

Running from Pillar to Post Just to Pay Bills?

Promises and Fulfilment

Realistic, ambitious or pragmatic — no matter how the new national budget is described, we have started getting a comprehensive picture not only of the government's intentions but also of reactions from a cross-section of our people...

If these reactions augur well for a constructive nation-wide discussion and an in-depth parliamentary debate on the budget in coming weeks, we are pleased with what looks like the beginning of an interaction between the government and the private sector...

How the debate now proceeds or, for that matter, its outcome depends largely on the government, especially on the Finance Minister. Judging by the way Rahman defended almost every provision of the budget, he may well be tempted to pay less than adequate attention to suggestions made by the trade bodies or to criticisms coming from AL...

Among the points already raised by the trade bodies, the government's inability to offer a comprehensive plan for the rehabilitation of sick industries seems as serious as its unwillingness to spell out a time frame for many of the measures proposed in the budget...

Restoration of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government by the Supreme Court has fundamentally changed the political situation in Pakistan. It is far from stable, despite a speedy vote of confidence from Parliament. In the 39 days Sharif was out of power, after President Ghulam Ishaq Khan had dismissed him...

Somalia's Trial Continues

When the saga of bloody confrontations in Somalia seemed close to be over, the cowardly murder of 23 Pakistani soldiers engaged in peace-keeping under the United Nations' aegis has dealt a rude shock to the expectant world community.

Somalia after all is a test case in that the UN in the post-cold-war era has exerted itself to bring peace in some troubled spots of the world. Barring a few stray incidents, initially the UN peace mission in Somalia went ahead quite smoothly.

The peace formula has held until the attack on the Pakistani soldiers. Accusing fingers are pointed to Mohamed Farah Aided, one of the Somali warlords, for this flagrant breach of truce.

THE budget session of the Parliament has started. My friends who ask me to write on some serious national issues hope, perhaps a bit optimistically, that this column might draw the attention of the law makers to some of these pressing problems.

In Bangladesh we have no dearth of serious issues. The list will be so long that it will be difficult to decide where to begin. Last week, I wrote about the plight of the farmers. Will the Parliament have a debate on it? Let us wait and see.

Take, for example, the telephone bill. Every month the bill comes — surprisingly regularly — but every month it brings a surprise.

The Finance Minister, while presenting the budget estimates, will no doubt wax eloquent about the macro-economic miracle that we are supposed to be enjoying today. Will he also think for a moment about the poor bill payer running from office to office to sort out a huge arrear bill or to get his bill corrected or from bank to bank to make the payment?

comes — surprisingly regularly — but every month it brings a surprise. Together with the bill for the preceding month there is a large sum included as "arrears". One is upset because the bills are being paid every month regularly.

phone office every month to get the bill corrected? Most of my working life I have lived abroad but I have never had such experience, even in a developing country. I will not talk about the telephone service which is perhaps one of the worst.

Supply of electricity, I am sure, is a sore subject even for the most patient and forgiving individual. I lived in Thailand for over a decade but never saw anything like it. Thailand can-

more corruption? Recently the owner of a newly established garment factory told me that his electricity bill we in arrears for two months. The bill collector wanted to make a deal which the owner declined.

Just before the last Eid festival there was a team of Titas gas officials going round a particular area threatening to disconnect those who did not pay

seem to bother the Titas Gas authorities.

The problem of paying municipal tax is so complex and difficult that it deserves a separate article. The basis on which these taxes are calculated is a mystery to ordinary human beings. Of course this can become a simple process if one is "reasonable and kind" to some employee of the Corporation.

The authorities of these agencies seem to take delight in inflicting punishment on the bill payers in another way. Most of these utilities collect their dues from their customers through a designated bank.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

not be compared to Germany or America or France or UK. It is an Asian country like Bangladesh. Yet one does not suffer either the agony of frequent interruptions in power supply or the destruction of the electrical appliances.

their bills. A laudable campaign indeed. But why just before the Eid festival? Well, the experienced readers will understand the significance of the clever timing. No one wanted the hassle just before the Eid.

