

## Need for an Economic Debate

With the national budget for the coming financial year due to be presented today, the Jatiya Sangsad — indeed, the country as a whole — should see the stage set for an in-depth substantive debate in coming weeks on economic issues. On this score, our past experiences are far from encouraging, leaving a cross section of the educated elite, even parliamentarians, in a mood of indifference towards this annual event. Besides these sceptics, many treated what may well be the most important function of the parliamentary system almost exclusively as a political battle, thus ignoring the economic and financial implications of the exercise.

There are reasons to hope that this may be different this year. We are pleased to note that in recent weeks, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman has held a number of dialogue sessions on broad economic issues with leading experts and intellectuals, including some who are known to be critical of the government's policies. The opposition Awami League (AL) has also done the same, by organising a day-long seminar on programmes and policies of the administration, indeed on possible alternatives to the current directions. Now, we learn from a letter from the AL General Secretary, Zillur Rahman published in this paper on Tuesday that his organisation has set up a 'think tank' for the formulation of its socio-economic agenda. If these developments mark a response to the plea of the media, especially of this newspaper, for increased interaction between our political parties and non-partisan experts, they may well underscore the beginning of a move towards placing a discussion on our economic policies on a constructive plane.

This is precisely what we expect from the debate on the budget. As a statement of the proposed expenditures to be met by expected or planned income from internal and external sources, or as a tool for the management of the country's financial affairs, the budget, by itself, may not take us very far in our understanding of the economic challenges and options facing the nation. Indeed, Saifur Rahman whose performance in the field of macro-economic reforms has earned much credit from all concerned, does show a persistent tendency of often claiming more success than he has achieved, sometimes by side-stepping problems which have defied easy solutions. A few other cabinet ministers have started following the same practice, with the result that the discussion on the budget, especially on individual ministries, tends to be sterile, lacking in transparency. We would like the Treasury Bench to discard this approach. Instead, it should take the parliament into confidence over difficulties in the implementation of its policies in a number of areas which this paper has focused on again and again, such as the pace of privatisation, the flow of foreign investment, a liberal trade programme and the plight of farmers over the uneconomic price of rice.

It should not worry the ruling party if the opposition takes advantage of what may be interpreted as failures of the administration. There is always a price to pay for transparency or, for that matter, for accountability. Here, we would also urge AL and other opposition parties to play their role in promoting a new positive mood in the debate. Let them not spare the government for its failures — this is a job they are assigned to perform effectively — but now that they have a 'think tank' at their disposal, let them be as specific as possible in focusing on, say, contradictions in our agricultural policy, in fiscal reforms or in administrative changes. In the process, they may even offer new options to the existing policies. Last but not the least, we also hope that the Opposition leader, Sheikh Hasina will shorten her visit to the Human Rights Conference in Vienna and return home to play her role during the debate in the parliament.

## People's Confidence in Police

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's emphasis on earning people's confidence by the police in her speech at the time of inauguration of the newly-built police headquarters can be considered more than a ritualistic and rhetorical exercise. She has not even made a direct — let alone an oblique — reference that the police-public relations are any worse than ever before; nor there are systems, like opinion polls often carried out in developed countries, to evaluate the public esteem the law enforcing agencies command. But there is one definite indication of the police performance, by default, in the growing incidence of crimes — ranging from petty theft to mugging on gun point to homicides — and violence in myriad bizarre forms in society.

Whether this alarming rise in criminal and violent incidents has prompted the head of the government to ask the law enforcers to give a close look into their conduct with the general public is not known; but the hard truth is that people will have to call in an enormous amount of optimism to repose their confidence in the force maintained by the state to ensure their social security. The escalation of lawlessness, lack of protection against musclemansy and even harassment of innocent people needing protection of law — all this marking the social life — naturally do little credit to heighten the image of the police forces.

No denying the fact that corruption, incompetence and inherent weakness in the system have much to do with the situation as it is now. But why blame the policeman alone? He is more or less a creation of the obtaining socio-political — largely political — system. However bold faces the politicians may make before going to power, the U-turn they take after assuming control of the administration in using — better say abusing — the law enforcing agency accounts for shaping the police-public relations; certainly not to respond to the need of society. Successive governments have been blamable for this undesirable politicisation of a government's organ on the neutrality of which depends the social stability and, in a large measure, the practice of democratic culture.

