

The missing stipend money

Apply the law against the guilty

IT is a sad commentary on our socio-economic realities that even stipends meant for school students is pilfered by individuals who should have known better. News reports from Rangpur reveal that as much as Tk. 346 crore, meant to be stipends for girl students under the first phase of the Female Secondary Education Stipend Project (FESP), was embezzled allegedly by officials of the education department as well as a group of unscrupulous teachers. Indeed, there seems to have been a clear nexus of officials and teachers in the whole ignoble exercise. A total of Tk. 1800 crore was sanctioned for the period 1994-2004 and of that amount Tk. 1400 crore was shown to have been used up as stipend money. The rest of the amount, of course, was spent on other aspects of the project.

The question which now comes up relates to the extent of the corruption involved. Clearly, there is a grave need here to identify the elements taking part in the sordid enterprise. What has happened is that some dishonest teachers and education officials conspired to grab the money by showing on paper the names of fictitious students. And these fake names were 13 lakh in total, which explains where and how the money disappeared. The instance of 28 educational institutions being part of the stealing in Nilphamari alone is a hint of the nefarious deed that was committed. A total of Tk. 9,34,000 went into the hands of non-existent students.

Now that an investigation has revealed the extent of the corruption, it is worth inquiring if adequate safeguards are there to ensure a foolproof working of the second phase of the FESP, which commenced in 2005 with a total outlay of Tk. 502.98 crore.

The misappropriation of the stipend money undermines the very principle upon which the FESP was enunciated. The principle was but an offering of an incentives package, so to say, in order to ensure that girl students went through a substantive mode of education in the interest of their future. In other words, the stipends are a guarantee of their education which, in turn, is a defence against the risks of early marriage in the rural regions. Broadly speaking, therefore, such stipends serve the purpose of promoting women's empowerment as a way of sensitising people to the objective realities around them. Let stringent steps be taken to ensure that such endeavours are not endangered in future. At the same time, we expect the law to be applied forcefully and swiftly against the people guilty of stealing the stipend money.

Lowering internet tariff

It would provide impetus to IT sector

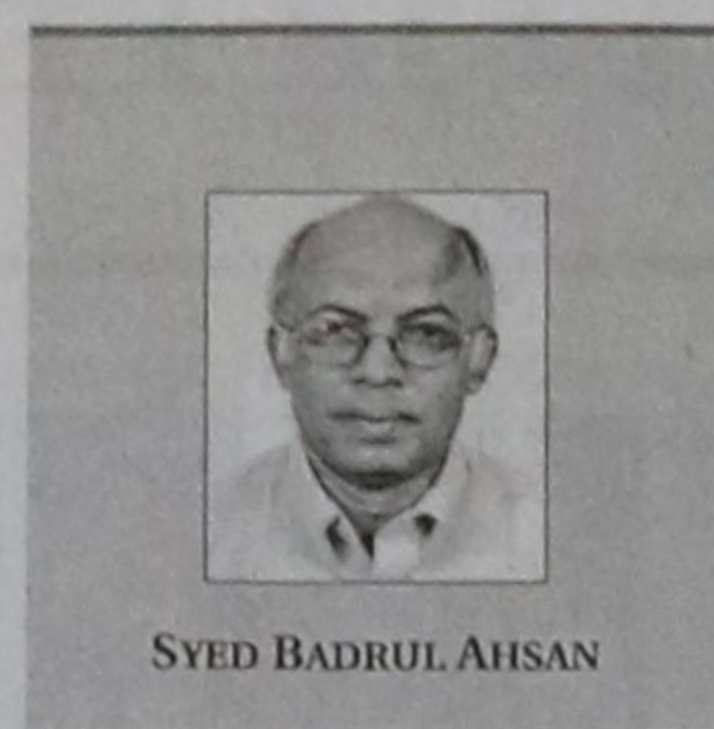
IT is good news that the government is contemplating slashing of internet tariff even further to facilitate all round growth of the IT dependent business sector in the country. In a long overdue move, the government had cut back on the tariff by 20 to 40 percent from the rate prevalent till last February. But the sector needs extra support as it is being evaluated that further slashing of tariff would largely benefit the software developers and particularly the emerging call centre and outsourcing sector. We are heartened to learn that this sector is poised to take a leading position in Bangladesh business world that depends on the proficient use of the internet.

