

In praise of bio-fuel

Every year Bangladesh spends about \$2 billion to import oil, 15% of total national budget. Through bio-fuel production, Bangladesh can save half of its foreign currency from avoided oil import and can allocate the savings to the other sectors of the economy.

MD. ABDUL BATEN

THE current endeavours for reform have been obstructed by the uncontrolled rise in the price of essential commodities. Some have defined it as a "hidden famine." However, everybody will agree that this current situation has been aggravated by simultaneous effect of recent world-wide food crisis and continuous increased trend of oil price.

Any increase in oil price significantly increases production and transportation cost, and price rise become unavoidable. It is therefore argued that poor countries like Bangladesh should explore alternative renewable energy sources that will reduce their dependence on imported oil. Bio-fuel would be a sustainable solution in this regard. In most global energy scenarios that meet stringent carbon emissions constraints, bio-fuel is assumed to be a significant

new source of energy.

The world oil price is rising geometrically. Among the world's poorest countries, 38 are net importers of oil (Bangladesh is one of them), some now having spent more than six times their health budget on oil importing. Moreover, they are mostly affected by climate change, consequences of global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel. It is therefore a growing need to curb emission of greenhouse gases. Bio-fuel with its low carbon emission potentiality would be an alternative energy solution, many scientists believe.

Bio-fuel is a non-traditional energy source produced from dry organic matter or combustible oils from plants by a conventional way of sugar from cane, maize or other oil containing seeds then the parallel fermentation and distillation. It can be used blended with traditional petroleum-based diesel oil or

directly as ethanol.

However, debate is mounting based on the idea that bio-fuel has tied oil and food prices in a way that could profoundly upset the relationship between producers, consumers, and nations in the years ahead, with potentially devastating implications for both global poverty and food security.

But advocates for bio-fuel are not small in number. They believe that bio-fuel will reduce uncertainty of implementing development budget of most oil-importing poor countries that most often have to cut their development budget due to increase in oil price and become dependant on foreign loan to implement national budget.

Many supporters of bio-fuel from developing countries argue that bio-fuels will be a blessing for tropical developing countries like Bangladesh because of four comparative advantages of sun and excel-

lent energy crops. Modern distilleries might both facilitate electrification in remote areas and also create more jobs, thereby making developing countries serious players in the global market.

It has been argued that only to avert such a potential shift in the global market, the developed countries, who control 90% of global trade at present, have started debate on bio-fuel through their powerful media.

If bio-fuel changes the whole picture of oil politics then the US's absolute control over the world will be weakened. Moreover, if the developing countries shift their present fossil fuel-based carbon intensive energy use to less carbon intensive bio-fuels, then pressure will mount on US to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, as now they deny it by blaming developing countries for not reducing their carbon emissions.

Brazil, leading producer of bio-ethanol, saved some \$52 billion in avoided oil import between 1975 and 2002. Another way to save money is through improved energy efficiency. Every year Bangladesh spends about \$2 billion to import oil, 15% of total national budget.

Through bio-fuel production, Bangladesh can save half of its foreign currency from avoided oil import and can allocate the savings to the other sectors of the economy.

In spite of the dispute, a look at the bigger picture reveals that an apparent straight case of fuel taking precedence over food is misleading. Besides, bio-fuel could be in the vanguard of much higher standards in international trade in agricultural commodities. For decades, the unjust trade in agriculture products have vested the control of agri-market of developing countries to some multinational corporations. Bio-fuel creates an additional supply of food and fuel crop that could galvanise agriculture in developing countries, which for many years have had their farming system crushed by cheap imports.

Some influential framers from the west point out that their past food surpluses dumped on developing world markets never alleviated hunger, rather it would be a good thing if developing countries could produce that we in the west are prepared to pay a fair price for.

Some protectionists suggest that

bio-fuel bonanza will increase food price and poor people will not have access to high priced food. But whether higher prices of food will be a curse or blessing is contextual. This is, however, an opportunity for small-scale farmers getting decently paid.

Will the bio-fuel boom increase bio-diversity loss? Many advocates of bio-fuel suggest that energy crops will be grown solely on degraded and abandoned land, hence actually will enhance bio-diversity and soil quality without an impact on food production. Indeed, UN figures show that there to be around 2 billion hectares of degraded land globally that could be put into production -- 25% in Asia, 25% in Africa, 25% in Americas; the rest scattered around the world.