Instead, the police are encouraged to perpetrate violence and brutality. Demoralised policemen naturally become more aggressive and the people's service they are supposed to do remains only in the law book. It is at this point we would like to draw the administration's attention to the foreign training for our police officers in countries with an enviable record of police service. If the law enforcing people sent abroad just take note of the police dealings with members of the public, they should know the difference between practices at home and abroad. But the political decision must come first to improve the police service.

**A**n international conference on 'The Role of Legislatures and Parliaments in Democratizing and Newly Democratic Regimes' jointly sponsored by the research Committee of Legislative Specialists of the International Political Science Association and the Association Française de Science Politique, was held in Paris, from May 26 to 28.

More than 70 international scholars from 25 different countries of the world met in ten sessions to explore such topics as 'Members of Parliaments and their Activities', 'Parliaments and External Actors', 'The Relationship of Parliaments and executives', 'The New Parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe' and 'The Parliamentary Role and Institution Building in Democracy'. The conference was held in French National Senate, Palais D. Luxembourg, Paris and in all 42 papers were presented.

The conference mainly focused on the constitutional issue confronting central and eastern European countries and Russia. Mr Gordon R Hein, Director of Programme Planning and Review, The Asia Foundation presented the only paper on Asia titled 'Strengthening Legislatures in Asia: The Challenges of Institution Building, Political Power and Popular Legitimacy'.

In Bangladesh context, four relevant features were in focus: (a) separation of judiciary from the executive, (b) formation of standing committees as contemplated in Article 76 of the Constitution, (c) necessity for appointment of Ombudsman vide Article 77 (d) setting up of the secretariat parliament vide Article 79.

As has been mentioned, this conference in Paris mainly focused the Constitutional issues as emerged in central and eastern European countries. But

# Nursing a Nascent Democracy

by Badrul Haider Chowdhury

the issues have universal relevance in an era when "public life invades political action everywhere".

A number of participants expressed their anxiety on the problems created by the different branches of the Government. The separation of powers is needed for proper articulation and not for the division of the organs of the Government. But the core of the problem is to find a synthesis for running democracy.

## Separation of Powers

The Russian participant Prof. Dr Valery S Korobeinikov of Russian Academy of Natural Sciences and Institute of Legislation and Comparative Law stated: 'Modern independent Russia is trying to establish its state mechanism on the basis of separation of powers but the process of separation of powers in modern Russia, as we can see, faces many objective and subjective difficulties, and concluded I suppose it will take time to find the best way of separation of powers in Russia.'

Montesquien's doctrine of the Separation of Powers was the product of an era which looked upon government itself as something 'inherently dangerous and possibly despotic'. Experience shows that a synthesis is necessary for running a welfare statecraft. Montesquien himself had advocated for the judicial power as check which is more clearly realised in the United States, India, and some Commonwealth countries. In Bangladesh Constitution such evolved view was adopted (vide Article 102, 106, 109, 110). Then Article 111 declares the binding effect of the Supreme Court judgments. In Article 112 the mandate is given that all

authorities, executive and judicial, in the Republic shall act in aid of the Supreme Court. Thus the balance between executive and legislative branch was put on a legal plank. If the executive exercises judicial or quasi-judicial function as it happens with modern governments, the judiciary insists that it must accept the principles of natural justice. Therefore, the need of the present day statecraft is for union as well as separation. Here comes the point of separation of judiciary — which was a rallying point in the movement for toppling autocracy. In Bangladesh, it is yet to be achieved notwithstanding some well-meaning endeavours in the past.

Mr Gordon R Hein, Director of Programme Planning and Review, The Asia Foundation in his paper on 'Strengthening Legislatures in Asia: The Challenges of Institution Building, political power and popular Legitimacy' noticed the Asian countries have moved forward "at a remarkably steady pace in the twin tasks of democratic transition and democratic consolidation". In a cautionary tone he reminded that the failure of new democracies to respond effectively to priority citizen concern may undermine popular support not just for individual leaders or policies but for the democratic experiment itself. Sri Lankan constitutional scholar G L Peiris was quoted with approval: 'Unfortunately, many Asian Legislatures have become mere extensions of the executive with little power of their own. Furthermore, in many Asian nations, the quality of Legislatures is poor, and members are unaware of how the system they represent actually works'. Mr Hein had voiced

correctly that the prime tasks are (a) to strengthen the institutional capacity of the parliament, (b) achieving an accepted role for the parliament in politics and government and (c) building popular support and legitimacy for that role through citizen participation and particularly responsiveness to citizen concerns.