The Internet Service Providers Bangladesh (ISPB) has been liaising with Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) pushing a proposal for minimum tariff to help boost the sector. ISPB has given assurance that if tariff is lowered they would be able to provide services at the cheapest cost in the region. The Ministry of Finance, we believe, is giving serious consideration to the proposal and hopes about that something positive might come out in about a month.

There is no denying that a bright future awaits Bangladesh with a wider and adroit use of internet facilities. A large number of our young men and women would find employment through an expansion of IT related business in the country. At the moment, some of the South-East Asian countries are enjoying a lion's share of the international outsourcing and call center business; therefore, there is no reason why we should lag behind. It needs to be mentioned that a month back the BTB chairman had said Bangladesh's internet bandwidth tariff would be the lowest in South Asia. It is highly encouraging and we hope he would carry his point with the Ministry of Finance for an early acceptance of the proposal.

Bangladesh has immense potential to etch a name for itself in the IT sector with talents abounding all around. But the needs of the hour are: a pragmatic IT policy, well-laid-out infrastructure and availability of facilities at affordable cost, albeit underpinned by political stability and social harmony. Let us move in the right direction in right time.

AQ Khan, pilfering and the honour of Pathans



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

ABDUL Qadeer Khan did not provide Iran and Libya with nuclear technology out of any financial greed. That is the result of a Pakistan government investigation into the activities of the man who has been in internment for the last four years.

Maybe Khan was not interested in money, but it has been made abundantly clear that he gave Tehran and Tripoli the nuclear know-how owing to ideological reasons. It was a simple case of one Muslim doing other Muslims a favour, of a disreputable sort.

And there comes the big question of just how much of a risk Khan and others in the Pakistani civil-military establishment put a whole world into through those dealings with states that cannot be trusted with nuclear weapons. If you recall the irritant that was Gaddafi's Libya till recent times, with all that shooting down of a passenger aircraft over Lockerbie in 1988, with its grant of refuge and assistance to men who shot down Bangladesh's pre-eminent leaders in 1975, indeed with all manner of notoriety, it becomes pretty obvious what Abdul Qadeer Khan was aiming at.

GROUND REALITIES

One final word on Abdul Qadeer Khan. He makes much of the fact that he is a Pathan, that no one dare play around with the honour of a Pathan. He is absolutely right that Pathans have an acute sense of self-esteem inasmuch as they have respect for people of moral strength and stature. But he is wrong to place himself in the same league as other Pathans, for Pathans do not pilfer. And they do not go around conspiring to make the world more vulnerable to dangers than it already is.

The sad part of the AQ Khan story is that efforts are now underway, following the eclipse of General Musharraf, to rehabilitate the man whose chief contribution to the history of the world lies in the way he surreptitiously pilfered nuclear technology from Europe and applied it to the making of what would eventually be Pakistan's nuclear bomb. That bomb came in 1998; and Khan was hailed by Pakistanis as a hero, the man who was the father of the Pakistani bomb.

Some went a ludicrous step further, to suggest that he was the father of the Islamic bomb. It was as if Islam had nothing better to do than produce killing machines. And yet it was this man who was feted for years on end by successive Pakistani regimes as the individual who had charted a new course for Pakistan.

He first drew national attention when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto asked him over to a cup of tea. And, remember, it was Bhutto who made people guffaw with his loud pronouncements in the mid-1960s about Pakistan willing to eat grass and yet determined to produce an atomic bomb. It was quite natural, therefore, for Bhutto to listen to what AQ Khan had to say on his plans for a

nuclearised Pakistan. That meeting was to lead to others, with other men and women in power in Pakistan.

And through all those meetings, which Abdul Qadeer Khan arranged or influenced into taking place, a clear pattern emerged of what he and his cohorts were after. Khan consistently undermined the chairman of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission, Munir Ahmed Khan, and took advantage of his growing celebrity status to undermine and undercut anyone who crossed his path. Of course, he was not alone. To a very large extent, it was his proximity to the powers that be which elevated him swiftly to a position he quite clearly did not deserve.

The agents he sent out to the West, including the United States, to scour for centrifuge parts under cover of industrial or business requirements, came under intelligence scrutiny. Some were arrested and then mysteriously released. Ironically, despite their full awareness of Pakistan's developing, stealthy nuclear program, successive US administrations looked the other way.

Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter knew what AQ Khan and his friends were engaged in. They

kept their silence. It was outrage that went up by a good number of notches in the eight years of the Reagan administration.

Obsessed with defeating the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and, therefore, keen to have Pakistan as an ally, it ignored repeated findings by congressmen and senators pointing to escalating phases of the Pakistani nuclear program and, instead, routinely came up with certification that Islamabad possessed no nuclear bomb and was not likely to produce one.

Investigators like Richard Barlow, driven by zeal to expose AQ Khan's surreptitious activities and the Pakistani government's quiet but insistent encouragement of his plans, were run out of town. A concerted campaign to portray Barlow as mentally unstable, as a man whose marriage was on the rocks because of his supposed extra-marital affairs, was undertaken by elements unwilling to have anything come in the way of Washington's links with Islamabad over the conflict in Afghanistan.

Perhaps one of the more bizarre aspects of Abdul Qadeer Khan's smuggling of nuclear technology into Pakistan, and its subsequent development in

Kahuta (the sprawling establishment, named after him, was known as Khan Research Laboratories), was the fact that the Pakistani military soon came to be identified with the project.

General Ziaul Haq dropped by at Kahuta, and was clearly impressed with the secrecy in which the bomb-making industry was working. His successor Ghulam Ishaq Khan demonstrated, at every turn, the government's support for AQ Khan's project. And AQ Khan was a national hero, even to politicians who were carefully kept isolated from the nuclear program.

In her first stint as prime minister, Benazir Bhutto discovered to her horror and embarrassment that while Abdul Qadeer Khan remained reluctant to answer her summons to a meeting with her at the prime minister's office, he was absolutely ready and willing to meet President Ishaq Khan and army chief Aslam Beg at the presidential palace to discuss the progress of the nuclear program. Bhutto was conveniently shut out of the conference, though she did turn up unannounced at one such meeting on her own.

Abdul Qadeer Khan may yet be a heroic figure to many Pakistanis, especially those who have for years seen in Pakistan's nuclear program a symbol of Islamic firepower. The bigger truth is that he is as guilty as some others, such as those who have worked in the shadows for years to develop the Israeli nuclear industry, of doing precisely those things which have endangered the security of the

world. Worse, he has hugely increased the risks of rogue or failing states coming by nuclear weapons and then passing on the lessons of their experience to questionable regimes.

AQ Khan and his men, with the connivance and assistance of individuals such as Aslam Beg and Hamid Gul, went peddling their technical know-how before Saddam Hussein in Iraq. And this was at a time when Kuwait had already come under Baghdad's occupation in August 1990, prompting the West and its allies into forging a coalition against the Iraqi invaders.

At around the same time, Pakistan was offering similar nuclear technology to the clerics in charge of Iran. And then, of course, there was Libya, a state which in the times of George W. Bush chose to come clean with its nuclear plans and indeed dismantle them in order to gain re-entry into the councils of the civilised world.

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Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star.

Don't bet on the president

Still not convinced of the folly of political portfolios? Consider this: in the fall of 2000, the Platonic ideal of a Bush-era stock would have been based in Texas and involved in energy distribution and trading that would benefit from deregulation in power markets, and whose CEO had a Bush-bestowed nickname, say, "Kenny Boy." And that would have been Enron.

DANIEL GROSS

IT'S that time of the leap year. Personal-finance magazines and investment analysts are constructing political portfolios: market sectors or stocks that will thrive, or dive, should a particular candidate take the White House.

Like party conventions, these portfolios are a storied convention of campaign season. Like party conventions, they're not very useful or illuminating. Trust me. I know from experience. In October 1992, a younger, svelter version of this columnist called analysts to find out which stocks would do well if Bill Clinton were to beat George H.W. Bush.

The response: Clinton's proposals for a stimulus package and a Rooseveltian Rebuild America Fund would be a gold mine for construction-equipment makers like Caterpillar.

A Salomon Brothers analyst said Clinton's universal health-care plan, a pet project of his wife (plus ça change), would be great news for HMOs. But the stimulus package and universal health care were among the early casualties of the tumultuous Clinton first term.

