

DHAKA TUESDAY MARCH 30, 2004

Higher education strapped for cash

Subsidy is okay, but how much?

IGHER education is receiving less financial sup-port, in real terms, from the government than it used to 10 years back. The public universities were allocated 7.66 percent (Tk 291.24 crore) of the total budget for education in 2002-03 fiscal, compared to 8.14 percent (Tk 143 crore) in fiscal 1993-94. The extra amount of money, however, has been greatly offset by a 50 percent inflation and a 60 percent increase in enrolment.

The biggest casualty is the quality of education. With 88 percent of the total budgetary allocation going to salaries of teachers, employees and infrastructure maintenance, only 12 percent is left for books journals, educational equipment and research, which indeed is a small amount, given the growing need for upgrading the educational facilities.

The question of what the universities are charging for education arises for obvious reasons at this point. While private universities have tuition fees averaging between Tk 5,000 and Tk 10,000 per month, the public universities charge a very nominal amount.

Subsidies for higher education are given in most coun-tries of the world, including the advanced ones, let alone the developing countries. These subsidies are part of the overall plan to give access to students, coming from the less privileged sections of society, to higher education. But the subsidies, we believe, must be rationalized in order to avoid the public universities depending too much on government support.

The quality of education is an issue that cannot be compromised on any pretext whatsoever. If the standard of education goes down, the whole purpose of having so many public universities will be defeated. True, the public universities have to pay the teachers and employees and spend a huge amount of money in infrastructure maintenance, but they cannot render the service that students need if there is scarcity of books, journals and all other educational facili-

We, of course, do not support the idea of arbitrarily refixing the tuition fees and putting the burden of meeting their education expenses solely on the students. The university authorities should undergo a consultative process that will include the representatives of teachers, student bodies and parents before they opt for a reasonable raise in tuition fees. In principle, we are supportive of subsidy, but how much it is to be given has to be realistically determined so that it is compatible with affordability and the value for the services given.

Business turns paralytic

The backbone of the economy must be protected

HE business community remains shaken to its core by the brutal decapitation of businessman Shamsul Haq and his son Russell Sheikh. In the aftermath of the horrific killings, the FBCCI spoke of a reign of terror that threatens to destroy the business climate in the country. Indeed, only last Saturday night another trader was beaten to death in Bagerhat for refusing to pay a toll to extortionists, and last Tuesday over 40 local business bodies of Old Dhaka held a daylong strike to protest rampant murder and extortion.

One thing which is clear is that Bangladesh is becoming a dangerous place to do business in. The decline in law and order has negatively affected all of us, but it is the business community that has been specially targeted by gangsters and it is this community that is suffering the most. Businesses with significant capital assets and cash-flow are both obvious targets and extremely vulnerable to extortion.



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

S the ensuing US A Presidential election approaches fast, black clouds have started gathering in the political horizon of President Bush. The plan to hand over the socalled control of the liberated (occupied) Iraq to the Iraqis themselves (another non-elected body) by 30 June next is being speeded up amidst increasing violence and distrust among diverse sections of the Iraqi populace. The purpose is to ensure $the American \, people \, not \, to \, witness$ return of their soldiers in coffin anymore from Iraq and cause adverse impact on Bush's reelection. Yet, after 30 June, the American troops will not leave Iraq, and their favourite contractors will continue collection of war booties in the name of reconstruction of a war-

ravaged country. Many Americans still think that

the Bush Administration would be able to get away with the responsibility of invasion of Iraq and will handling of war in Iraq and on terrorism, as an election issue. The accusation of the former Treasury Secretary that Bush had contemplated to invade Iraq much earlier inflicted quite a blow against the incumbent President.

win election. They counted on the

indifference of American citizens

at what happens in the outside

world and their deep-rooted inter-

est in domestic affairs that affect

their day to day life. But the num-

ber of such supporters is dwindling

with the rapid fall of his popular

rating. The growing criticism at

home, especially by the Demo-

cratic election aspirants, has

strived to modify and project the

foreign policy, especially Bush's

The impact of the hearings of the newly set up Congressional Commission to investigate the 9/11 events already appears to have proved damaging for the Bush Administration. The sessions of the Commission have been informative, rather revealing, and interesting. Those who appeared were among the policy makers and chief operators of both Clinton and Bush

of the impending dangers and the pronounced threats before 9/11 were not also heeded by the Administration. independence of a principal State organ, the Executive, from another organ, the Legislature. Her omission to testify is likely to evince doubt in the minds of people about transparency of the Administra-

Administrations. They included

Defence Secretary Donald

Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin

Powell, National Security Adviser

Sandy Berger, CIA Director George

Tenet, President's Anti-terrorism

Chief Richard Clarke and others.

