

'200 wealthy families now replace 20'

Following is remaining part of Sunday's Jatiya Sangsad proceedings

Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury cautioned that if this kind of practice continued, there would be no accountability of the government. Speaking about imposition of taxes, he said while the budget proposed reduction of taxes on air-conditioners, it raised taxes on edible oils. He said the popularity of the present government would



depend on how it acts on various issues. Chowdhury expressed the hope that the democratic government would follow mixed and competitive economy and reduce losses in the public sector enterprises so that the people were exempted from the burden of additional taxes.

Asaduzzaman

As soon as Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury concluded his speech on the Finance Bill, Asaduzzaman (AL-Magura) rose on a point of order and drew the attention of the chair to Rule 26 of the Rules of Procedure to say that the formation of the parliamentary committee as put on the order of the day ahead of the legislative business, has been bypassed.

He said as there was no announcement from the chair in this regard, the transaction of business in the House might have been a violation of the rule.

The Speaker told the member that the discussion on the formation of the parliamentary committee was kept pending after he received a letter from the Leader of the House in this respect. So, the Speaker said, it is not a violation of the rule.

Hadiuzzaman

Participating in the discussion on the Finance Bill, Shah Hadiuzzaman (AL-Jessore) said a tax phobia, particularly the proposal of introducing Value Added Tax (VAT), has already gripped the country, he said the small traders are passing their days in fear.

He said although the Finance Minister has proposed taxes on several items he has not given any guideline for organising our manpower to utilise it properly.

Tabibur Rahman

Speaking next, Tabibur Rahman (AL-Jessore) said tax proposals on ball point pen, cotton yarn and soyabean oil have already made adverse effects on their prices.

He said the prices of lungis, and sarees have also gone up as a result of the tax proposal on yarn. He said the price of one kg soyabean has shot to taka 40.

Abdur Razzak

Abdur Razzak (BAKSAL-Shariatpur) said the tax proposal on gas, soyabean and ball point pen and the reduction of taxes on white cement and air-conditioners were in no way social justice.

He said the Finance Minister spoke of self-reliance in his budget speech but had not given any direction for achieving it. He said contrary to the expectation of the people, he price of diesel has not yet been reduced. He called for reduction of the price of diesel



Nurul Islam Moni

Nurul Islam Moni (Ind-Barguna) criticised the tax proposals in the budget and demanded withdrawal of the proposed taxes on agricultural products and additional tax on VCR.

He demanded withdrawal of the proposed wealth tax on those who were renting their houses built with loan money.

Referring to the proposed compulsion for investing 25 per cent of the industrial profits in buying government bonds, he said this would limit expansion of the industries, referring to the tax proposals on dividend of the companies, he said this would encourage the traders and investors to give false declaration.

Shudhangshu Shekhar

Shudhangshu Shekhar Halder (AL-Pirojpur) criticised the proposal for VAT and said it was not clear on what basis this taxation was being made.

Making comments on the Finance Bill, he said there was no mention of the Pay Commission in this bill.

Matiur Rahman Nizami

Jamaat group leader Matiur Rahman Nizami said measures had to be taken so that investments were not made in unproductive sectors which

richer section of people by reducing duties on luxury goods such as air cooler and fruits and decreasing travel tax.

Begum Motia Chowdhury expressed her apprehension that the condition of farmers would further deteriorate following increase in electricity and gas tariff. She said the BNP government promised to launch market economy in the country, but this type of economy would not succeed if bank loans worth Taka thousands of crore remained unrealised. She called upon the government to take effective steps for the realisation of outstanding loan to the tune of Taka 10 thousand crore from defaulters. The government must try to ensure the recovery of at least 25 per cent of the defaulted loan, she added.

Salahuddin Yusuf

Salahuddin Yusuf (AL-Khulna) questioned the wisdom of the Finance Minister in building a self-reliant economy by borrowing huge funds from abroad and depending heavily on foreign aid. By this only an economy dependent on foreign aid would be built, he added.

He said time has now come to think seriously on how to build rural based economy in our country where 80 per cent of the people are farmers. He criticised the Finance Minister for raising the exemption limit of wealth tax for a house from Taka 25 lakh to Taka 50 lakh on the one hand and proposing increase in taxes on gas, fertilizer and agricultural products on the other he strongly pleaded for giving subsidy on agricultural inputs including fertilizer for building agriculture based economy.

Yusuf regretted that East Bengal (now Bangladesh) was surplus in food and West Bengal deficit in this commodity in 1947 but the situation has now changed the other way round. Provision of adequate irrigation facilities, installation of a large number of tubewells, both shallow and deep, and supply of adequate inputs have made West Bengal in India self sufficient in food he said and demanded similar facilities for the farmers of our country.

He expressed his grave concern at the influx of landless people into urban areas of the country in search of job for their survival and called for effective measures to check the growth of landless people. In this connection, he laid emphasis on family planning programme to contain population explosion.

The Awami League member from Khulna demanded of the government for the repatriation of huge funds which ex-President Ershad had accumulated through corrupt means and transferred them to foreign countries. Steps should also be taken for the recovery of defaulted loans worth Taka 10 thousand crore. If even Taka one thousand crore of the outstanding loans could be realised, there would be no need for imposing taxes on the people, he added.

Participating in the debate M Shamsudduha (CPB-Nilphamar) said the VAT system should be introduced on some items on an experimental basis to serve the public interest. He said VAT was a modern system but the people of our country were not aware of it.

