

## Frugality of Government Expenditure

The government has ordered spending cuts for its different ministries, departments and organisations. The move is nothing new; it comes with a ritualistic regularity about this time every year.

The original provisions under different revenue heads of the 1993-94 budget having been overshot in the first six months, the need arose for revising the allocations upwards to keep the government running for the next six months. The thing to note is that the Finance Ministry resigned itself to the fate that nothing could be done about the over-expenditure already incurred and that therefore it is under the painful necessity to have to arrange funds for the remainder of the year. Since the funds are in short supply to meet the additional expenses, the only alternative seems to be scraping from the development budget. A far worse scenario than just a break-down of the revenue budget discipline.

We have two points to make. One, the original allocations in the revenue budget get always surpassed in actual expenditures. If a sound technique, based on a realistic assessment of the requirements, prior to budget-making, was followed, there would be no question of overshooting the expenditure. Needless to say, realistic allocations can be self-enforcing. The government will have a strong leverage to pin down an official for any over-expenditure. Then, along the way, under certain heads there might have been surplus which was not allowed to be transferred under other heads starving of funds. May be such a transfer of funds could stave off any sudden halting of work in a certain section or department. Why it has always to be the same old story of a massive revision of the budget half-way through a financial year?

The second point relates to making the heads of various departments accountable for over-expenditure in avoidable cases. The miscellaneous account which should normally figure at the tail-end of the revenue expenditure pattern is the real bottomless basket. Telephones are used with least compunction in the offices and at home. Inter-district and overseas calls are made for long personal conversations at government expense and they are hard to be made accountable. Ghost bills are a peanut to this otherwise prodigal use of the telephones. The monthly slab restrictions on telephone use are there on paper. But who is going to take such a step like asking for a deduction in the salary or a refund at the time of a government servant's retirement, if the limits are exceeded? We can at least announce such a measure and see what happens. After all, the tax-payer's money is not a play-thing. The misuse of government transport constitutes another wasteful expenditure that must be curbed.

It is also in the areas of foreign visits by our delegations, entertainment of foreign guests at home and the seminars and symposia where a good deal of money can be saved. The size of our delegations abroad may be reduced and the duration of their stays limited on a strictly need basis without detours allowed. Of course, some trips may be prompted by weighty considerations but generally the impression must be erased from the public mind that they were avoidable jaunts or won as rewards. Our missions abroad should be able to cut corners obviating the despatch of delegations from home in some good measure there.

The parting handshake with surplus employees on merger of some organisations or their placement in departments needing their services are still in abeyance draining out some resources.

If austerity were brought about all by circulars we would have seen it in our midst a long time ago. Judging by the number of directives gathering dust on the office shelves, we have to devise practical ways to make the habitually wasteful officials accountable, if necessary, on pain of some corrective punishment. But essentially good examples of respect for the tax-payers' money have to be set across the administration.

## Airport Security Lapses

The Zia International Airport has become quite a news-maker. Every other day there would be some haul of contraband this or that. Perhaps that only admits it to a club of select elite among airports. But when a garments tycoon is roughed up by airport people for alleged misconduct shaming even a moron come from areas where aircraft do not exist — and a whole horde of mill workers descend on the place with revanchist machismo — ZIA most certainly cries out for some tighter security arrangements to be put in place.

The last big haul of gold worth Tk 30 million could be made thanks to a plucky guard staking his life to stop a goon. Trespassers on the apron such as the one who was driving away with these black bags of a king's hoard should — by the look of the incident — be an almost regular affair at the ZIA. Corroboration of that fear did not take months to come. And it came unbeatably. A stowaway was found on board a Biman DC-10 taxiing to take-off on a foreign flight. It was a full-house inside and the stowaway was standing in the aisle having failed to find a seat for himself. That helped things. Imagine it happening in a half-filled passenger cabin.

Mr Ujjal Kumar Roy, the non-passenger, a man from some Jessori village was found to be quite different from what his name could suggest. Apparently a simpleton, he walked on to the apron and asked his way to an Abu Dhabi or Dubai-bound aircraft — of some workmen at their job. He was shown the right plane. Reportedly he had no papers for the trip. This is a tell-tale case of the incredibly holed airport security system and inconceivable laxness of performance by the airport personnel.

The only *ujjal* or bright thing about the episode was the decision of the chief pilot of the plane not to fly it at all. Another plane had to be pressed into service to take the flight. His one and only concern in taxiing back and changing the plane was security in flight. While thanking him we call for a deep-scooping probe geared to healing the present dangerous state of airport security. Perhaps we should thank Mr Ujjal Roy as well for so effectively demonstrating the basal ineffectiveness of the airport security system.

## Jamaat Opens a New Front: Khatme Nabuwat

THE campaign against the Ahmadiya Muslims may well be Jamaat-e-Islam's new front in its bid to survive politically. The fundamentalists in Pakistan and India, and their parties, the Jamaat and BJP respectively, have fared poorly in recent elections. Their electoral reverses must have come as bad news for the Jamaat here. The Jamaat's alliance with the ruling party in Bangladesh has been under strain for some time past. The Gholam Azam issue has been an irritant, compounded by the way Jamaat student wing, Islam Chhatra Shibir, has carried on sporadically but systematically, a programme of intimidation through violence, not sparing the students loyal to BNP. The Shibir has given evidence of its striking power, not once but time and again. In pursuing a course of wounding, killing and destroying, it has antagonised the rest of the student body, putting the government in an awkward position. There are signs of a new turn in the nation's politics, a new wave of feelings, of harking back to the emotions of 1971. This last December, in particular has been a month of celebrations of a kind which the Jamaat could not have relished. The shameful record of its collaboration with the occupation forces that year was resounding from end to end of Bangladesh, forcing the party to devise new ways of diverting public attention from itself to

imagined enemies. The Ahmadiya community was an easy choice. Suddenly, perhaps not quite so suddenly — the community became the target of a host virulent and concerted attack, not by Jamaat directly, but by an organisation — Majlis Tahaffuz Khatme Nabuwat — acting on behalf of the party. The link between the two is quite clear. Khatme Nabuwat will not admit it, nor will the Jamaat, but it would seem that the former is but the religious wing of the latter, working in close cooperation with the same and identical object in view which is to exploit the religious sentiments of the people to attain political ends.