The present National Security

Adviser Dr. Condaleezza Rice was

not allowed to testify before the

Commission at the behest of Presi-

dent Bush, taking umbrage under

the constitutional provision of

tion and is likely to go against its interest. Plenty has been written and talked in support of dismissing pleas for justification of President Bush's war against Iraq, both on

Muslim world, but also some of

account of Iraq's alleged possession of WMD and its connection with al-Qaeda. The consequence was disastrous. It not only alienated a significant section of the

enormous influence. Besides, the Republican traditionally enjoys greater support of the big business, industrialists and the rich, and always bags much bigger goodies as election expense.

proper personnel, to impart them Counter-terrorism Advisor adequate training and to deploy Richard Clarke's testimony was the operators appropriately. Sandy most damaging one for Bush Jr. He Berger, who served both Clinton and Bush Jr. as their National testified to the fact that after 9/11 the Bush Administration should Security Advisor, pointed out that have gone all the way to capture the number of al-Qaeda attacks in Bin Laden, the self- confessed various parts of the world as well as perpetrators of the tragedy of 9/11, Bin Laden's public declaration of and his associates and not stopped war against America long before until the objective was realised. But the events of 9/11 should have it did not assign due priority to the prompted the Bush administration al-Qaeda, whose suppression was

US's traditional friends in Europe. greatly undermined by going to It bred many more terrorists than war against Iraq. The billions of dollars spent on Iraq should have those originally designed to suppress. It made a blatant violation of been better utilised by providing the Charter of the United Nations the much needed security for al-Qaeda targets inside the United and severely tarnished the efficacy States, he claimed. Besides, delay of the world body as the primary instrument for maintaining and in eliminating bin Laden has meanpromoting international peace. On while given birth to a large network the other hand, the American of al-Qaeda in various parts of the people were largely swayed in world.

earlier been found within sights of

US soldiers but no action could be

taken against him for various

reasons. He underscored the

shortcomings of the administra-

tion due to its inability to recruit

favour of the Administration by the The CIA Director gave a historimedia on whom the latter wields cal account of how bin Laden had to take immediate action against al-Qaeda. But it was not so done and also the Administration did not exhibit the degree of urgency it deserved.

The Commission Chairman and members emphasised that the primary task of the government of any country was to provide security of life and property of its citizens and that the government failed to provide it, despite existence of the required world-wide network of apparatus and availability of adequate resources for it. The repeated warnings of the impending dangers and the pronounced threats before 9/11 were not also heeded by the Administration. On the contrary, their misjudged preventive action against Iraq brought grievous harm to the American national interests in general and the President's own interest in particular. The President should know that among his previous colleagues he is, perhaps, the most disliked man outside America.

It will take America quite some time and requisite action to repair and restore its past image. And the relatives and friends of the victims of al-Oaeda terror could not demonstrate greater anger and disappointment at the revelation not only of government's failure but for the unforgivable apathy towards performing its solemn legitimate duty.

M.M.Rezaul Karim, a former Ambassador, is a member of BNP's Advisory Council.

How Spanish elections may influence future world events

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

The Commission Chairman and members emphasised that the primary task of the government of any country was to

provide security of life and property of its citizens and that the government failed to provide it, despite existence of

the required world-wide network of apparatus and availability of adequate resources for it. The repeated warnings

this action would transform Spain into one of world's great powers. It seems that Mr. Aznar's motto in life is: No matter whether right or wrong, one has to be on the side of the most powerful. Mr. Aznar may also have thought that Spanish participation in the Iraq war on the side of the United States would give him a place in history and that his legacy would be considered as great as that of King Charles I, who consolidated the power of the Spanish empire and then (1555) abdicated the throne . After the

tion?) Bush and his acolytes are afraid that the Spanish withdrawal will have a domino effect on the other members of the coalition and eventually will lead to Bush's defeat in this year's presidential election.

