

Taxing Knowledge

There are no convincing and heart-warming records of governmental or other collective initiative geared to pulling society out of the present abysmal reading situation...

Imposition of tax on the import of books in the new budget do tend to enshrine that endemic and nationalized apathy to books. One doesn't feel like joining issue with the new budget proposals...

The government has very obviously played into the hands of a pressure group calling themselves as publishers. Before yielding to their pressure for 'protection', government should have talked to respectable and big and genuine publishers...

Knowledge and culture must be unhindered. They must not be allowed to be held hostage by any group seeking their own perverse interest.

We very much feel that the proposal of tax on book import can be wholly dropped without affecting the budget in any manner. And we strongly recommend that the government do so.

Japanese Debacle

Japan's corruption-ridden politics has taken a further dip in that Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa lost a confidence vote on Friday. So crucial is the outcome of the no-confidence motion moved by the Japan Socialist Party...

At the centre of the political row in Japan is the abandonment of the draft legislation to curb the practice of graft at the top administrative level. Miyazawa came to power on the promise to enact political reform aimed at doing away with such 'money politics'.

This verdict pronounced through the no-confidence vote serving its purpose in a most telling manner points to the crucial fact that members of the ruling party sometimes have to exercise their power in the best interest of the nation, overlooking partisan considerations.

Known for its love for traditional and somewhat conservative values, Japan nevertheless has developed a highly cultivated democratic culture which is manifest in the fact that it has been returning the same conservative LDP victorious but still the system discards anyone resorting to devious practice.

THE budget for the financial year 1993-1994 was presented to the Parliament on June 10. Predictably there was a chorus of praise from supporters of the government. The Finance Minister, at a press conference held on the following day, exuded satisfaction at his own performance.

The slow-moving and lack-lustre economy is our principal concern today. There is hardly any new investment. Neither domestic nor foreign investors are coming forward in significant numbers. Unemployment remains endemic, creating tremendous social tension.

Confidence, as most economists will testify, is an intangible and rather illusive factor but in the final analysis, all the crucial economic decisions are taken by entrepreneurs on the basis of the level of confidence.

The building up of confidence in the economy is an arduous and complex process which requires decisive action rather than mere complex process which requires decisive action rather than mere statements of concern. The

appalling law and order situation, the wide-spread practice of extortion of businessmen by criminal elements, corruption, inordinate delay in the decision-making process, unrest in the labour front—these are among the many problems that may account for the lack of confidence among entrepreneurs.

The programme for privatization is moving at a snail's pace, if it is moving at all. In the third year of the BNP government it is still engaged in 'preparatory exercises' in order to establish the viability of the enterprises before privatization.

Exchange rate policy is another area which can profoundly influence the viability of our industries, both export and import—substituting. It is well known that India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have in recent years followed an aggressive exchange rate policy to enhance the competitiveness of their exports.

right direction if full convertibility of Bangladesh Taka on trade account is introduced. In fact this would be a big step in restoring business confidence. Subsidies on many agricultural inputs have been withdrawn. This shock has been administered, most people believe, under the pressure of the World Bank and other donors.

Two sides. Reduction of import duty, regardless of the impact, is threatening their profitability. Equally important, the flood of smuggled goods can and often does wipe out the margin of profit.

Their own feet. However we cannot shut our eyes to the realities of life. Poverty in the rural areas, specially among the small and marginal farmers is so wide-spread and intractable that without some positive action it may be impossible to make any dent in it.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

After 19 months the Middle East peace talks remain deadlocked because the two sides have not greed on the price Israel must pay for peace with the Arabs. Syria, a key player in Mid-East diplomacy, insists that Israel must commit itself to full withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights.

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One such would be the nature of the peace to be established between Syria and Israel. Israel has said it would not make a commitment on the extent of its withdrawal from the Golan until Syria defined the sort of peace it was prepared to conclude with the Jewish state.

