# The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Tuesday, April 8, 1997

### Why Directives?

The Prime Minister's directives to this or that governmental agency are administrative action better kept within the walls of the bureaucratic system. There is no need for these to come out into the open and take up newspaper space. And somehow a headline on yesterday's Daily Star - PM's directives to solve city's water-logging, ease traffic jam - strikes as one such in the bargain. Were these two problems waiting to be solved only when the PM asked for it? Why is there a need for the Prime Minister herself to say that Dhaka's waterlogging must be solved and its transport situation eased. Was the administration unaware of these or they are seriously seized of the problems and have been on the job for quite some time new? If things pick up only after the PM has shown her interest in the matter, administration must be dangerously flawed to be keeping room for an improved pace even in things as urgent as traffic breakdown and waterlogging. It is nice for the PM to throw her weight behind certain pressing problems but this is an odious practice which may end up in weighing the PM down with things that should be outside her care and for which the ministries and the vast ramification of numerous agencies are there for.

Time has come to compare between the pre-and post-directive situations and be sure that these directives do indeed help. She is on record to have given directives to contain and eliminate traffic breakdowns. What became of those earlier directives and what warranted the latter? And if she has by her latest directives betrayed sincere concern for the city-dwellers' woes, why did she choose not to call for an early end to the atmospheric pollution — the deadliest of all the problems that now beset the city? This is eating into the health of the eight million that huddle into this small city contine.

If Hasina was addressing an emergency meeting on the problems of Dhaka it is strange that it should not have the mayor as one in the audience. Granted Hanif has little to do with either traffic jams or waterlogging, it should be remembered that Hanif has a mayoral stake in these. It is Hanif and not the traffic or environmentwallahs who is faulted for this city's problems. We take this opportunity to again underline the fact if Dhaka has to be rid of its many problems of backwardness, it will call for an all-in state thrust and not only selective supports. And who else but Hanif must spearhead that thrust?

### Sanctity at the Sectt

In the national secretariat yesterday vigilante squads caught up with at least three dozen loitering or pestering favour-seekers who had gained entry into it through the back door. Or shall we call it front door by some palm-greasing trade-off a priori? This happened inside the secretariat with the gate-keepers' bought-off or callous neglect of duty spotlighted tellingly but were there to be a screening undertaken at the gates themselves the dirty linen would have been awash more revealingly.

The pandora's box was not, therefore, laid fully open; yet who other than an ostrich might be so self-deceivingly blind-folded to the madhouse-like visitors melees around or into the ante-rooms to the ministerial chambers?

All this underscores a systemic failure at the very hub of government where system should have been the most prized and stoutly defended staple of the highest decision-making organisation in the country.

There is a certain inherent sanctity to the ministerial offices that cannot be given a go-by under any circumstances, far less at the altar of public relationing. Furthermore, the urgency and importance of matters the high functionaries of the government have to regularly confer with the ministers on hardly leave any scope for their Private Secretaries and PAs to be virtually holding public darbars for their bosses. Even the selective spillage into the minister's room can be extremely incapacitating for him and his officials or technocrats paying audience to him or desirous of seeing him.

The ministers' time-management needs to be perfected. They are urged to attend to constituencyrelated matters or party affairs at the party offices, or take up some of these at their residences outside office hours, of course.

At the secretariat they are state functionaries at work expected to entertain visitors irrespective of party affiliations but strictly during certain stipulated hours on need basis. The tenor of decorum and propriety that the ministers set does percolate the whole structure of government. That is the bottom-line to remember.

### Save the Weak

Two instances of barbarity present a moving testimony to the complete defencelessness of the weak in the society. Shaharan Nesa (30), pregnant for eight months was knifed in the abdomen by her husband Masud on her refusal to part with Tk 130 she had saved for the family. This happened at Ghoragacha village in Jessore on Saturday. The child in the womb took the brunt of the stabbing while the mother, critically wounded and traumatised, is left to wail over her grievous loss, and her abandonment to a harsher environment. The husband's hand did not tremble in the act even at his father-in-law's house where Shaharan Nesa had gone to give birth to the child!