Likewise, analysts argued in the fall of 2000 that a George W. Bush victory would light a fire under the already soaring stocks of

Microsoft and MCI WorldCom. Why? Bush would likely be more lenient on antitrust policy. As CNBC's James Cramer would say: "Wrong!" (Microsoft's stock is below its level of January 2001) and "Wrong!" (MCI WorldCom went bankrupt in July 2002).

Political market calls are conceived in sin, since most are based on the false premise that the stock market prefers Republicans to Democrats. According to Sam Stovall, chief investment strategist at Standard and Poor's Equity Research, between 1945 and 2007 the S&P 500 rose 10.7 percent annually when Democrats occupied the White House, compared with a 7.6 percent annual increase under Republicans.

Those who, fearing higher taxes, sold stocks after Bill Clinton's inaugural missed out on a great rally. And those who, anticipating lower taxes, plunged into the market in January 2001 entered what has been a lost decade for U.S. stocks; since 2000, the markets of countries like Brazil and China have lapped their American cousins.

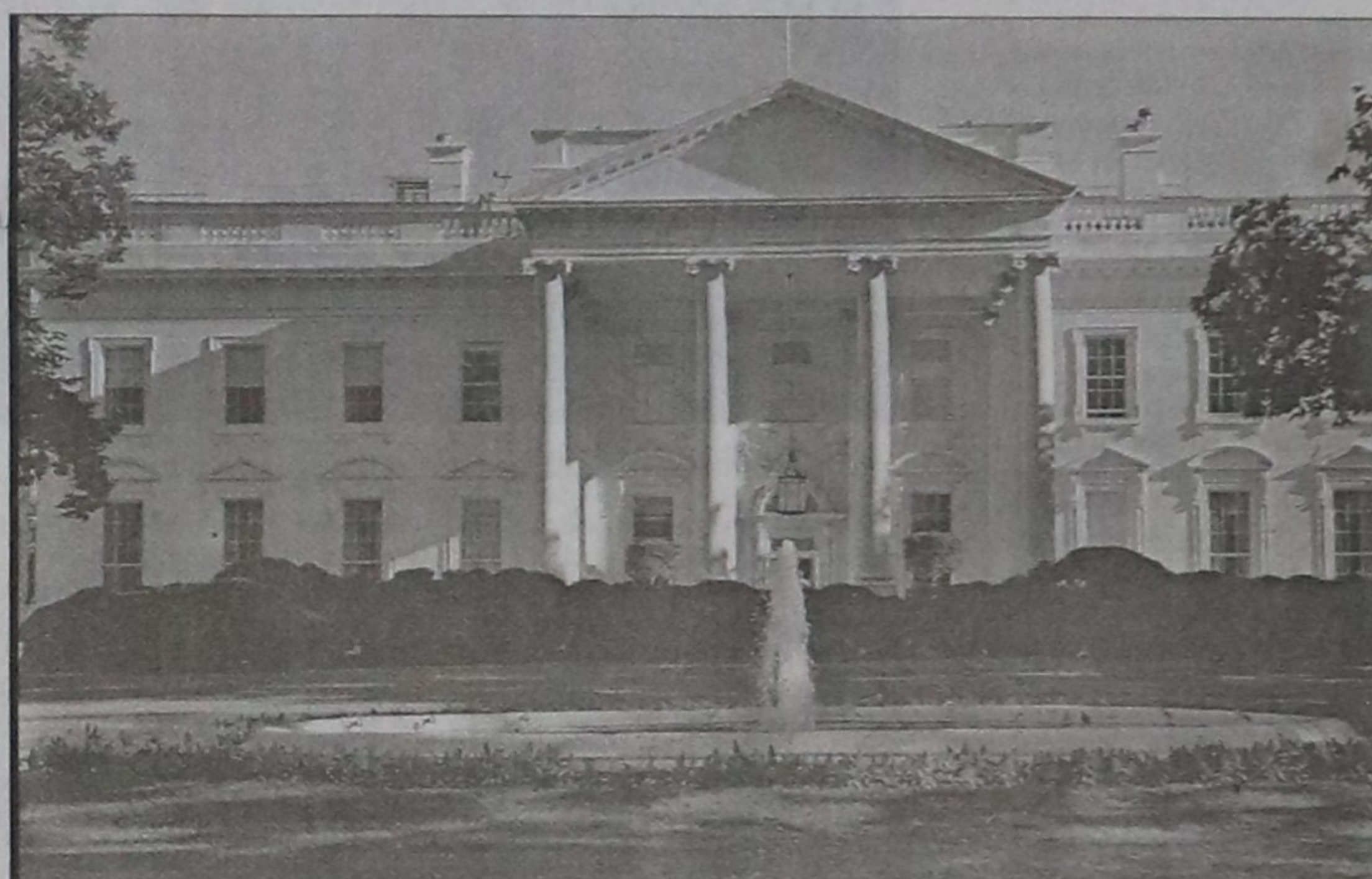
Political portfolios also rely on a similarly simplistic understanding of how Washington works. Analysts seem to believe that political platforms are fail-safe