The Syrians insist that an Arab-Israeli peace settlement should be full and comprehensive. But Assad recently reiterated his position that the parties could reach bilateral accords without such accords becoming separate deals, like that between Israel and Egypt, but these are unacceptable to the Arabs.

The Syrian spokesman said that during the recent visit of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq

the system it would be unrealistic to count these chickens before they are hatched. After the last budget the tariff value of nearly 250 commodities including daily necessities such as powdered milk, sugar, salt, chilies, soybean oil were sharply increased under SRO.

There were some references to poverty alleviation in the budget speech. This issue is of central concern to the opposition as well. In fact the opposition pointedly asked the government to give precise information in the budget on allocations targeted to poverty alleviation.

Let us now see if the budget honestly reflects the government's stated intentions. We are told that the net loss in total revenue collection will be 328 crore Taka. The authorities propose to compensate this loss by means of 'administrative reforms and restructuring'.

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Syria is the Key to a Lasting Mid-East Peace

Michael Jansen writes from Damascus

It is said there can be no Arab-Israeli war without Egypt and no Arab-Israeli peace without Syria. And since Syria is now the mandatory power in Lebanon, there can be no Lebanese-Israeli peace without Syria.

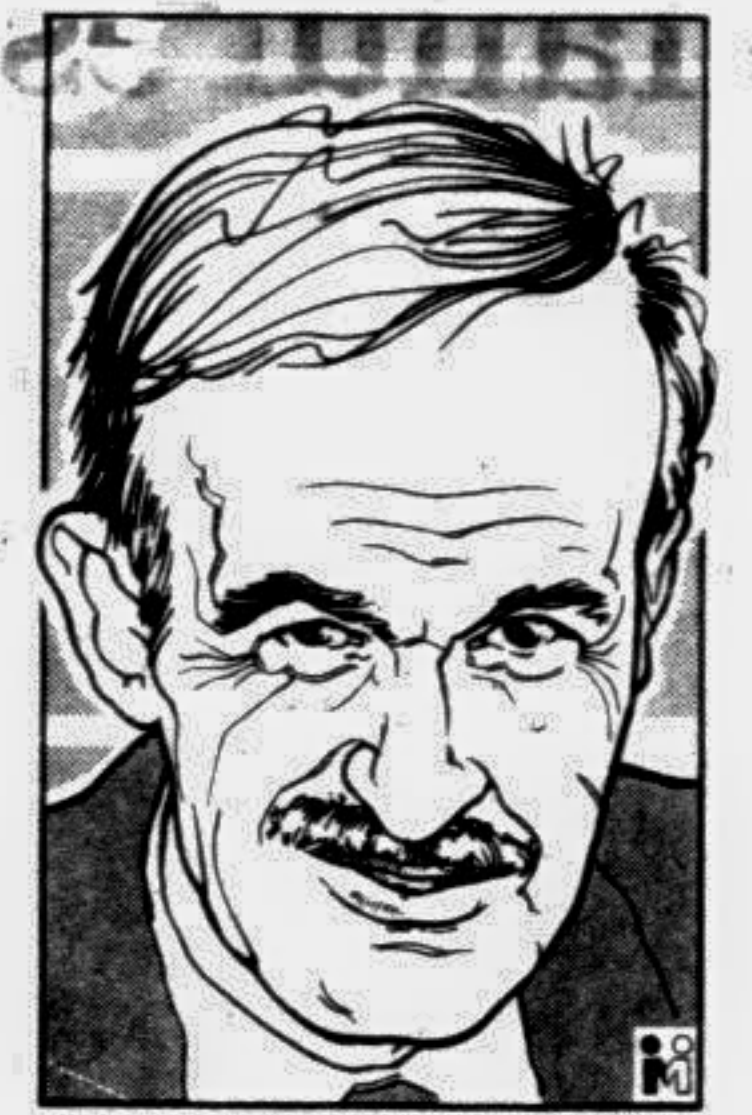
In preparation for the tenth round of bilateral peace talks in Washington, both Arab and outside parties visited Damascus to confer with the Syrians, who remain committed to the negotiations in spite of the lack of progress during the first nine rounds.