Because this is gender-related helplessness of a rural woman, the law enforcers should be obliged to ferret out her husband for a punishment that

proves deterrent for others of his ilk. On Sunday, in Kishoreganj, an ice cream vendor Lokman, aged only 15, was beaten to death by the cronies of an influential man in broad day-light. His offence: he was banging on the lid of his ice cream box to attract the attention of buyers in that township. The poor child's right to earn a living was trampled underfoot much the same way that he was killed off taking full advantage of his juvenile helplessness by the full might of a group of grown up henchmen. No one, not even a few lathiwielding policemen tried to charge the thugs away. The culprits must be brought to book as a test-case of human rights violation in its worst manifesta-

tion.

## Why We Must Have Sub-regional Cooperation

Trade and investment would benefit big and small alike. But the doors to such trade and investment cannot be opened unless we constitute the economic grouping among the neighbouring countries first. This is the basic justification of the growth quadrangle by creating one common market in the eastern part of the subcontinent.

CONOMIC cooperation through unhindered through unhindered trade and investment. in particular, free flow of goods and services through each others territories - involving a group of adjoining countries or segments thereof - is considered to be the gateway to economic growth. Since the end of the second world war, over half a century of development in various parts of the world have proved beyond any reasonable doubt that only through inter-country cooperation among neighbouring countries. seeds of economic growth can sprout on a sustainable basis. If we remain alone - too proud to venture out of our so-called nationalist folds - we will be left alone, least developed and backward. This would be too heavy a price to pay for what it

Regardless of past political antagonisms, west European countries after the end of the second world war, much before the wounds have been healed. decided to join hands and promote one single market - common to the adjoining countries. It became perhaps the largest single market, where cooperating countries concentrate on producing those goods and services in which they are the best. As we all know, in most industrial enterprises, per unit cost of production comes down with expanded capacity. Cost of steel in one million ton capacity mill is much higher than a mill with 10 million ton capacity. It is the same with automobile, electronics, paper and even in agriculture, due to high cost of European labour, large farms are appropriate with high yields through intensive production techniques.

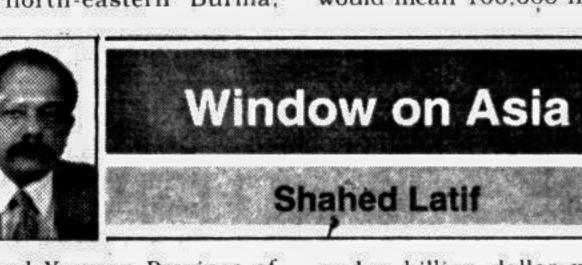
However, large production will automatically mean large markets. So European countries, instead of separate markets, created one large common market of all countries together. The so-called nationalist, go-alone leaders should particularly note that large countries like Germany with a population of over 80 million and a small country like Luxembourg with a population of less than a million are both members of the European Common Market

 benefiting equally from such regional cooperation. Benefits from such economic grouping are not discriminatory. It cand not be since economic growth would far outweigh the losses incurred by non-competitive enterprises within a particular country. Trade and investment would benefit big and small alike. But the doors to such trade and investment cannot be opened unless we constitute the economic grouping among the neighbouring countries first. This is the basic justification of the growth quadrangle by creating one common market in the eastern part of the subcontinent. The proof of it is the European common market. For God's sake, please stop the meaningless nationalist out-

Let us consider some other examples close at home. The first two economies which emerged as Asian Tigers were Hon Kong and Singapore and the basis of it was trade and investment with their neighbours. The gateway to China is Hong Kong. A significant part of the trade and investment of China flows in and out of Hong Kong. For Singapore, its location is its major asset and is the gateway to trade and investment for the rest of South-east Asia. Now the South-east Asian Countries are cooperating in setting up growth triangles to promote trade and investment, particularly in areas which are lagging behind. Northern Thailand, north-eastern Burma,

which are already well developed elsewhere in the world. There is nothing new about it and we can only gain and not lose anything out of it. In fact, Bangladesh being the only partner in this group with access to the sea, our gains are likely to be much more than others. I have earlier mentioned the location advantage of Singapore which has a deep sea port, and therefore, became the gateway to trade and investment for all other Southeast Asian Countries. Exactly. the same thing should happen out of the proposed growth quadrangle and it may be recalled that at the recent Kathmandu meeting on the proposal, one of the priority items for discussion was the development of a deep sea port near

around Chittagong. I will strongly urge my compatriots opposing the grand development to consider only the consequences of a deep sea port through which all the export and import cargo of Nepal Bhutan and north-eastern Indian states can pass. Easily, it would mean 100,000 new jobs