In Bangladesh, other than sugarcane, bio-fuel can be produced from some crops that can be grown in areas not suitable for traditional food crops e.g. jatropha (veranda), pongamia (caron) can grow under conditions of low fertility and rainfall. The north-western region with low fertility could be put into bio-fuel crop production commer-

cially which may convert the munga-affected region into an important economic zone.

In a recent article, Peter Rudberg of Stockholm Resilience Centre argues that climate change and food security are intimately connected both when it comes to the effects of climate change but also how proposed solutions to one problem risk exacerbating the others. In the latest report from IPCC (2007) on climate change, it is assumed that conditions for agriculture in northern latitude will probably improve, while production potentials in many developing countries will be decreased, due to change in water balances. That means when the question of food security comes, the northern developed countries (EU, US, Canada) will be benefited by climate change.

US Department of Agriculture projects that fuel distilleries will require 139 million tons of corn in 2008, this is the same amount as India might lose of its rain-fed cereal production because of climate change. Therefore, many people believe that food security of developing countries is more threatened from fossil fuel that is

mainly responsible for greenhouse gas emissions causing climate change, than it is by bio-fuel.

In spite of imposing huge tariff on Brazilian ethanol, US and EU are now heavily investing in bio-fuel technology, considering its future. Although some sceptics warn if you start to fuel cars with crops, you are putting the world's one billion starving people in competition with one billion motorists, world oil politics is entering into a new paradigm with bio-fuel.

Of late, numerous institutions and think-tanks have published reports concerning bio-fuels. Evidently, the bio-fuel issue engages several policy domains such as agriculture, energy, environment, and trade, which have to be integrated to face upcoming challenges.

Who knows who will take the leading role in the new regime? Will the US still maintain its de facto energy consumption position or will bio-fuel change the underprivileged developing countries' position in world politics due to self-sufficiency in the energy sector?

Mohammed Abdul Baten writes from the University of Stockholm.

Pakistan's constitutional shenanigans

If, perchance, the sacked judges are reinstated, they will have to share the court with the Establishment judges. A crowded but weakened Supreme Court, fighting with itself, is a godsend for the Establishment.

LIAQUAT ALI KHAN

INVOKING the non-existent powers of the army chief last November under a declaration of emergency rule, Pervez Musharraf dismissed sixty high court judges and implanted the dismissal order in the constitution as an amendment.

The order/amendment reads: "A Judge including the Chief Justice, of the Supreme Court, a High Court or Federal Shariat Court who had, not been given or taken oath under the Oath of Office" (Judges) Order, 2007, had ceased to hold office on and with effect from the 3rd day of November, 2007."

That a single person can amend the constitution is egregious. Even more egregious is the demand that the democratically elected parliament, if it wishes to restore the

sacked judges, must repeal the order/amendment with the constitutionally required "votes of not less than two-thirds of the total membership of (each) House."

Furthermore, the president is armed with the disreputable 58 (2) (b) constitutional power -- a provision that General Zia ul Haq inserted in the constitution -- to dissolve the National Assembly if in his opinion a situation has arisen in which the government of the Federation cannot be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the constitution and an appeal to the electorate is necessary. Even though Musharraf, who occupies the presidency through constitutional manipulations, is unlikely to dissolve the newly elected National Assembly in the near future, the new coalition government which has taken office is frightened by

what it calls "the Establishment."

The Establishment

The Establishment is a quasi-pejorative label to describe the combined forces of Pakistan Army generals, intelligence chiefs, and top bureaucrats. In reality, the Establishment is a group of powerful government officials who pool their resources to checkmate policies and persons that cross their path or wish to weaken their grip on power. Founded on vertical hierarchy, the Establishment effectively demands that human resources in the armed forces, intelligence agencies, and bureaucracy take an oath "to discharge their duties, and perform their functions, to the best of their ability, faithfully and always in the interest of the sovereignty, integrity, solidarity, well-being and prosperity of the Establishment."

The Parliament

Even the concept of sovereign

parliament is a constitutional shenanigan. Politicians and the media take pride in talking about the sovereignty of the parliament. It is ironic, however, that Pakistan's constitution in its preamble establishes the sovereignty of God, and not of the parliament. Under the constitution, the parliament exercises authority as a "sacred trust" within the limits prescribed by God. The Establishment sincerely believes that it alone has the keys to the sacred trust. Ignoring the preamble and defying the Establishment, politicians and the media harp the mantra of Sovereign Parliament.