## Democratic Culture

All the three determining factors play a formidable part in building up what may be called "democratic culture". After a free and fair election the democratically elected government faces insurmountable demands propped up by high expectations which obviously cannot be solved overnight by any government. What is needed is social awareness and here the task of the parliamentarians are stupendous for enlightening the citizenry. But the parliamentarians themselves must understand the problems. The Constitution in Article 76 to look in view the necessity of Standing Committee. It is a clear priority, where parliamentarians have been raked by contentious debate, frequent opposition walkouts, and even physical confrontations between members. Mr Hein suggested "that Committees be developed to provide a forum where issues can be addressed in a more relaxed, reasoned and issue focused manner."

## Ombudsman

Necessity of appointment of an Ombudsman had been stressed by this author in recent past. In pursuance of Article 77, the necessary law was enacted in 1979 but it has not been implemented. The power to investigate any action taken by a Ministry, a public

officer or statutory public authority is so necessary for transparency of the administration that this theme was highlighted in Berlin Conference on "Accountability and Transparency in International Economic Development" (May 4-6, 1993) organised by a new non-governmental organisation. The author attended the conference on invitation. The Berlin Declaration took notice that corruption subverts economic and social development by driving up costs, distorting priorities and misallocating resources; undermines respect for public institutions and damages the fabric of society. Hong Kong and Singapore have good legislations against corruption. If the Northern developed countries can resist corruption, then it is easy to fight corruption in the developing countries of the South. Till and Ombudsman is appointed. The Standing Committees of the Parliament can play effective roles in this regard.

The improvement of legislative research and information service is essential for nursing a nascent democracy. In some countries steps have already been taken by non-governmental agencies. For example, Congressional Research and Training Service (CRTS) in the Philippines has emerged as an institution for conducting policy research and staff training for the Philippine Congress. In Nepal, a group of students from University is working in the Parliament as researchers. Mr Hein observed, 'Library and research services and trained parliamentary staff in places like Taiwan and Korea should appropriately be viewed as an investment that paid off successfully down the line.' Even

after 1991 military coup, staff members and researchers from the Legislative record and Budget office in Thailand continued to receive training "in preparation for the day when parliament would re-emerge". In point is the case for setting up of Secretariat of Parliament as envisaged in Article 79.

Being a creature of the Constitution such Secretariat will not only function as an independent body but it can feed the members of the Parliament with all data, informations and analytical policy issues which can be used profitably in the debate while confronting the minister concerned and thereby strengthen the institutional capacity of the parliament.

Every modern Legislature takes its cue, while making laws, from the opinions expressed in the press and on the platform (thanks to Bangladesh Government the Pension Act for members of the Parliament has been repealed) which shows that no parliament can pass laws which are against the facts of nature or are against the established codes of public morality.

The message of the conference can be put succinctly: Parliamentary trust emanates from the nature of times in which citizens find themselves. "Those citizens who are highly satisfied with the economic circumstances in which they live, and who relish the performance of democracy in their country, are much prone to trust parliamentarians than citizens who bring opposite inclinations to economy and democracy."

After all the Parliament becomes the spokesman of the country before the State, and then in process acts as the spokesman of the state before the country.

The writer is a former Chief Justice of Bangladesh

**B**UOYED by its strong economic performance, Asia is expected to outdo other developing regions of the world in the increasingly fierce competition for scarce funds.

At the same time, however, many Asian countries must deal with the scourge of success as they scramble to get all the foreign funds — aid, loans and investments — they can to keep their economies growing.

Virtually every country in the region is now spending huge sums on infrastructure ranging from telephones to electric power stations to maintain their fortunes.

All of these facilities have been put under enormous strain by more than 10 years of fast-paced economic growth. And now the ageing systems threaten to throttle further progress.

Much of the optimism about Asia's prospects in this era of shrinking aid budgets stems from the 'virtuous circle' argument: the region's economies are thriving and this makes them more attractive to aid donors and private investors alike.

As individual countries become richer, they rely less on official aid and loans and bank more on foreign investments. That has been the pattern for East Asia's economic tigers.

Since 1980, the Asia-Pacific developing region has become the most successful in attracting foreign direct investments in the developing world, say Asian Development Bank (ADB) economists Min Tang and Aludra Pardo in a joint paper that examines the expected impact of the emerging world capital shortage.

From 1983 to 1990, about US \$113 billion of investments were poured into Asia-Pacific developing countries, a total that almost matched investments in the rest of the developing countries, the ADB

economists said. That surge of mostly Japanese and Taiwanese investments, they added, has helped some Asian countries reduce their dependence on aid. Malaysia, for example, has been paying off its external debt and actually reducing it since 1987, using its high export earnings.