Italy's prime minister Berlusconi is already feeling the pressure. On the first anniversary of the invasion, millions of Italians demonstrated against Italian participation in the occupation forces. More than 67 per cent of the

tion. He said, "that they (the Americans) deceived us about the weapons of mass destruction, that's true. We were taken for a ride". Although no immediate withdrawal of the Polish contingent is expected, it is quite likely that by the end of the year, Poland will follow the Spanish example. By the way, the Poles are currently in command of the South-central military sector of occupied Iraq.

Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkanade of the Netherlands, who

going to be held next year. Tony Blair (now popularly known in Britain as Mr. BLIAR), who manipulated facts and figures to take his country to war against the will of at least 50 per cent of the British public may have to pay a price for his lies and end up like Aznar as a defeated and discredited leader. (After all, according to a poll conducted recently by YouGov for Sky News 75 per cent of the British public "believed that Britain's role in the Iraq war had made the country more vulnerable" to terrorist

is still harping on the same flimsy excuse trying to convince American public opinion. According to a poll conducted recently by the non-partisan Pew Research Centre, " one year after the war in Iraq, European distrust of the United States has intensified, anger towards America is still fierce in Muslim countries". In fact, the invasion of Iraq has increased the threat of terrorism all over the world

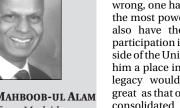
Spain and Poland under the leadership of Aznar had aggressively pursued a pro-American policy, which often went against the idea of building a strong European Union as a counterweight to American hegemony. With the disappearance of Aznar, it would be easier to agree a new constitution for the EU, which until now had been effectively blocked by Spain and Poland. This would definitely give new direction and momentum to the union. Aznar's confrontational attitude had created an unpleasant atmosphere in the EU. Rodriguez Zapatero, the Socialist leader, although does not consider himself as an anti-American is definitely not willing to serve the interests of Bush. He will most certainly be more pro-European than pro-American and repair the damaged relations with France and Germany, who are after all, Spain's natural partners and neighbours. If accountability is the true essence of democracy then Spain's young democracy has certainly passed the test. We do not know vet whether the older democracies of Britain and the United States will pass the test or not. If they do, the results of the Spanish general elections will have contributed to it.

Letter from europe

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abdication he retired to a monas- Italians are in favour of the with- sent 1300 troops against Dutch attack. terv to meditate. drawal of their troops (approxipublic opinion, did so at great mately 3,000) from Iraq. Although political risk. On March 16, after a Although, militarily the withmeeting with Bush at the White Berlusconi is not up for re-election drawal of Spanish troops (only until 2006, elections for the Euro-House, he was non-committal 1300) will not make a significant about leaving his troops in Iraq pean parliament are due in June, difference, from a strategic point this year. If his party does poorly in beyond July, 2004. of view, it will have a tremendous impact on the morale of the sothese elections, his position will Australia's rightist prime miniscalled "coalition of the willing ". (Is become untenable and he may ter John Howard, otherwise known this a mere coincidence that most have to go sooner than expected. as Mr. Bush's "deputy Sheriff" in After all, his rival in Italian politics of the members of this unholv the Far East is one of the most alliance are Europeans? One may is none other than Romano Prodi, enthusiastic supporters of Bush's well ask the governments of these the current president of the Euromilitary adventures in Asia. He is predominantly Christian countries pean Commission. Prodi's grim also expected to face election Britain, Italy, Poland, Ukraine, assessment of the invasion and contest this year. Gradually more Spain, Holland, Rumania, Buloccupation of Iraq is "the terrorism and more Australians are asking garia, Denmark, Hungary, Norway, that this war was supposed to stop whether their country's participa-Portugal, Lithuania, Slovakia, is infinitely stronger now than a tion in the Iraq war, instead of Moldavia, Estonia etc.: What have year ago". destroying terrorism, has not made the Iraqis done to you? Why are Even the Polish president Australia more vulnerable to it. your troops occupying Iraq? Are Howard may also come under Aleksander Kwasniewski, who you not afraid that your action will confirmed that the Iraqi governrenewed pressure from public until now has been a staunch be perceived in the Muslim world ment under Saddam Hussein had opinion to withdraw Australian supporter of the American presias an example of Western imperino connection with the 9/11 terrortroops from Iraq and Afghanistan. dent recently uttered a few cruel alism and thus provoke retaliaist attack. the Bush administration words about the Bush administra-British general elections are

CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM writes from Madrid



Y now, almost everybody knows that the Spanish general elections were held on March 14, 2004. Millions of words have been written trying to explain why against all prognosis, the Socialists were able to inflict a humiliating defeat on the Conser-

vatives, whose leader had run the country for the last eight years with an iron fist. The purpose of this letter is not to mull over them again but to analyse the possible conseauences of this surprise victory. whose repercussions are still reverberating all across the pro-Bush camp in the Western world. Immediately after the election results were announced. Mr. Zapatero, the Socialist leader, who will most probably become Spain's next prime minister, repeated his vow to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq after 30th June, 2004 unless all foreign military forces in Iraq were placed under the control of the United Nations. Spanish participation in the US-led invasion of Iraq was (and still is) a hugely unpopular measure. More than 90 per cent of the Spanish population were against this invasion which they considered as illegal, immoral and unjust. Ignoring the huge majority of public opinion, Mr. Aznar, the conservative prime minister endorsed the invasion because he thought that

senior madrasah, 16 secondary

schools, 15 junior schools, seven

The leaders of the country

that Charjabber would be

upgraded to a an upazila. A deci-

sion was also taken in this regard

recently. But we do not understand

concerned to look into the matter.

It is clear by now that today's global

politics cannot filter and keep out

the religious tinges or virus. It

appears that man is rather getting

more keen to seek his Creator, after

taking meals from the manmade

menu for centuries (capitalism,

communism, and all other varia-

tions). The victims of global poli

tics are the superpower and the

small nations, including Bangla-

Md Nurul Islam (Akash)

Political trends

Charjabber, Noakhali

I would request the authorities

why it is not being implemented.

Intimidation, extortion, threat of violence, and even murder is a common occupational hazard of doing business in Bangladesh.

These small businessmen and traders who are being targeted are the backbone of the economy, and the effect of this climate of fear that has been created, apart from the terror it has bred among the business community, is to further depress the economy. The extortion that businessmen must pay raises the cost of doing business to prohibitive levels. This is then passed onto the consumer and has been a significant contributory factor in the rise in the price of essentials and the rate of inflation that has dogged the economy. Both local and foreign investment have slowed to a trickle due, in large part, to the uncertain business climate fostered by the appalling law and order situation.

The government cannot continue to tolerate this kind of breakdown in basic law and order. One would have thought that the human tragedy and horror of businessmen being hacked into a few hundred pieces would be sufficient to spur the government to action. But if the government is not moved by the plight of the business community, perhaps it will be motivated by the ripple effects of such rampant law-lessness on the well-being of the nation's economy.

Finally, George W. Bush, the president of the United States, who invaded Iraq under false pretences and is responsible for the killing of probably tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis (no one knows the exact figure), destroyed a country, violated international law and poisoned the international atmosphere (remember, Huntington's theory on clash of civilisations) will also face election contest, this year. Bush's ostensible reason for invading Iraq was to destroy Iraq's stockpile of weapons of mass destruction. When no weapons of this nature were found in Iraq. Bush said that this war was to eradicate terrorism. Even though the American intelligence services have

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

RRI employees' pension

Pension of the retired employees of the River Research Institute (RRI) has been stopped for more than a year. Nobody is showing any concern for these distressed people. Originally, the RRI was part of the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and for providing special attention to research on water resources, this organisation was developed as a separate national institute at Faridpur in 1989. The employees who had been working in the RRI under the BWDB were absorbed without taking any consent from the employees concerned. Pension has been approved for the employees of the BWDB and the employees of the RRI who were recruited by and served under the BWDB for more than 25 years. They deposited their pension contribution to the BWDB and it deposited that amount to the RRI for providing pension to them. The RRI also provisionally approved the pension to the retired employees and after about 4/5 years, all of a sudden, this benefit has been stopped without considering the sufferings of the retired

personnel and their families in these hard days.