The Arab side characterized the ninth round of talks (April 27-May 13) as the last chance for the peace process to achieve some results. The round began well, with the Israelis permitting the return home of 30 Palestinian veteran deportees and both sides approaching the talks with a new seriousness.

This put Syrian President Hafez al-Assad in a difficult position, politically and diplomatically, because he was personally responsible for persuading the Palestinians, Lebanese and Jordanians to return to the talks, suspended in December after Israel deported 413 Palestinians from the territories.

Assad convinced PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat to drop the repatriation of the deportees as a pre-condition for resuming the talks, on both bilateral and multilateral levels. And Arafat compelled the Palestinian negotiation team, made up of residents of the territories, to return to Washington for the ninth round, in the expectation that there would be a breakthrough. The breakthrough did not come.

For the deadlock to be broken between the sides, permitting the round to end in dead-lock. This put Syrian President Hafez al-Assad in a difficult position, politically and diplomatically, because he was personally responsible for persuading the Palestinians, Lebanese and Jordanians to return to the talks, suspended in December after Israel deported 413 Palestinians from the territories.



PRESIDENT ASSAD 'Full peace for full withdrawal'

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nor the Israelis can afford to pull out. The Arabs have no alternative but to talk peace because they cannot make war without Egyptian muscle and Soviet arms and because the status quo in which Israel is settling and absorbing the territories captured in 1967 is intolerable.

Israel must also stick with the peace process because since it began, Israel has gained international respectability through new ties with such countries as India, China and Nigeria and secured funds needed to absorb incoming Soviet immigrants.

For the peace process to progress, the United States, which has so far failed to become fully involved, as did president Jimmy Carter in 1978 and 1979 in the Israeli-Egyptian talks, must turn itself into an active partner and act even-handedly to produce a just, enduring, comprehensive peace.

MICHAEL JANSEN was born in the US, lives in Cyprus, and has covered the Middle East for many years.

OPINION

'Negotiate Now'

Shahabuddin Mahtab

We thank Anis Ud Dowla for his write up of the 16th June, 1993 (Daily Star, opinion) because it is a humanistic approach, where Mr Dowla showed his deep concern for the welfare of the workers, the viability of the industrial units, and the necessary transparency, correctness, firmness which are the sine qua non of a democratically elected government which must work for the total national interest.

'Negotiate Now' reminds us of the adage, 'Better late than never'. The subject of a negotiation, that we are now talking of is late by several months: Again we would like to emphasize that the Bangladesh labour, both men and women are one of the best, if they are not politicised and used. By the side of the Vigarunnessa School and the Monowara Hospital one road construction is going on, and it is the women labour, who are doing the back breaking part of the work.

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.

Instant history

Sir, Thanks to Mr Mahfuz Anam for his commentary and reaction on Col (Retd) Akbar's shameful figure on the number of those embraced martyrdom during our great war of independence. Col Akbar owes it to the martyrs, the nation and the oppressed people of the world to apologise for his short sightedness. We give him the benefit of doubt, since he was a part of that great war and did not become a number of this undebatable number.

My World

Sir, One of the main attractions of The Daily Star is its weekly feature by S M Ali. It's read by many with special liking which keeps them in good mood for a week. Its omission in any week makes us gloomy as we have little other sources to keep ourselves both enlightened and in good humour.

Democracy in Pakistan

Sir, Democracy in Pakistan was given a big punch by the bureaucrat Ghulam Ishaq Khan and it was lying flat on the floor for weeks together. The Supreme Court of Pakistan has however made the historic judgement and declared President Khan's act illegal. We congratulate the winner — the sacked Premier Nawaz Sharif — and the National Assembly on the independence of judiciary in Pakistan.