

Recriminations and Reforms

Much of what Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman says about mismanagement in the cumbersome bloated administration, about its low productivity and, finally, about "too much political interference" in economic policy management is undoubtedly true.

Without casting any doubt on the sincerity of the Finance Minister, some impartial observers would now certainly wonder if Rahman has not been indulging in this exercise of recriminations a bit too long, for more than two years to be precise.

The Finance Minister's wave of recriminations produce serious misgivings. One concern is, by blaming various institutions, especially the fiscal ones, government agencies — for that matter, the administration as a whole — Rahman is creating scapegoats for a possible failure of his economic policies.

It is against this background of the administration's inability to set its house in order that we now have a massive 185-page report from a team of experts, set up with the help of the United Nations. While expressing some reservations about the value of such a report, prepared with the help of external agencies, this paper has played its role in focusing on issues which relate to the emergence of a good, accountable, transparent government in Bangladesh.

Insane Soccer

Like all other encounters between the giants of the Dhaka Football League, Wednesday's was not a great match. If soccer-lovers here remember the cloudy evening's exchanges on the field at all, it is not because of the players' individual skill or mechanical team work but because of the ungainly happenings both on and off the field.

With tension running high and pressure building up on the nerves of both the players and their supporters, games between the top teams of any country hardly rise up to their billing. That is understandable. But what is not understood is if the rising tension as well ought to be leading to frayed tempers.

For Abahani the stake was greater than their rival, Mohammedan's, because before this last match of the first leg for both teams, the reigning champions were trailing their arch rival, now leading the points table, by no less than three clear points.

So much for the game. What happened following the second Abahani goal can be a classic example of shifting the blame of inept goal keeping and an unpardonable personal failure on a scapegoat — in this case the referee who also failed to be equal to the task on the big occasion.

ACCORDING to the recent budget statement of the Finance Minister, "GDP growth rate for 1992-93 has been initially estimated at around 5 per cent compared to 4 per cent last year.

The GDP growth rate of 5 per cent during 1992-93 was the result of a bumper harvest of paddy; this is a fact well known. Hence neither macro-economic stabilisation measures, as mentioned by the Finance Minister, nor economic recession in the global economy could hamper our economic performance.

If we must achieve the medium term strategy of doubling per capita income by the end of the century, then a double digit growth rate of 10 to 11 per cent ought to be maintained between now and the year 2000 — a period of seven years only.

Not that such double digit growth rates are mere fictions of our imagination; very much within our close neighbourhood, countries like Singapore, Thailand and China, in particular, have managed to experience such spectacular growth of their economies on a sustainable basis, up until the present recession beginning 1990-91.

Double digit growth rates are difficult but feasible. The realities of our economic situation must be fully comprehended first. We must realize that GDP growth cannot be dependent on

Budget and Public Investment Decisions

bumper harvests; in which case our economic fate would be buffeting between good and bad — dictated by weather induced variations of farm outputs.

As explained later, the correct mix of investment decisions leading to disaster-free agriculture diversification can alter our current perception on production variabilities in agriculture.

The main source of GDP growth ought to be rapid expansion of labour intensive manufacturing primarily geared to export markets. Even 20 to 30 per cent rates of manufacturing growth have not been uncommon in the newly industrialising countries of East Asia.

Construction industries have often been the mainstay of economic

growth in industrialised economies whose significant sectoral growth potentials have largely remained unutilised in Bangladesh. Pent up demand for housing both for living as well as a work place, could run into millions of units provided the cost of construction could be brought down within accessible limits of families enjoying an average monthly disposable income of approximately 3000 taka.

WINDOW ON ASIA Shahed Latif

construction technologies, then such artisan level income earners (Tk 3,000/month) could afford bigger housing units of around 720 sq ft.

The contribution of the service sector to economic growth can be maximised through promotion of tourism, airline business, tele-communication, data entry and processing services, books and publications, expansion of shipping, insurance and other financial activities and engineering services as well as other consultancy services development.

