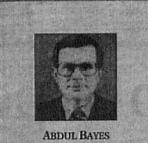
POINT COUNTERPOINT

Driving towards energy divide?



LREADY at the doorstep of a "digital divide", Bangladesh seems to be poised for an "energy divide". According to a recent World Bank Report (2003), a double burner costs Tk. 375/month. For equivalent energy. it is Tk. 1450 for Kerosene oil. That means (a) a poor household in Ashugonj with access to gas is richer than a poor household in Belkuchi under Sirajgonj or some

access to gas prevails.

The same report also says that only 6 per cent of the households gas and most of them in urban as far as energy cost is concerned, areas. Subsidy on domestic has been rising. However, total

where with no such access to gas assuming Kerosene as alternative but relying on kerosene; (b) a rich fuel and Tk. 16 billion/year which household with reliance on LPG is is 79 per cent subsidy assuming poorer than a household where LPG as alternative fuel. This goes to mean that (a) subsidy on energy is being seized upon by the rich and urban dwellers and (b) in Bangladesh are connected with inequality across income groups,

2002/2003. But in Rajshahi and Khulna, the index went up by 13 times! Whereas, 61 per cent of the poor people (on head count basis) are reported to live in Rajshai and 50 per cent in Khulna which is much higher than Dhaka or

According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey

Tk.3000-5000 per month spend 14

per cent of their monthly budget

on fuel and lighting. The richer

section spends only 3-4 per cent

for the same fuel and lighting. The

poor tend to spend more on

Only 12 per cent of the

households for the bottom fifth of

income distribution and 21 per

cent of the second lowest quintile

have access to electricity. Most of

the households at top quintile

have access to electricity. That

means, access of the poor to

energy than the rich.

poor national access to electricity, which is reported to be 30 per cent.

By and large our perceptions, policies, priorities and practices seemingly remain to be purely pro-rich and utterly pro-urban. We are driving towards an "energy divide" unless we develop institutions, governance and commitment to eradicate the

Why the pitfalls? Because we think that gas should gear up growth through fertilizer industry and power plants. Undoubtedly they are the big players in the market consuming about 75 per cent of total gas. But we should also bring under the net the small and cottage industries and the poor households who could also contribute to growth and poverty reduction. Any industry located in the western zone relying on furnace oil would turn out to be uncompetitive compared to that in the eastern part with access to gas. The small and cottage industries employ over four-fifths of the industrial labour force. I reckon that many of the small and cottage industries already on the verge of extinction could stage a come back and remain sound in the presence of gas.

Gas at household levels could save the poor in a lot of ways. The number one killer of infants in Bangladesh is reported to be reparatory problem. Every year, throughout the world, 2.5 million women and children die from smokes of burning biomass on open fire. The poor could also gain from preserving the cow dung, tree leaves and other fuels, which can be

used as organic manure. We can only suggest that we should avoid the policy of "energy divide". This can only happen if we can change our mindset. That is, the poor cannot afford to pay for gas connection and monthly bill. As far as cost of connection is concerned, credit facilities would enable them to have an access. As far as monthly bill is concerned, it should not be a problem given that the poor are already paying more than the cost of gas.

Just think of the time saved in collecting fuels. On average, children and women in the collection and management of traditional fuels spend 3-4 hours. Children are robbed of their reading times due to households' fuel scarcity. Poor women could be helped to do some other jobs. In weaving, it takes 14 hours to process yarn under traditional methods and fuels. With gas, it could be reduced to 6 hours. The cost saving could be as high as 60 per cent for processing of yarn and 40 per cent for dyeing. Mind that most of our weavers are poor.

The society should aim at attaining a "general equilibrium of happiness" where every one, rich and poor would have access to public services and where each and every one should have the right to pay for the services. If there has to be any subsidy, then it should go to the poor first. Unfortunately the subsidy is being seized upon by the richer section to result in a "partial equilibrium of happiness" where some have to live and many to die. This is no good for the society.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor in Economics, Jahangimagar University.