China's explosive economic growth — by 1994, its economy will be four times bigger than it was in 1987 when free market reforms started — has been powered not only by soft loans from the World Bank, the ADB and Japan.

Overseas Chinese, particularly from Taiwan, Hong Kong and South-east Asia, have poured billions of dollars into thousands of medium and small enterprises that have turned southern China into the fastest growing region in the world.

Asia is also fortunate in having Japan as the region's financier. With Japan slipping into recession and its banking system in deep trouble, Tokyo's pockets no longer seem bottomless but they are still among the deepest in the world. While other aid donors have cut back or frozen aid levels, Tokyo has raised its 1993 overseas aid budget by 4.7 per cent to more than US \$8 billion.

Moreover, the Japanese are spending the bulk of its aid in Asia, especially South-east Asia. This is in line with a global trend noted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that capital flows tend to stay in the regions where they originate.

Japanese aid should cushion the impact of a global capital crunch for at least the next few years, especially for the

## Asia Faces Up to Success

Fast-growing Asia is assured of funds despite the international aid crunch, but the money may not be enough to keep the region's economies from losing steam. Ramon Isberto of IPS reports from Manila.



Philippines, which depends more than any other South-east Asian country on official aid.

"We expect that aid levels will be cut eventually. But for the next few years, we have a lot of proposals in the aid pipeline to keep us busy," says Alan Ortiz, who runs the Philippine government agency coordinating overseas aid.

But while the booming economies of East and South-east Asia are in much better shape to cope with the coming aid squeeze, they have little room for complacency. With bottlenecks in power, transport and communications threatening their economies, these countries need to dramatically increase their spending in infrastructure.

According to the World Bank, Thailand loses about 1.7 per cent of its gross domestic product because of the monstrous traffic jams that afflict Bangkok. Power shortages are costing China billions of dollars in lost output.

To avert an infrastructure crisis, Asian countries will have to spend astronomical sums. One official of Japan's Long Term Credit Bank says the total bill could add up to US \$2.5 trillion over the next 10 years.

The World Bank estimates that Asia needs about US \$450 billion to build the power generating capacity needed to sustain its average growth rate of 8.4 per cent.

This enormous sum is unlikely to be provided by official aid. Agencies such as the World Bank and the ADB are now encouraging private investors to pour money into infrastructure projects through build-operate-transfer (BOT) schemes.

That approach shows promise. But while nearly US \$40 billion worth of BOT projects are expected to be ongoing by end-1995, this represents only 10 per cent of what economists say will be needed.

Still, other countries in Asia face bleaker prospects. Those in South Asia in particular are not as insulated from the impact of the global aid crunch. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh

and Sri Lanka have attracted very little foreign investment and depend chiefly on soft loans from official agencies.

According to the ADB, these countries will continue to depend considerably on foreign aid in the near future. This makes them more vulnerable to possible aid cuts by donor governments.

New Delhi for example has seen the Norwegians, Swedes and Danes cut their aid allocations for India. The amounts are relatively small: in the past three years, Norwegian aid fell from US \$17 million annually to US \$8.5 million.

But the cuts hurt because these will halt high-value projects like industrial pollution control, waste disposal schemes and small industry development.

The reasons given for the cutbacks vary. Baard Hopeland, a Norwegian aid coordinator in India, says Norway's parliament wants to channel more aid to sub-Saharan Africa. Others say the cuts were linked to India's high defence spending.

Swedish diplomat Jan Essner, who handles bilateral aid programmes in New Delhi, said Stockholm reduced its aid by 17 per cent because of domestic economic difficulties, not India's defence spending.

Finance ministry officials say India is not in deep trouble because the major aid commitments from agencies like the World Bank and the Paris-based Aid India Consortium are pushing through.

Neighbouring Bangladesh and Nepal, however, have much more at stake. Foreign donor funds make up about 80 per cent of the development budgets of these two countries.

Kathmandu has been shaken by the World Bank's recent decision to freeze a large dam project in eastern Nepal after giving assurances it was committed to the project.

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

## Reporting on airline accident

Sir, The Bangladesh Airline Pilots Association, a registered trade union and a member of the International Federation of Airline Pilots Associations, is a regular subscriber to your esteemed daily. Good, clean wholesome reporting, interesting articles, stimulating views and tit-bits have attracted us to your newspaper.