guides to What Will Happen. Bill Clinton's 1992 platform said there would be no capital-gains tax cut for the wealthy on his watch (he signed one in 1997).

Bush's 2000 platform vowed that "the Social Security surplus is off-limits, off-budget and will not be touched." OK, then. The portfolio makers also seem to assume that once presidents take the oath of office they remove a magic wand from a special case in the Oval Office and conjure campaign promises into policy instantaneously -- without congressional input.

Wall Street types might be forgiven for not comprehending the byzantine path that legislation treads on Capitol Hill. Less forgivable is the way political portfolio construction misunderstands markets.

Ultimately, mega-trends far beyond the control of government -- like the internet, or the growth of China -- influence stocks more than small-bore policies. The Medicare prescription-drug benefit, passed in 2003, was seen as a huge boon to Big Pharma. But since the benefit was signed into law in December 2003, the Amex Pharmaceutical Index has woefully under-performed the S&P 500.



Even when they're right, politically inspired stock recommendations are often right for the wrong reasons. Oil stocks have done well under the Bush-Cheney administration, as analysts suggested in 2000, but not because the former oilmen made good on campaign promises to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for drilling. Instead, ExxonMobil has soared because breakneck growth in China, tensions in the Middle East, the weak dollar and speculators have pushed oil higher.

This year Dan Clifton, the Washington-based head of policy research at Strategas Research, is taking political-stock analysis to a new level by looking at the makeup of Congress. Reps. Charlie Rangel and Barney Frank will have a say in tax bills, no matter who is elected president," he says.

Clifton's Democratic Sweep portfolio, which assumes Democrats win the White House and 60 seats in the Senate, suggests buying an alternative-energy fund and shorting utilities stocks (since increasing the dividend tax, as a President Obama might do, would eat into the value of these dividend-paying stalwarts).

Sam Stovall of S&P argues counter intuitively that a Democratic sweep would be better for oil stocks. Why? If a Republican president advocates drilling in the Arctic refuge, Congress will accuse him of helping oil-rich friends. "But if the proposal comes from a

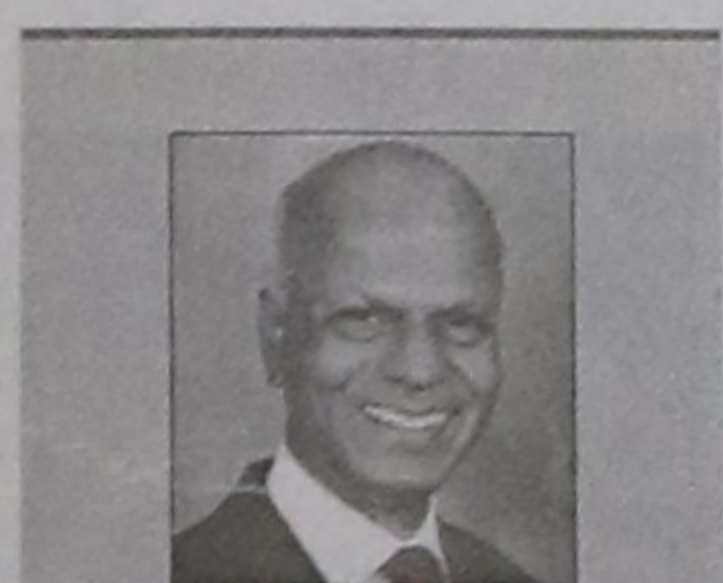
Democrat, Congress might be more likely to go along."

That's plausible. But it's just as plausible that a massive new find in Canada or a recession in China will roll the oil markets more than anything President Obama or President McCain will do.