Laos and Yunnan Province of China are being linked together to form such a grouping. Countries or provinces thereof along Mekong river are cooperating to implement common river basin development projects and have further decided to promote such growth quadrangles. Southern Thailand is similarly linked to Malaysia, Singapore and adjoining parts of the island of Sumatra (Indonesia). Similarly, there are plans to establish such a trade and investment group covering Mindanow province of the Philippines. Sabah and Sarawak provinces of Malaysia, and parts of Suma-

The North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) also aspires to achieve the same purpose of trade and investment growth between Canada, Mexico and the United States. In the near future, such a grouping among East Asian countries would rival European Economic

Economic grouping of the type envisaged involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and the north-eastern states of India exactly follows the trends

and a billion dollar worth of new earnings for the nation. Why should we forego this?

My opposing compatriots would say that we should oppose this because great security risks are involved and we will lose our sovereignty. Along with goods and services in transit, military troops may also move which we cannot allow. The negative views boil down to the basic assumption that there cannot be anything good coming out of such cooperation since we have been neighbours for quite some time now and it did not bring us any good so far: we must think in nationalist lines and concentrate our development efforts within our

boundaries only. I stated earlier the example from Europe where tiny Luxembourg and mighty Germany both benefited equally from the economic, union without any security risk or loss of sovereignty. Why it should be otherwise in South Asia since access to the sea opens up significant trade and investment opportunities for the landlocked members of the group and why one of the member-

states should be mad enough to jeopardise such golden opportunities. The growth quadrangle includes one state with access to the sea and other states with resources to develop but cannot do so because of the lack of access to the sea. It is, therefore, a unique complimentary situation where possibilities of trade and investment are considerable so much so that military intervention as consequence thereof is like a distant mirage. India and China fought a

border war in 1962 and the geopolitical realities have vastly changed so much so that there is a real possibility of such growth triangle between India, adjoining provinces of China and Burma in which case, alternative access to the sea for the north-eastern Indian states will be ensured. Then where do we go? At least we will prove that we are determined to remain poor and the unfounded fear of being the battle ground between India and China led to the incredible decision to abandon the grand opportunities to promote economic growth; while the same two possible adversaries borne out of our fertile imagination are themselves cooperating leaving us behind sleeping at the post. Under the circumstances, should we keep on chasing the black cat in the dark room which is not there?

There are minor revolts within the north-eastern states of India and it is none of our business to get involved. On the other hand, the main cause of those revolts are lack of development of the north-eastern states of India. If the growth quadrangle is created the main obstacle to economic growth will be removed and the group as whole should forge ahead. This will then be the final solution to the security problem of north-east India and there is no reason why we should be chasing after the absent black cat.

In what way then we will be losing our sovereignty? It is not a fragile substance. It is being upheld by over 100 million citizen which is not a small number. In fact, we will lose it because of our poverty and if we continue to remain poor for long. We will have to beg, borrow and steal just to survive. Under such conditions, we will lose our sovereignty and not because of economic cooperation with our neighbours. Growth quadrangle is an opportunity to promote economic growth and break the poverty barrier. If we are bypassed, we will not able to retrieve our position again.

## Dhaka Day by Day

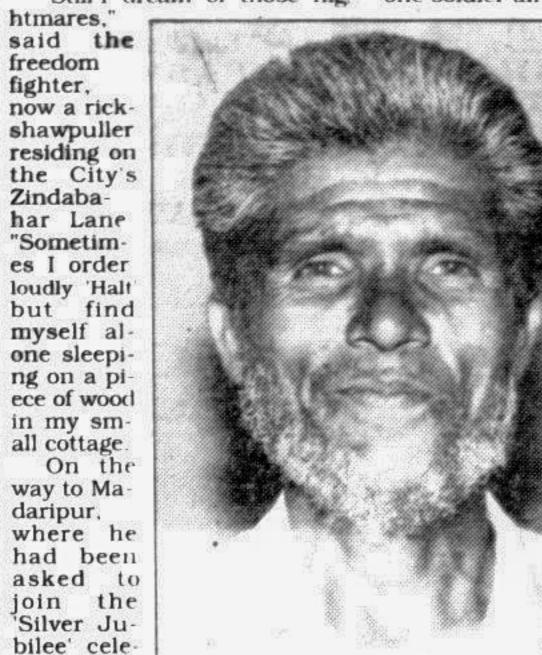
## A Freedom Fighter's **Modest Expectation**

by Govinda Shil

freedom fighter without the asnothing to demand except a job for my son," Abdur Rahman Matubbar told at The Daily Star office.

fought under Major Manjoo in "I hit him from under his throat bright while narrating some charged him with bayonet. exciting stories of 1971.

htmares.