We have heard that the Ministry of Water Resources has submitted the replies to the queries raised by the Ministry of Finance and the water resources minister also wrote a DO letter to the finance minister, requesting him to look into the matter urgently. But 3/4 months have already passed, still the unfortunate employees continue to suffer

I appeal to the Honourable Prime Minister to look into the matter and save the men in dis-

Abul Hashem West Raza Bazar

Dhaka. Upgrading

Charjabber Charjabber, a thana, is a combination of 7 unions and 49 mouzas

of coastal areas of Noakhali district. It was set up on 13 March, 2001. Inhabitants of the thana have long been demanding that it be upgraded to an upazila. This thana has an area of 386.46 square kilo-

metres and there are many institudesh. There is simply no time to tions like the thana health comcalm down and analyse. plex, two degree colleges, one

The US and partners are scared, and are taking unpopular actions accordingly in different parts of the Dakhil madrasahs and several world, outside the UN presence. primary schools . The area has The Muslims all over the globe are been brought under electrification. obsessed with the idea that they have been wrongly made the culpromised many times in the past prits and the victims.

In Dhaka the opposition is suspicious of the so-called fundamentalist groups in the regime (coalition), and does not hide the fact. Political tension has risen, as one more local factor has been added to unpractical charismatic politics in Dhaka. Traditional political leadership is finding it difficult to adjust to the fast changing conditions of today's political culture. There are too many variables in these changes (like the changing weather); hence even interim solutions do not last long. This no-go situation is raising tension in the society, in addition to the cumulative tension created by lawlessness and other social evils (the newspapers are full of it).

It is important to note that this lack of discipline in the society would continue unless the power-

workers are disciplined from the top (who depend on whom?). Power and influence are being misused, now openly. It means that the established institutions have eroded. Even the judiciary is tainted marginally, according to the media analysts. The civil service is unable to work efficiently, which is an open secret. The point is: who is fit to throw the first stone? We get passionate about the peripheral problems, without oothering to analyse the roots and foundations of the genesis of the problems facing us today.

ful and misguided political field

reviewed carefully. Sensitive form and context rub some peo-

ple the wrong way. Tolerance and patience are timeless virtues, but where to turn to for daily net practice? Today the precepts and practices handed down differ in form, content, and application. Too many grievances are blocking the appeal highways. Who are listening to whom?

The politicians are not interested in separating the grain from the chaff, because some of them are the culprits themselves, working through the backdoors. Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde that is the situation in a nutshell.

Recovery of heroin

The Daily Star's report dated 21.3.04. regarding recovery of heroin by a BDR team from a village at Manikchalk in Godagari upazila on Friday caught my attention.

There were some conflicting claims made by the BDR and the locals on the quantity of heroin recovered and arrest of two persons, which the BDR denied. The BDR claims to have recovered 4.6.kg whereas locals say it would

be 12kg. In my opinion, the facts can only be unearthed through a neutral investigation and interrogation of the man from whose thatched house the heroin was recovered. Hussain Imam Choudhury

Pallabi, Mirpur, Dhaka.

Hartal

am a Chartered Accountant and have been resident in the UK for almost forty years. My family and I instinctively visited Bangladesh every two years on average. Every time we visited we faced hartal nearly once a week. I do not consider any of those hartals as meaningful in any sense. There is nothing for the country to gain out of those disruptive and chaotic situations. Hartals are called just by utterance without any humane discussions between political parties. No sensible persons have ever wanted to respond to any hartal calls. It is only the fear that prevents them from defying such hartal. Who gains from hartals? Well, I will leave this for the general people to judge.

I do not need to mention who suffers as a result of hartal. Of course when elephants fight it is the grass that suffers. An already crippled economy of the country is only dented further. Day-labourers have to go hungry. I have never found any newspapers that published the true and accumulated cost of every day's hartal to the nation's economy. There is nothing further that I can add to such miseries

With all this in mind I call upon all the professionals, teachers, students, traders, all trade unions and alike to organise themselves and come out on the street in solidarity with a common slogan such as "We shall not obey any more hartal calls".

Let all the disputes between the political parties be confined within the parliament house -the house that belongs to them only. General people are not interested with what goes on in the house. They want to get on with their struggle for survival undisturbed.

Shaikh Rouf Ahmed

London

The core is not difficult to Dhaka detect : lack of true political dedication towards clean public service. Now it is: first the self, then the other issues. This is the universal pattern, hence local denials carry no weight. Simply

put the various media through which politics operate are also polluted. Not only that, now the

political messages also carry virus. Some are mild, which generate allergy; while some are ruinous and apolitical. The role of religious propaganda has to be

A Husnain