Critical Decisions The critical budgetary decisions related to those investments and expenditures which are essential if growth inducing sectoral developments through private investments should deliver the required increase of GDP. A 7 per cent GDP growth

rate is a laudable objective and doubling it by the year 2000 ought to receive more enthusiastic support from the people; provided (and it is a very big condition) that from patterns of revenue expenditures, estimated outlays under the Annual Development Programme as well as proposed taxes and revenue earning measures, people could discern silver linings within the thick black cloud from where economic growth should rain down upon us.

People must be convinced that the Government is determined and prepared with a necessary set of actions to double the size of GDP. Unfortunately, it is not the case since desirable growth rates to double income have been scaled down, which in itself is indicative of an utter lack of bold ambitions as well as strategic vision of a true golden Bengal of future.

search, development, demonstration and training (RDD&T) should be a profitable venture. Government is bound to be highly flattered since imitators would follow in large numbers. A similar venture for manufacture of potato starch could boost the returns to potato cultivators.

The main emphasis of public investment in agriculture should be on diversification. For this purpose, RDD&T projects in tissue culture for spread of commercial orchid growing, strawberry, mushroom and other export oriented crop cultivation is necessary. Budgetary support may also be designed for large scale development of poultry feed manufacture, hatcheries and poultry farming.

Public investment for manufacturing development may concentrate on the setting-up of the Factory Development Company responsible for investing in factory buildings all over the country for outright purchase or hire-purchase by private entrepreneurs — with all the utilities provided. The company may also set-up complete factories as joint ventures or on its own, particularly in new areas as RDD&T units but to be eventually sold to private parties.

ing vessels, processing units, freezing units etc., have great deal of potential to enhance economic growth. Construction industry on the other hand might be the prime mover of economic growth.

Service Sector

In the service sector, private entrepreneurs are yet to venture and, therefore, government initiatives are necessary at this stage. The investments in this case, will include infrastructure development for tourists at Cox's Bazar, training institute to create a computer-literate workforce, demonstration of modern desk-top publication business, privatization of telecommunication business and expansion of Biman flights for tourists as well as cargo flights for fresh foods and flowers to Europe, Middle-East and Japan.

The set of public investment proposals have one common characteristic: they all are of high growth potential geared to specific context of purely sectoral origin: first, agriculture diversification with greater value-added from crops, fisheries and poultry during disaster free months; second, manufacturing development through ready-made factory buildings; third, reduced construction costs and large scale financing for housing through long term mortgage loans; and lastly, direct initiation of development of service industries like tourism and data processing.

There is no doubt that government can do more by doing less. But the least that belongs to public sector must be carefully discerned and acted upon through carefully chosen investment plans. Unfortunately, this important expenditure side of the budget is lacking in depth as well as inspiration for the people.

On the other hand, the most admirable aspect of the budget is the boundless sincerity of the Finance Minister to the task in hand. I am hopeful that in course of the next budget, critical investment dimensions are likely to be sharply focused in such a way that the entire nation will be inspired to struggle for the few growthful years left before the end of an otherwise sordid century for our motherland.

Indian Farmers Attack Cargill Seed Plant

by A Special Correspondent

As part of a campaign to demand a ban on multinationals in the seed sector, a powerful farmers' association in India has attacked and partially demolished the Cargill seed-processing plant in India. The campaign is aimed at protecting the rights of local farmers to produce, use, modify and conserve seeds.

lice prevented extensive destruction. This is the second action taken by the movement as part of a campaign targeting all multinational corporations operating in the seed sector. Last year approximately 1,000 farmers gathered at Cargill's offices to demand a ban on the entry of such companies into India.

'satyagraha' denotes action of civil disobedience. The KRRS has been campaigning against the proposal of patenting of life forms for the past seven months. According to news reports in India, the KRRS said the Dunkel proposals were detrimental to Indian agriculture as they were aimed at patenting plants and genes, and were part of an international conspiracy to deny farmers the right to produce, modify and sell seeds.