Abdur Rahman Matubbar

Matubbar talked ab-out his ex- from inside the Jessore Canton

a normal programme where free- culprits who forcibly caught the dom fighters have been invited. innocent girls and sent them to his group who received arms under trial," demanded the man. training from a camp of Matubbar got bullet injuries Barakpur near Calcutta. On the while participating in a war 3rd day of Baishakh, "I was ac- across the river Madhumati in costed by Shamsu chairman of late 1971. A contingent of Muk-Shirkhara Ballagdi village of tibahini was crossing the river Madaripur district, who sug- from its eastern bank. But, ungested I join the 'Muktibahini.' I fortunately, the rajakars

brations of

the cou-

ntry's inde-

pendence.

fighter said. training on how to operate ri- ers covered the wounded from fles, SLRs and LMGs, how to behind and finally won the fight. plant land mines and blow up bridges and culverts. The 13- again but remained there only member group led by one Lak- for two hours. Then I returned man Hawlader carried several to the battlefield with banoperations along the border. dages," he said. We planted mines in front of

Matubbar narrated, was to blow was given a plate of 'polao' and up a enemy's camp at Arhpara. 20 taka," Matubbar said. " It was rainy season, the 'Aus' asked Sheikh Mujib to help me paddy fields were under flood. "I do something. He assured me went to the camp to beg alms. I saying, "Do what you are told them that I had been hun- doing now .... I will do for you gry for several days. They be- later." But, "he was killed before lieved and gave me four pieces doing something."

"I cannot tell I became a of bread, I looked around and asked for water to another solsurance of a smooth life. I have dier. Thus I conducted my servey."

One mid-night, Matubbar, a 20-year old young man sneaked into the camp area carefully. A middle-aged man, who Only one sentry was drowsing. Sector 8, Matubbar was looking and he fell. One of our comrades

The Muktibahini team kept "Still I dream of those nig- one soldier alive until he gave detailed strategic

> team threw 8 handgrenades. The lone soldier then asked how the Muktibahi ni looked "Are they something spiritual creatures? Zeens? or Parees?" Seeing the lungi-clad guerillas, the soldier then asked them to kill him. "We were shocked and ran out

> > of patience

when we

informatio

The

rescued young girls

pectations. He thought he would ment. They had not even a piece be given something this time. of cloth on them. We begged "The DC of Madaripur may give cloths from the villagers and me something," he said. But, the gave them." The rajakars (colla-Deputy Commissioner of Mad-borators), al-shams maintainaripur made it clear that it was ed Matubbar, were the main Matubbar had 13 fighters in garrisons. "They must be put

did not tell my parents any- warned the enemy earlier. They thing of my plan although I was opened fire on us. Lokman, my their only son", the dedicated immediate boss along with two other cadets breathed their He received a two-month last." The other freedom fight-

"I was taken to Barakpur

The man can clearly recall the Pakistani forces while pre- his memories of 1971. He surtending to offer our prayers." rendered his rifle in Dhaka The most risky operations as following the Independence. "I

### TT 7:11 **TT7** • . The Writing is on the Wall

by Chandra Shekhar Das

Albania is a long way from here and the crisis there is not going to affect Bangladesh as communal disturbance or flood in India would. But there is fearful similarity between the reality we have in Bangladesh and the causes that have brought Albania to the present pass.

ECENTLY a photograph of a very minor girl with crumpled bank notes in her hands was published in a British newspaper. The picture was taken from a street in Tirana, Albania's capital, a place which true to the message of the visual is now grovelling under a reign of anarchy. With its political leaders engaged in internecine bickerings bordering on civil war and its people now a frightened farrago and quite unrecognisably severed from a heritage of a spirited, freedom-loving nation are bugging out to different directions, the word anomie fits this

Balkan state like a glove. Most monitors of continental political clime are at a loss to attribute the reasons behind this eboulement of normalcy there. Actually, there was no normalcy in Albania. It was only a facade of normalcy, and a very suspect one awaiting the tinder for an explosion which was put across the face of the

or the fraud pyramid projects were unearthed pressure mounted and Albania's exterior of normalcy crumbled throwing its people in a cauldron of uncertainty and hopelessness. Albania is a long way from