The idea of sovereign parliament, which Pakistani barristers unwittingly borrowed from the United Kingdom, makes no sense even under secular law. In the age of rights and separation of powers, no state institution ought to be sovereign. Each institution must be checked and restrained from committing excesses. Does a sovereign parliament have the lawful authority to commission genocide or torture?

Following dictates of the Establishment, Musharraf ignored the parliament, even though his own party (the "King's party," as it were) enjoyed a solid majority in both houses. To further discount the parliament, Musharraf imported a naturalised American citizen to be the prime minister, rebuffing the native leaders of the King's party. Despite suffering incessant indignities, the parliament wasted no time in "re-electing" army chief Musharraf for a second presidential term of five years starting in 2007.

The nation hoped that the parliament would indeed become the center of power after the February 2008 democratic elections. The King's party was thoroughly defeated. The opposition parties of the two former prime ministers, whom the Establishment had forcibly removed from power in the previous decades, won in a big way and formed a coalition government -- a political union that pleased the nation. But contrary to all bets, the parliament has come to

be as irrelevant as it has been under the King's party.

The coalition chiefs, Asif Ali Zardari and Mian Nawaz Sharif, are not themselves members of the parliament. Yet they -- and not the parliament -- hold the ultimate power to make decisions. In matters relating to the restoration of judges, the National Assembly has been kept out of negotiations. Instead of debating the judges' issues openly on the floor of the National Assembly, the coalition chiefs debated the issues in secret in a hotel in a foreign country. Even Pakistan's prime minister, presumably the strongest person under the constitution, was left out of the deliberations. Just as the prime minister under the Musharraf regime was no more than a deferential pawn, so is the new prime minister under the coalition government.

The Supreme Court

Given that the decision-making power belongs neither to the prime minister and nor to the parliament,

the question arises whether the sacked judges will be restored as promised. The answer, as usual, lies with the chief and not with the tribe. Chief Zardari is determined to safeguard the Establishment judges who upheld the National Reconciliation Ordinance that manumitted Zardari from all criminal action. Even the other coalition chief, who has been a fierce advocate for the independence of judiciary, has quietly agreed to let the Establishment judges stay on the Supreme Court.

As is customary, all roads lead toward the Establishment. If the sacked judges are not restored, the Supreme Court belongs exclusively to the Establishment. If, perchance, the sacked judges are reinstated, they will have to share the court with the Establishment judges. A crowded but weakened Supreme Court, fighting with itself, is a godsend for the Establishment.

Ali Khan is professor of law at Washburn University School of Law in Topeka, Kansas, and the author of the book, *A Theory of Universal Democracy* (2003).

The significance of the Pentecost

Perhaps the call of the Pentecost is clear enough: we need to turn to the One Universal God, who is love and who is spirit. No flesh can find true meaning of life without the gift of His touch. May we celebrate in His spirit and power for our renewal.

MARTIN ADHIKARY

TODAY Christians all over the world celebrate the festival of the Pentecost. The English word "pentecost" is derived from the New Testament Greek word "pentekostes" meaning "fiftieth" or the festival of the fiftieth day. The ancient Israelite people used to offer new harvest for forty-nine days after the Passover feast as a mark of their gratefulness to God for the harvest.

The number seven is a number of completeness of perfection in the Bible. So the people offered harvests for seven weeks. This function reached its climax on the fiftieth day observed with extra festivities and rituals. There are

narratives concerning the festival in the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. On this day the Jews also commemorated on this day the giving of the Law by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.

The New Testament book of The Acts of the Apostles describes a unique event of greatest significance in the life of the Christian church; in fact this event marks the beginning of the Church. Acts describes that when the diaspora Jews from as many as fourteen nationalities gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Pentecost and when the first disciples of Christ were praying to God, the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples in the form of tongues of fire

and empowering them to speak in tongues and magnifying God's name in an unprecedented way. Christ had promised them that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when he would be in heaven. So the Holy Spirit came and gave the handful of followers of Christ to perform miracles and witness to Christ as a result of which many came to believe in Christ. Thus the Church was initiated.

