The teachers are supposed to be exemplary in the society. Regrettably, over the years, public respect towards the university teachers have been on the decline. Such selfish acts can only add conviction to that. But then, who is listening — aren't they the cream of the intellectual society — how dost thou dare question them?

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### Appeal to the PSC

Sir, I am one of the 130 students of the faculty of Law of the University of Dhaka. We appeared at the LLB (Hons) Final Exam of 1995 held on 22nd July of 1996. But unfortunately due to the Administrative difficulties our result could not be published in due time. It was published on 1st February '96.

But in the 18th BCS, a substantial number of Assistant Judges is going to be engaged who need the submission of original mark-sheets as well as original certificates. But we are unable to submit those documents owing to the Eid vacation the consequence of which is closure of the Administrative and official works from 4th to 14th instant.

Now we earnestly request the PSC, to increase/extend the submission of application date from 15th to 25th of February so that we can vie for the posts of Assistant Judges.

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