When those economic scams

country.

here and the crisis there is not going to affect Bangladesh as communal disturbance or flood in India would. But there is fearful similarity between the reality we have in Bangladesh and the causes that have brought Albania to the present

The overturning of infamous pyramid schemes in Albania, clinically speaking, was the last complain before a final rejection of the rule of law but the real impetus for anomie to creep in was its political history so conspicuously marked by political instability. Never in its history Albania had a honeymoon with progress and political stability. From autocracy to ideological quarantine, it experienced all. Thanks to the long line of quirky individuals from Ahmed Zogu to Enver Hoxha.

Even after two successful experiments with the unprecedented mechanism of neutral caretaker government for smooth transition to democracy, politics in Bangladesh until now seems to be fraught

with all the dangerous possibilities that have bedevilled Al-

That democracy is a system which above everything demands as its precondition, sincere belief in the obligation to maintain individuality in a pluralistic milieu is something our politicians are yet to grasp. From print media to the parliament house the unmistakable impression one is likely to get everywhere is one that of exterminating the opposition. It beats imagination how people leavened with experience of being at the highest executive seat of the country as well as that of street can indulge in irresponsible statements. Examples are galore. Not long ago, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said in a public meeting in Pabna that she is the only rightfully elected Prime Minister. It was only the more responsible part of that public address which the newspapers reserved for the headlines. Very resonantly and confidently, the BNP chairperson dwelt on the 'fact' that Sheikh Hasina's Awami League has come to power through an election that was massively rigged. Now, this is exactly an accusation which the present Prime Minister and her party Awami League used to utter when they were on the street. In fact, catch phrases like 'media coup' alongside generalised allegations of rigging entered our political lexicon soon after BNP emerged as the party with the highest number of parliamentary seats in the '91 elections, the first of the two we have had under caretaker

government. Justice Shahabuddin who is now the President of the country was the head of the caretaker government then and the elections — if we do not have to admit of a collective amnesia were certified by the international observers. By labelling the '91 elections as a tainted one, the present ruling party did not then only show its inability to absorb the essence of democracy which is respect to the opinion of the electorate but also the belief in the honesty of the management led by a person who, as sheer irony would have it, is their choice as the Presi-

Our politicians should thank their stars for having to deal with a people that is so forgetful and forgiving. Otherwise

dent of the country.

the daily drama of absurdity the political leaders have been making them witness to would have been long over. How else can one explain the tragedy of being fettered to politics of recurrent pattern and stale and stereotyped shibboleths? Who will account for the depravity that even in '97 newspaper headlines differ from that of '93 only in the change of nomenclatural arrangements and not in content or substance.

Even though Sheikh Hasina's Awami League came to power in '96 through elections acclaimed globally and held under yet another caretaker government, the first political statement BNP came up and is still persisting with is that the elections were not fair. Quintessentially, this allegation and the one made by AL after '91 elections are same because they both stem from defeatist mentality and a mindset that it is fair as long as I win but foul the moment I lose'. By saying that June 12 elections were rigged BNP are not only trying to make a poor cover for the inanity of its political argument but pushing dangerously close to the process of alienating itself from the logic of representing people as the largest opposition. If the '96 elections was a study in fraudulence and corruption then in which bin of abstraction it throws the allegiance of 34 per cent of the electorate?

Perhaps, the reason our politicians are so unfailingly irresponsible, myopic and intolerant is that they genuinely believe that pluralism in politics or opposition politics is waste of time and energy so anything can be said and cashed in on. There were many ways BNP could have revved up its campaign against AL. But the theme it has chosen of late to corner AL politically is the eternal flame in connection with celebrations of independence. While falling for the palpable ploy it totally forgot that it represented a part of the mass that went up in arms to wake up from the nightmares of history - a history that is replete with deceit, depravation and communal propaganda. Worse, at a time when the law and order situation of the country is going through challenge it possibly never knew before, the BNP

chairperson in a public meeting

has called her party men to take

the law their own hands to bear back what she dubbed govern-

ment-sponsored terrorism. The pity of all is that the picture on the other side of the coin is equally unsparing and unrelieving. The AL leaders would have done democracy a great favour if they could involve their political rivals in major national issues which, being caught in the welter of unilateral justification and condemnation look almost destined to undo all the promises of stabil-

Woodrow Wilson, the Ameri can president known as the initiator of his country's first positive attempt to break away from the disreputation as an isolationist state, was once asked what was his formula for good government. He answered 'common counsel'. When pressed for elaboration he added: "In a free frank legislation expressive of the wishes people as opposed to private understanding arrived at by hidden influences. As a matter of fact, the American people are waiting to have their politics simplified because they realise that at present time their politics are full of private arrange ments and they do not understand what it all means". Every brush with power of our political parties have so far been periodic misadventures of taking people's support for granted.