The feast of the Pentecost in the Old Testament religion was the last part of the harvest festival. But it turned out to be the beginning of the life and witness of the Christians. On the fiftieth day following the resurrection of Christ from the dead the Holy Spirit came

upon the disciples as the greatest single gift of God to empower them to testify to what God has done in Christ for the salvation of mankind from the bondage of sin. In order for the followers of Christ to be change agents for others they first themselves needed to be changed and transformed. The Holy Spirit entirely changed their attitude and life and they were able to perform great miracles in Christ's name and were successful and authentic witness to God's work of salvation wrought in Jesus Christ.

Each year Pentecost comes with its call to believers to believe in the power of the Holy Spirit and rededicate their lives for preaching the Good News through word, deed, sign, and life. The first disciples were able to become the vehicles of Christ's love and compassion for a sin-sick world. Today we are reminded of this glorious beginning of the Church, which over the last two millennia has passed

through a chequered history of successes and failures, of light and darkness, of glory and ignominy. It became a human enterprise only with agenda for mere temporal goals.

As we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit we need to capture the vision for the Church to impact the world by Christ's teaching. But, unfortunately, in general we have been impacted by the world and its ways. Let us remember what John the Baptist said about Jesus Christ while he was preparing the way for the latter: "I baptise you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thoughts of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

Christ calls his followers with the challenge of denying themselves for the sake of Christ's work of preaching the Gospel of transformation of lives. This requires the power and quickening of God's spirit. Before he ascended to

heaven Christ asked his disciples to wait for the promise of the spirit so that they could do miracles, cast out demons, give sight to the blind, heal the sick, bring hope to the hopeless, cast out demons out of the demon-possessed people, and thereby incarnate the gospel. So they did receive the Holy Spirit and fulfilled in their lives all that they were called to do and as a result of their preaching the Church grew.

But that glorious day did not last for long. The Church, in general terms, got entangled with worldliness, bad politics and the like. It lost its God-given vision for a world where justice and peace and universal brotherhood under One God the Father of all would prevail. It appeared to be often mulling around like the Israelites in the wilderness because of lack of trust and obedience to God.

Remember, the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples on that great day of Pentecost in the form of flames of fire (but it was not fire

in the physical sense). Fire purifies and renews. So the descending of the Spirit signified the purification and a renewal of the lives and attitude of the disciples. As God is pure, holy and righteous so His ambassadors needed to be like Him.

That's how also God wrote down in their hearts His law of holy love for all mankind. Christ himself was led by the Spirit to the wilderness to be tested by the devil after he had fasted for long forty days and forty nights. Born of the virgin Mary by the power of the Spirit Jesus did everything in the same power. Although the unique event of Pentecost was a once-and-for-all pouring out of the Spirit in history the promise of the baptism of the Spirit was to be extended and carried on. This needs to be experienced and incarnated in real life situation. This is because it is the Holy Spirit which brings God home to us. The Spirit is our teacher and mentor within us.

Today the entire human family seems to be without a clear vision. There appears to be tensions and conflicting claims in every area in our lives, corporate or individual. We are perhaps milling around with our own lost visions or goals. This seems to be true with individuals and nations. We need to catch the ethico-spiritual values of religion. Otherwise, our mere dogmas will not help us in creating environment for lasting solutions to human crises. We need today to remind ourselves of the Golden Rule in the Bible as taught by Jesus: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them to do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

Perhaps the call of the Pentecost is clear enough: we need to turn to the One Universal God, who is love and who is spirit. No flesh can find true meaning of life without the gift of His touch. May we celebrate in His spirit and power for our renewal.

Whites won't vote for Obama: Hillary

LETTER FROM AMERICA

For the record, Obama won more white votes than Hillary in Iowa (by 6%), Illinois (by 16%), New Mexico (by 12%), Utah (by 15%), Virginia (by 5%), Wisconsin (by 9%), and Vermont (by 22%). And Hillary received only 1% more white votes than Obama in Connecticut and the biggest prize, California.

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em. Know when to walk away, and know when to run. -- The Gambler, "Kenny Rogers" 1978 super hit)

IN an interview on Thursday, May 8, Hillary Clinton said: "Sen. Obama's support among working, hard-working Americans, white Americans, is weakening again, and whites in both states (Indiana and North Carolina) who had not completed college were supporting me."