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BENEATH THE SURFACE

We can only suggest that we should avoid the policy of "energy divide". This can only happen if we can change our mindset. That is, the poor cannot afford to pay for gas connection and monthly bill. As far as cost of connection is concerned, credit facilities would enable them to have an access. As far as monthly bill is concerned, it should not be a problem given that the poor are already paying more than the cost of gas.

eastern part where gas is largely

available is Tk.500/moth and that

is 30 per cent lower than rich

households. But in the western

part of the country where gas is yet

to be made available, the rich

spends 65 per cent more than the

poor implying that the inequality

is higher in the western part than

higher in poverty-ridden regions.

For example, according to BBS, the

fuel and lighting consumer price

index rose 7 and 8 times from

The energy prices are also

in the eastern side.

consumption is Tk. 12 billion/year energy use by the poor in the 2000, households spending and it is a 74 per cent subsidy

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বার এ্যাট 'ল' ডিগ্রী লাভ

চৌধুরী ইশরাক আহাম্মদ সিদ্দিকী ২০০৩ সালে ইংল্যান্ডের UNIVERSITY OF KENT হইতে এল এল-বি ডিগ্রী লাভ করেন। তিনি ২০০৪ সালের অক্টোবর মাসে ইংল্যান্ডের MIDDLE TEMPLE হইতে বার এ্যাট 'ল' ডিগ্রী লাভ করেন। জানা মতে তিনিই বাংলাদেশের সর্ব কনিষ্ঠ্য ব্যারিষ্টার। তাহার মাতামহ চট্টগ্রামের ব্যারিষ্টার আনোয়ারুল আজিম এম, এ (Cantab) ১৯১৯ সালে ইংল্যান্ডের লিংকল ইন হইতে বার এ্যাট 'ল' ডিমী লাভ করেন। তাহার পিতামহ বিশিষ্ট রাজনৈতিক ব্যক্তিত্ব, নিবেদিত প্রাণ শিক্ষানুরাগী ও সমাজসেবক বলিয়াদীর জমিদার খান বাহাদুর চৌধুরী লাবিব উদ্দিন আহাম্মদ সিদ্দিকী। তাহার পিতামহের ভ্রাতা প্রখ্যাত আইনজীবি এবং তৎকালীণ পূর্ব পাকিস্তানের এডভোকেট জেনারেল এবং পরবর্তীতে ইতিহাসখ্যাত প্রধান বিচারপতি চৌধুরী বি. এ. সিদ্দিকী। তিনি সাবেক মন্ত্রী ও এম,পি এবং বি. এন, পি'র জাতীয় স্থায়ী কমিটির সদস্য (MEMBER NATIONAL STANDING COMMITTEE) এবং ১৬১২ খুষ্টাব্দে প্রতিষ্ঠিত প্রাচীন ঐতিহ্যবাহী বলিয়াদী সিদ্দিকী এস্টেটের বর্তমান কর্ণধার চৌধুরী তানবীর আহাম্মদ সিন্দিকী এবং সঙ্গীত শিল্পী বেগম খুরশীদ আজিম সিদ্দিকী'র কনিষ্ঠ পুত্র। এখানে উল্লেখযোগ্য যে চৌধুরী তানবীর আহাম্মদ সিদ্দিকী ৪০ বছর আগে অর্থাৎ ১৯৬৪ সালে ঢাকা হাই কোর্টের সন্দপ্রাপ্ত কনিষ্ঠতম এডভোকেট ছিলেন।

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management (NGO experience will get prefer) Ability to understand social vulnerability of the communities particularly MSM and

Hijra communities. Significant knowledge on program management.

Communication and writing skill fluency both in English and Bangla.

Computer literacy is must specifically MS Office.

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Significant knowledge on Financial management, Accounts

Ability to understand social vulnerability of the communities particularly Hijra

2 years experience in relevant field.

Computer literacy (MS Word, MS Excel) is must. Communicating skill both in Bangla and English.

Deserving candidates are requested to apply with their resume along with one passport size photograph and contact telephone number. Application dead line 20th December 2004 and address to

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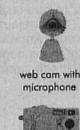
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