

14 June 2000

The Editor
Deccan Herald

Dear Sir,

On March 31 of this year you published our article: "The Escrow Cover Report: A Critique" after changing the title to read: " The Escrow Cover Report: The Curate's Egg". My informal survey revealed that many people did not know what a curate was; still others were perplexed with the reason for bringing in an egg; and no one knew the origin or meaning of the expression "the curate's egg". I had heard the expression from my late father (1900-1985) who often tended to use Victorian English. A reputed journalist told me that it was a standard expression in discussing the annual budget to indicate that it was a mixture of good and bad. I searched the Internet and quickly found the following explanation that I would like to bring to the attention of your staff and readers

The curate's egg is an allusion to a famous cartoon by George du Maurier in *Punch* magazine in 1895. The cartoon shows a bishop entertaining a curate (= bishop's assistant) to breakfast. The bishop apologises that the curate's egg is bad and the curate humbly replies: "Oh no, My Lord. I assure you! Parts of it are excellent!" As a bad egg is of course 100% bad, the curate's reply owes more to courtesy than good sense, and the cartoon was making fun of over-dutiful (or self-serving) deference. "A curate's egg" soon became a metaphor for a bad situation that someone persists in trying to salvage with misplaced or phoney optimism. It is often incorrectly explained as meaning something that simply has both good and bad qualities. But that definition blunts the refreshing insight of George DuMaurier's classic cartoon about ludicrous opportunists.

Hence, the insertion of "The Curate's Egg" into the title for our article on "The Escrow Cover Report" was inappropriate because we were categorical that, while rightly rejecting escrow cover for power projects, the report's real purpose was to make a pitch for privatisation which was not in the terms of reference.

Yours sincerely

Professor Amulya Reddy,
International Energy Initiative
25/5 Borebank Road, Bangalore 560 046