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1970, which excludes patents on all life forms. KRRS General Secretary Hanumanagouda told the Union Government to take a decision on the Dunkel proposals only after discussion with state governments. He said that the Sangha had also been demanding that the Union Government furnish details of MNCs which had been allowed to set up business in Karnataka.

To the Editor

Late night movies on BTV

Sir, Late night movies are usually shown on BTV after the news in English i.e. from 10-30 pm to 11-30 pm. Among them only a few are popular. For this movie series a viewer waits for a whole week. But it is a common practice of BTV to cancel particularly the most popular series and replace it by a discussion programme on various topics on the 'important' days.

viewers have to wait for the whole twenty minutes, till the late night news in Bangla and English end, to see the remaining part of the film which ends only after two minutes.

Questions are: Whom are you complaining against? Whom are you complaining to? Some are suggesting the early appointment of the Ombudsman. May be he will be a good man. But it will not be one-man show.

Novelist Humayun Ahmad is facing legal action for suggesting in his story that some judges are corrupt. The other day you carried the news of dismissal of three judges for being corrupt!

Decades ago a friend of mine narrated his experience of booking railway wagons from Chittagong to Dhaka. He said the fixed tip was one hundred Taka per wagon over the official freight. One day, reportedly, his man came to inform that from "today it is two hundred Takas". Why? Allegedly because an anti-corruption inspector had been installed there after repeated complaints about the corruption of the railway booking clerk.

Years ago I saw a drama where a character in extorting four thousand takas as bribe from his client consoled the client: "Sir, don't mind. I take this from you today. Tomorrow I shall have to pay the entire sum for the admission of my sons to school."

This is not however, true for everybody. Sir, I am such a private citizen like many others. I am a thief-fearing simple soul.

Now every one has turned bold, daring and desperate. Some at the top are found to turn too rich too soon while others like our utility inspector, meter readers, bill clerks, ledger keepers, supervisors, their union leaders, may be are merely trying to make their life a little more comfortable. Who could blame them? And who would dare to question or catch them?

Many in authority routinely sermonise about honesty, speak against corruption. But we know them in their true colours only after they fall from grace. Now my back is against the wall. There is no other source of water for me. And water is life. How much more do I have to pay for it? And from where do I get the extra money?

A suffering citizen

Letter writers' cell Sir, The formation of a 'Letter Writers' Cell' or a 'Forum' is not at all the crying need of the countryfolk — that too at the cost of the Honourable Prime Minister's office. Readers who are genuine in their thoughts and look at matters conscientiously must have noticed that even if not always, quite frequently, prompt actions do take place or a request fulfilled by the authorities concerned if and when such a letter appears in the Readers' Column of a newspaper.

It is my earnest request that readers who are seeking the Honourable Prime Minister's intervention in matters that involve the whole nation, including those who write, should think with sincerity, honestly accepting the fact that the opposition party also has responsibilities to carry out besides the various relevant departments or organisations. I cannot agree that no action ever takes place nor that the authorities concerned never bother. For, if that were so, today there would not have been,

a single letter writer nor any letter writers' column in any newspaper (or weekly) of Bangladesh.

However, it is hoped that each authority concerned would take up new initiative to mitigate problems facing the countryfolk sooner and in greater numbers as is demanded by the learned and alert members of the society.

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"Munir hanged"

Sir, There appeared a news as a boxed item in the front page of The Daily Star on the 30th July — in which the DIG (Prison), Inter alia, states that 'there is no rule for taking any photograph inside the jail or of taking any picture of the body of a hanged person'. This statement of the DIG (Prison) is contrary to the news which appeared in The Daily Star dated the 27th July (front page) under the caption 'Munir hanged'. In that news it was narrated that "...after the execution, his body was taken through the corridor to the main gate, and the jail sources said that the police photographers took several snaps of his (Munir's) body."

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