Our political culture has been poorer for that and democracy in the real sense has gone that little farther from us. People really want the leaders to simplify politics and make its common end as the good of people and for this to happen the leaders have to come out of their confinement in the past. Another observation of that great American leader sounds so appropriate for the absurd practitioners of politics in this country, "The so-called standpatter is a man who is fooling himself to the top of his bent. suppose that a man on an ice floe in the Arctic ocean thinks he is standing still, but he is not. There is a great drift of the water under him. I suppose the so-called conservatives claim to be standing where their fathers stood. They are doing nothing of the kind because the country is not where their fathers were. There is a great drift historically, a glacial move-

ment of which they are not

### Chicken pox

Sir, Over the last one month the news of out-break of chicken pox was coming from all over the country and more and more people were getting affected from this dreadful disease everyday.

To the Editor...

But it is unfortunate that our ministry of health, different municipal corporations and union councils were simply sitting idle and they have so far not taken any step to combat the contagious disease which was spreading in an alarming

proportion. We would like to request our government to arrange immediate mass vaccination against chicken pox and to make necessary medical treatment for the people suffering from chicken pox in cities, towns and villages without further delay.

O H Kabir 6. Hare Street Wari, Dhaka-1203

### Development of Bengal delta

Sir, The recent overwhelming support of the US Congress of the development of the Bay of Bengal delta region of '400 million people' comes soon after the Indian initiative of the development of the same region as a sub-region of the SAARC. In the latter exercise Bangladesh has been roped in, or has become a willing partner, however much the internal controversy. The US will not support a SAARC sub-region, but is interested in area-wise development. Now this interest is becoming more and more active.

Are India and the USA going to compete for this potentially rich region of 400 m? India started the idea, now the superpower USA is trying to catch up? It is obvious the US would like to maintain its monitoring presence in South Asia for watching India. Myanmar and China. A suitable site appears to be Bangladesh. If that be so, the US presence in Bangladesh will be more and more visible each succeeding year.

There is another reason for the international interest. India will be an economic power to reckon with in the next century, in the global context. The US private investment in India is accelerating (watch Bangalore, the second Silicon Valley'). One way to have some leverage with India is to have near-powerful independent neighbours in the East and the

West. The coming of age in Pakistan and Bangladesh may be worth watching.

There are two interesting scenarios in the East, the troubled north-eastern India, and the 'closed' Myanmar. So it looks like that insignificant Bangladesh is going to be in the limelight more frequently than expected.

Whether as a sub-region, or as a delta region internationally, unsolicited help is on the way. The point to watch is who are going to be the ultimate masters of this Bay development project (the ADB initiative may not be overlooked).

Bangladesh's outlook may be different: how to make hay while the sun shines. The situation is getting increasingly cu-

A Husnain Dhaka

#### Electricity problem in Mymensingh town Sir, This is an age of science.

We can see influence of science in every sphere of life. Electricity is one of them. The immense contribution of electricity to modern civilised world is undeniable. But of late, electricity problem has become acute in Mymensingh town. The frequent loadshedding has become a daily affair in Mymensingh town. From time to time power failure occurs in day time.

As a result, it obstructs various kinds of electricity-conducted works. Besides, it has been noticed every evening in without electricity incessantly is going out. Then the whole town becomes absorbed in deep darkness. Sometimes, electricity goes out two or three times in a single day or night. Particularly after going out of electricity at night it comes again two or three hours after. Sometimes it lasts for the whole night.

As a result, people are going through an untold misery due to this irregular supply of electricity. The students are facing an arduous situation. The study of HSC. Degree and Master's candidates and examinees is being greatly hampered. So now electricity problem has become a major one to them.

Debashish Paul 15 Shyama Charan Roy Road (2nd Floor) Engineers Institution Bangladesh

Mymensingh Center