Pakistan Business Cheers the Return of Sharif

Javed A Malik writes from Islamabad

The return of Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister of Pakistan after 39 days out of office has pleased the business community and boosted the integrity of the judiciary, which restored him. Sharif still has a lot of political repair work to do, but his opponent Benazir Bhutto has suffered by the episode and Sharif could now complete the second half of his five-year term of office.

President against PM



April 18: Khan dismisses Sharif. May 26: Court puts Sharif back.

power were rigged. However, she has lost out politically because she sided with the President when he ousted Sharif two months ago.

the reasons for this volte-face of the party leadership. But she is leading a strong opposition of around 60 members of the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament.

those remaining are not clear. Though facing difficulties, Sharif has gained politically as a result of his dismissal.

Sharif started a mass contact campaign soon after his dismissal and he proved his ability to launch a huge agitation campaign. This surprised many, as he was never known to be a leader of the masses.

Also, he can now rule for the rest of his tenure of almost two and a half years without any pressure from the President.

If the conditions favour, he can even get his own man elected as president when the elections become due at the end of this year.

The reformist Premier, successful in converting a relatively

closed economy of Pakistan to a free market, has vowed to continue the liberalisation policies even more forcefully.

His dismissal has also shown the strength gained by the country's business community during his tenure.

Sharif's free market policies have benefited the business classes and given them the confidence to take an active part in politics.

The first daunting task for the restored administration is to present the budget for the next fiscal year, starting July 1.

The standstill in economic activity which resulted from the change in government has further worsened this situation.

quired. But the government cannot annoy people by burdening them further with a tough budget at the risk of losing political support.

Moreover, it cannot provide an opportunity to the now much strengthened opposition to launch an agitation against the budget.

The decision to restore the Sharif government has raised the image of the judiciary. Sharif was the seventh chief executive of Pakistan to be dismissed, but the first to be brought back to power by the judiciary.

The army, which has ruled Pakistan under martial law for more years than the civilian governments in the last 45 years since independence, has been neutral during the whole episode.

The appointment was the start of the intense tug of war between President and Prime Minister that led to Sharif's dismissal.

JAVED A MALIK is a reporter on The Daily News in Islamabad.

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.

"Eid-ul-Azha and Thoughts on Sacrifice"

Sir, Mr. Mujibul Haque's article entitled "Eid-ul-Azha and Thoughts on Sacrifice", published in your esteemed daily on June 1, has shocked and surprised me not only because the author is shrouded with the blessed ignorance about the glorious sacrifice of Eid-ul-Azha but also because he has the audacity and temerity to cast reflections on the Ability and Competence of Benign Providence.

tance to their party. It is known to all that, all parties (except for the anti-liberation force) unitedly fought for the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971.

In this connection I would like to mention the improper behaviour of another party, which is not even hesitating to spoil the image of its own founder leader.

testifies to the fact that Allah is the Best Disposer of Affairs, that He is the Doer of all He intends, that He is the Best of Planners, that He is never unjust, that He is Exalted in Power, that He is Lord of the Throne of glory Supreme, that to Him belong the forces of heaven and earth, that His Word always finds fulfilment, that His Decrees are unalterable, that His Command must come to pass, that over all things He has Power, that He is the Lord of Power, that He is irresistible, that He never fails!

All narrowness and self interest should be suppressed, while making statement regard-

Pakistani version

Sir, While publishing in your widely-read Sports Page on 13 May 1993 Mr. A M Chowdhury's article entitled "Widies walk away with the rubber", you did not mention whether the same was lifted from a Pakistani daily/periodical. It certainly appeared to be so.

On the other hand, it would be very unfortunate if the author is a Bangladeshi. It would be a greater misfortune if the author has to be reminded that as far as Bangladesh is concerned, Pakistan is another nation and another country.

Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed BUET, Dhaka.

OPINION

Death without a Pension

As reported in the news media, a railway worker of the Western Zone Mr Zulmat Ali, who had retired on 22nd November, 1991, expired of a heart attack at the Rajshahi railway station in the night of Monday the 31st of May '93, without getting a paise of his hard earned pension money.

the pension rules were very much systematized and the pension cases were speeded up. But even the best systems fail as there are "system losses" at every nook and corner.

Shahabuddin Mahtab Siddheswari, Dhaka.