Still not convinced of the folly of political portfolios? Consider this: in the fall of 2000, the Platonic ideal of a Bush-era stock would have been based in Texas and involved in energy distribution and trading that would benefit from deregulation in power markets, and whose CEO had a Bush-bestowed nickname, say, "Kenny Boy." And that would have been Enron.

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Intifadas through art



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM
writes from Madrid

WRITING recently in the Daily Star, on the Spanish Intifada of May 2, 1802 against the French occupying forces, I commented that its history could of interest to the Bangladeshis because, in spite of the huge difference in time and geography, some may find certain similarities between our own struggle for independence in the late twentieth century

LETTER FROM EUROPE

Here, in this museum, an exhibition showing fifty four paintings, etchings and drawings of artist Monir ul Islam was inaugurated on January 19. Some of the etchings of the Homage to Bangladesh series were on display here, and made a great impact on the visitors because they were able to relate the histories of the two intifadas in their minds quite easily

tury and the Spanish war of independence of the early nineteenth century.

Besides the spontaneity of these popular uprisings, the adoption of guerrilla tactics to fight much superior military forces and the suffering of the ordinary people, there was one other similarity between these two intifadas -- artists of great talent poignantly captured the brutality of war and the atrocities

committed during these periods for the future generations.

As the scope of a short newspaper article does not allow us to cover the works of all these artists, we shall, by way of reference, merely touch on the contribution made by two of them -- Goya and Monir.

When, in early 1808, Napoleon cunningly manipulated the then Spanish government to allow his

troops to occupy Madrid and a good part of the Spanish territories and install his brother Joseph as the king of Spain, most of the aristocracy and many members of intelligentsia accepted the illegal occupation without a fight. But it was the ordinary people like bakers, masons, blacksmiths and grooms who rose up in arms against the usurpers.

On the morning of May 2,

1808, as the Spanish regular army troops remained confined to their barracks in Madrid with orders from the government not to intervene, thousands of ordinary people armed with knives, blunderbusses, scythes and sickles started attacking French soldiers across the city in a completely spontaneous and disorganised manner. The French retaliated. Fully armed combat troops opened fire on the crowds, killing hundreds of men, women and children.

During the night of May 2, hundreds of suspects were rounded up and in the morning of May 3, they were summarily executed by French firing squads.

Both of these events were admirably captured by the great Spanish painter Francisco Jose de Goya Lucientes (1746-1828),

in his epic paintings *The Second of May* and *The Third of May*.

In commemorating the bicentennial of those events, Madrid has organised an impressive exhibition of Goya's paintings at the Prado Museum. "Goya in Times of War" (1794-1828) brings together about two hundred paintings, drawings and etchings from Prado's own collection and private collections.

Besides the paintings mentioned above -- *The Second of May* and *The Third of May* -- what attracts the attention of most visitors to the exhibition are the series of etchings and drawings called *The Disasters of War*, which depict the cruelty and horror of war in a most vivid manner.

Those of us who have become used to seeing the pictures coming out of American prisons like

Abu Ghraib, and Guantanamo are particularly shocked by a watercolour titled *One can't look*, depicting the body of a tortured prisoner dangling upside down from the ceiling.

Like the French occupying army in Spain, the Pakistani army committed horrible atrocities against the innocent civilian population of Bangladesh. The internationally famous Bangladeshi artist Monir ul Islam used his artistic talent to denounce the Pakistani atrocities and depict the suffering of the Bangladeshis in a series of twelve etchings, appropriately called *Homage to Bangladesh*.

Francisco Jose de Goya Lucientes was born in a little village called Fuendetodos in the province of Aragon, which is approximately two hundred

kilometres from Madrid. Fuendetodos is home to a unique museum called Sala Ignacio Zuluaga. Here, in this museum, an exhibition showing fifty four paintings, etchings and drawings of artist Monir ul Islam was inaugurated on January 19.

Some of the etchings of the *Homage to Bangladesh* series were on display here, and made a great impact on the visitors because they were able to relate the histories of the two intifadas in their minds quite easily.

Oh, by the way, after the end of the exhibition on February 17, all of the 54 works of art by Monir were donated by him to the museum, and became part of Sala Zuluaga's permanent collections from then onwards.

Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam is a columnist for The Daily Star.