There are two problems with the statement. First, she implies that only white Americans are hard-working Americans, as though blacks and Latinos are not. Second, America is a racist country where whites will not vote for a black candidate.

Behind in all the measurable matrices -- pledged delegates, popular votes, and states won -- Hillary's only remaining arguments seems to be America's bigotry! It is never a good idea to want something too badly. Hillary wants to be the president so bad that she

is in danger of embarrassing herself and her supporters.

Hillary's logic is as flawed as suggesting that since over 90% of blacks have voted for Obama in the primaries lately, those 90% will not vote for her in the general election, were she to be the nominee. Let us not forget that Hillary was winning more black votes than Obama in the beginning. Because of her and Bill Clinton's playing the race card, she has lost them.

Likewise, just as it is inconceivable for Hillary to win back the black vote were she to honestly

court them, it is not impossible for Obama to win the working class white votes in November as he to understand and address their concerns.

Working class whites tend to vote Republican in the general elections. Hillary will have just as much trouble winning them in a general election as Obama.

The last Democrat to win a majority of white votes in the general election was Lyndon Johnson in 1964. The South used to be solidly Democratic. When President Lyndon Johnson signed the landmark Civil Rights Act to help the blacks in 1964, he accurately prophesied that the South would be lost to the Democrats for generations.

Richard Nixon employed the "Southern strategy" to woo the Southern whites. Ronald Reagan completed the process of making the South solidly Republican. The

recent winning Democrats, Jimmy Carter in 1976, and Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996, cobbled together a coalition of women, educated whites, blacks, and Latinos to win.

For the record, Obama won more white votes than Hillary in Iowa (by 6%), Illinois (by 16%), New Mexico (by 12%), Utah (by 15%), Virginia (by 5%), Wisconsin (by 9%), and Vermont (by 22%).

And Hillary received only 1% more white votes than Obama in Connecticut and the biggest prize, California. Therefore, to characterise Obama's coalition as "African-Americans and eggheads" is off the mark.

If white voters, who constitute 75% of the population, liked Hillary that much and voted for her in huge numbers, she would have won the nomination ages ago.

The writer listened in disbelief as commentator after commentator characterised Hillary's speech

after her catastrophic loss in North Carolina as a concession speech. Nothing Hillary said sounded like a concession to the writer. She was feisty, promised full steam ahead for the White House, and had nothing gracious to say about Obama.

It now transpires that Hillary has no intention of quitting the race until the primaries end on June 3. It has now become a battle to win super-delegates (about 258 uncommitted are left) who now outnumber the pledged delegates to be won (217). Having lost by the existing matrices, Hillary is inventing new ones. In her pitch to the super-delegates, her only prayer, she now says she carried more districts Democrats need to carry in November. So, the primary process is of no consequence in Hillaryland. It is through the extraneous intangibles that Hillary wants to be handed the nomination Obama has won.

When Obama visited the Congress on May 8, he was treated like a rock star and was mobbed by fellow congressman and senators, many of them uncommitted super-delegates. When Hillary had visited them a day earlier, she walked out alone. Obama has almost closed the 100 plus gap that Hillary enjoyed over him with super-delegates and is about to take the lead.

Although every one thinks that the race is over (this week's TIME magazine cover says: "The winner is...") with a cover photo of Obama) Hillary does not think so. In her mind, she is by far the best candidate. She believes that America is about to make a grave mistake by taking it away from her. Since Sunday is Mother's Day, let us use a mother metaphor. The mother (Hillary), who has lavished so much affection on her daughter (America) cannot understand why her daughter would leave her for

another man. The daughter (America) answers: "But, mom, I love him (Barack)!"

When Hillary Clinton questioned Gen. David Petraeus last September, she correctly argued that to believe his description of progress in Iraq required "a willing suspension of disbelief." After the Indiana and North Carolina primaries, the same now applies to her case for winning the Democratic nomination. With only 217 delegates up for grabs in the six remaining contests, the scenario for her victory has become far-fetched, fantastical and bizarre, and requires "a willing suspension of disbelief."

It is time for Hillary to turn on the Kenny Rogers' CD "The Gambler," and, paying close attention to his advice, finally fold her hand.

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed is a Rhodes Scholar and Daily Star columnist.