He demanded withdrawal of new tax proposals on diesel and kerosene.

Referring to the reported censorship of letters of

might give rise to the plundering of national wealth.

Nizami observed that the previous government had raised taxes on different articles but it did not take steps for internal resource mobilisation. He urged the government to see that the taxes benefit the government in raising the resources.

Nizami referred to the increase in municipal taxes and said this did not enhance the municipality's income as people started evading axes, he said the Dhaka Municipal Corporation was reported to be incurring a loss to the tune of Taka 1.50 crore.

Matiur Rahman Nizami said during Pakistan period there were some 22 wealthy families this number went up to about 200 in Bangladesh alone when this country came into being. Now the figure stands at several hundred, he said.

He called for taking a correct wealth assessment report from those families. He said we have to keep watch on the corrupt officials and also to take appropriate measures to check smuggling of national wealth.

Nizami criticised the enhancement of electricity rate and said as a result the Bangladeshi products would not be able to compete with foreign products. This would also hinder industrialisation in the country, he added.

He was also critical of raising the price of natural gas and said it would affect agricultural production as the price of fertilizer would go up.

Nizami called for abolishing interest and alcohol.

K M Jahangir

KM Jahangir (AL-Patuakhali) said there should be some difference in the functioning of an autocratic and a democratically elected government. He said the democratic government should not impose taxes as was done by the previous regime.

Criticising the imposition of taxes, Hossain said while the government was talking about the welfare of the rural people, it was at the same time imposing fresh taxes on them. He said the farmers would be worst hit by the high price of natural gas.

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Referring to the reported censorship of letters of

political leaders in Rangpur, he demanded an early solution of this issue.

M Asaduzzaman (AL-Magura) referred to the commitments of the Treasury Bench leader to make the country corruption free, and said President Ershad had also come to power declaring Jihad against corruption.

He said if President Ershad could be tried for visiting Atroshi 100 times at the cost of the state, then why the Peer of Atroshi would not be tried for amassing wealth through corruption and smuggling. He demanded confiscation of his wealth.

Criticising taxation proposal on gas, power and fertilizer, he demanded withdrawal of the proposals and said this budget would make the poor poorer. He said the tax proposals would affect the small industries and encourage smuggling.

He said the country has now turned into a market of a particular country from where all kinds of agricultural products including meat is imported. He also criticised the VAT system.

Asaduzzaman demanded introduction of the constitution amendment bill in the House immediately.

Abu Lais Mubin

Speaking next on the Finance Bill, Abu Lais Mubin Chowdhury (JP-Habiganj) said that the budget was full of tall talks but regretted that no provision was made to give relief to the farmers who are the backbone of our survival.

He said it was unbelievable that the rate of interest on loans for the farmers was the highest in the country whereas this rate for many other sectors, including the loan for multi-storied buildings, was much less.

Chowdhury referred to the exemption of interest on agricultural loans up to Taka 5000 and wanted to know the source from which this gap would be met. The Finance Minister made no mention of this in the Finance Bill and as such this remains a big question, he said.

The Jatiya Party member said the previous government of H M Ershad took several steps for the welfare of the farmers but the present budget lacked any reliefs to this community.

Mohammad Nasim

Chief Whip of the Opposition Mohammad Nasim was next to take the floor.

He quoted from some newspapers and said the budget presented by the Finance Minister was a document prepared by a chartered accountant who took care to make the budget only a good balance-sheet.

Nasim also quoted some economists who described the budget as not "pro-people" and highly dependent on foreign aid and observed that the budget was not being called upon to speak although his name was included in the list of speakers.

But Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali said he was going by the list provided by the Opposition Chief Whip and Moudud Ahmed's name did not figure in that list.

Displaying a paper, Moudud Ahmed said, "Here is the list and my name is very much there."

The chair remarked: "But your name is not in the list given by the Opposition Chief Whip - I am going by that as per your desire."

Chief Whip Mohammad Nasim intervened to say that Moudud's name was there in the list.

The Deputy Speaker checked the list again and said that Moudud Ahmed's name was not there.

The Chief Whip then regretted that Moudud's name was not marked incidentally. This led Moudud to make a caustic remark against Nasim: "He is the Chief Whip of Awami League and not of the Jatiya Party - otherwise he would have given my name."

The chair then gave the floor to Moudud and requested him to make his speech brief. Moudud Ahmed said the Finance Bill is an inseparable part of the budget and hence any discussion on it is important since it would have a bearing on the budgetary provisions.

He said the reality of a budget in a developing country like ours was that the Finance Ministers had to struggle hard to present a balanced budget and so he appreciated the problems faced by the Finance Minister.

The Jatiya Party parliamentary leader quoted a newspaper issue of last year when the Jatiya Party government was in power.

The Opposition Chief Whip referred to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's comment during the morning sitting that this government was accomplishing many a historic task and said tasks achieved by the BNP government were, in fact, mismanaging the relief operations after the catastrophic cyclones in Chittagong and some other coastal districts.

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common people since they would have to bear the brunt of these taxes.

Moudud Ahmed said the budget made no mention of meeting the industrial and other problems which were important for giving a financial direction.

He said his party members would stage a walkout from the house protesting against the budgetary provisions on three counts. First, the budget failed to reflect the hopes and aspirations of the people, secondly, it contributed to spiralling prices and finally, the budget made no effort to streamline the tax administration and wipe out corruption.

Moudud Ahmed and his party members