We would like to thank you and your editorial staff, for the manner in which you have reported the unfortunate incident of Bangladesh Biman DC-10 aircraft that overran the runway while attempting to land in inclement weather at Zia International Airport on 18th May 1993.

The Association, on the other hand, noted with regret, that a section of the press, were not so impartial with their reports. Instead of keeping to the facts they drama-

tised and sensationalised the incident. Many of the points reported were neither fact nor relevant.

Aviation as a field, is a very wide and complex and there are many related factors which determine the safe operation of a flight from the moment it takes off till it lands at its destination. Those who are not connected with the aviation industry and, in particular, operational matters, are not likely to know the technicalities. Based on the information provided to the press, most of which were hazy and uncorroborated, it is too early a stage, to ascertain the reason for causing the incident. There are undoubtedly many underlying causes, indeed there are as many conflicting information being circulated at the moment that it is difficult on anybody's part to know exactly what happened. It will require some time, little a true and accurate picture can be developed.

The association feels that at this preliminary stage, wrong reports, irrelevant details and careless comments, before the completion of a formal inquiry, may mislead a gullible public and bias the inquiry team, thus adversely affecting the position of our members involved in the accident.

We also believe that the rest of the press should be as discerning as you have been so far in reporting the incident in a free and fair manner.

Capt. Pasha Chowdhury  
General Secretary  
Bangladesh Airline Pilots' Association

## DESA's dash

Sir, The wisecrack is usually a verbiage. But I do not think DESA (Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority) is a wisecrack at best. Considering the performance of DESA under the present democratic government, may I request the authority concerned to think in what adjective they themselves would be called. Prior to DESA came into effect, it was made to believe that with the inception of this new organisation, completely different from PDB, electricity distribution system would considerably improve let alone the much talked system loss. Now the electricity consumers are realising about the tall-talk and the

efficiency, when distribution of electricity has become so erratic and even at the time of dire need, it flees away for hours together.

Inhabitants of the old Dhaka city, most congested area, are the worst sufferers. Particularly, Luxmibazar, Banianagar, Shantharbar, Tantibazar, Court House area, etc, are having intolerable willful torture by the DESA. We are experiencing a peculiar modus operandi of electricity in the aforesaid areas.

The DESA willfully stops supply through a phase of current (which they define as load shading) alternately out of three phases along side a lane or a street making one side of the street or locality have the supply of electricity while the other side or the locality devoid of it and vice versa. I strongly feel due to negligence on the part of DESA people in general having intolerable untold sufferings and the students in particular, who are going to sit for examinations, are forced to suffer in their preparation for their examinations.

Now may I ask a question to the authority concerned, kindly to consider, what benefit they could bring to the people of the country in general and the city dwellers in particular, who are completely dependent on uninterrupted supply of electricity, not for comfort but as an essen-

tial utility? The DESA/PDB has the right to cut off electricity supply of the defaulters, but now please tell us what treatment they would deserve for their failure to render essential service to the consumers, who pay tax to rear them up?

D M Barman  
Banianagar, Dhaka

## Smoking among doctors

Sir, As an ex-smoker, may I take the opportunity to convey, through your esteemed columns, my best regards to Prof N Islam for his illuminating article under the headline 'Towards a tobacco-free world' published in your daily of June 5.

I fully endorse his views that the doctors and the staff engaged in the services of maintaining public health in our country ought to give up smoking as a matter of principle of their profession. It is true that the number of smoker doctors in the UK is steadily decreasing.

In the British Parliament, a few months back, the Minister for Health, Mr Brian Mawhinney, replied to a question that far fewer doctors smoke in the UK than in the rest of Europe. A mere 10 per cent of UK doctors smoke. Ireland has the next lowest

record, 20 per cent as per 1989 figures. The figure rises to 24 per cent in Germany, 28 per cent in Belgium, 29 in the Netherlands, 31 in France, 36 in Luxembourg, 38 in Denmark, 39 in Portugal and Greece, 41 in Italy while Spain tops the list with 44 per cent.

Unfortunately, we do not know how many smoker doctors in Bangladesh actually we have. It seems to be necessary for us to ascertain the percentage of doctors habitually smoking in our country.

Nitin Roy,  
Fakirerpool, Dhaka

## TV programme

Sir, For a longtime I have been noticing that almost every day there is some kind of mistake with the TV programme printed not only in The Daily Star, but also in other newspapers. Like on the 30th May in The Daily Star, it was given that at 9 o'clock there will be film show. But there was no film show; there was some thing else.

Every day at late night BTB shows what will be on the next day. So, my request is that please give the right information.

A BTB viewer