The origins of the Khatme Nabuwat are outside the country. The chief of the Bangladesh chapter of this movement, Maulana Obaidur Haq, the Khatib of Baitul Mukarram, is reported to have visited Pakistan, to enlist support for the international conference in Dhaka of December 24. The organisers had succeeded in giving the conference the look of an international one. Religious leaders and scholars, not from Pakistan only. But from a dozen countries also, came and spoke, addressing a mammoth gathering. The only thing that went awry was the non-appearance of Bangladesh President. He had first given his word to come and grace the function, but later realising the sinister implications of the conference, withdrew. The or-

ganisers had flouted the Home Minister's request to postpone the conference, in view of the ongoing SAF games. They even snubbed the minister for his temerity and exulted in the fact that Islamic zeal had triumphed over the obstruction of those with a flawed *iman*. The government in general, and the President in particular, came in for some very sharp criticism in the conference.

The administration failed in its attempt to have the conference postponed but at the same time it saw to it that the surging audience did not turn into an attacking horde. The

questions. Does it realise that it is more politics than religion that made such a massive demonstration on December 24? Does it see the hand of Jamaat in the whole business? Does it see any thing wrong in the role of the Khatib of Baitul Mukarram, an employee of the Islamic Foundation who had played, and who is still playing, a thinly disguised political role? The government leaders, including Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, never tire of claiming Bangladesh as a land of communal amity, all its religious communities enjoying full liberty of conscience. Will this claim hold water when

the Khatme Nabuwat wants the government to play a role as the protector of Islam, — a most dangerous suggestion. No government today, anywhere in the world, except the Saudi government, has arrogated such a role itself. One speaker of the Manik Mia Avenue meeting of 24 December, if I remember rightly, went to the extent of charging the Prime Minister because she was not serving Islam as sincerely as her late husband, President Ziaur Rahman, did. It was both a criticism and an appeal, and the clear sense of the appeal was: Keep the flag flying. And the veiled warning was, if you don't, we will no longer be with you. You have had our support so far, but if you fail us in achieving our dear objective — declaring the Ahmadiyas non-Muslims, following the example of Pakistan — you may soon lose it. And we predict a fall of your government.

Such strong language even the leader of the opposition, known for her penchant for strong words, has seldom used, and in such a threatening posture. The Prime Minister will surely take notice.

The Tongi Jatra is just a few days away. It will be held with due solemnity; and it will once again establish the difference between religion and politics, between peace and war, between sanity and madness.

desecrated by busloads of tourists and visitors coming to visit the Chinese cemetery.

The south's ethnically Malay Muslim inhabitants comprise 75 per cent of the local population, and up to 7 per cent (4 to 8 million) of the total Thai population of nearly 60 million. In the deep south, 70 per cent of local government bureaucrats are Buddhist including the four province governors.

We (Muslims) are 75 per cent of the people in the area, said Sulaiman, 'so 75 per cent of the government officials should be Muslim.'

The Muslim population has not benefitted significantly from Thailand's nearly ten year economic boom.

The per capita income is well below the national average of US\$1,900 per annum. The south is rich in natural resources (fish, minerals and lumber). But businesses are dominated by Thai and Thai-Chinese merchants while Muslims are relegated to low paying jobs in agriculture and the fishing industry.

The Leekpai government has begun 'discussions' with Malaysia and Indonesia to introduce the concept of the Southern Growth Triangle, a development zone encompassing portions of the three nations targeted for industrial, agricultural and tourism development.

— Depthnews Asia

### PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

A new round of Muslim separatist violence seems to be brewing in Thailand's deep south.

Bordering Malaysia and wedged between the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea, the south burst back into headlines recently when Thai military authorities arrested four Muslim 'separatist' suspects and charged them with terrorist acts.

Beginning in August, Thailand's predominantly Muslim provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani became the scene of a series of allegedly related violent incidents: the torching of 35 schools, grenade attack on a Buddhist temple, an attack on a train which resulted in the death of one passenger and injuries to several others and the attempted bombing of a railway line.

These violent acts threatened to throw Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai's beleaguered one year old administration into further disarray, added fuel to mounting opposition party charges that he's an indecisive and ineffective administrator and raised old fears about travelling safely through Thailand's south.

We think that some of the incidents are connected to separatist groups, said Abhisit Vejjajiva, spokesman for the Leekpai administration, 'but the problem of the school torching has no answer yet. Perhaps there are other people masterminding the incidents.'

Previous Thai governments have battle separatists in the south for decades finally driving them into isolated mountainous

jungles. In the 1980s, however, many separatist leaders began to take advantage of a succession of government amnesties and plans.

Only a few, very poor separatist groups still exist today: the Pattani United Liberation Organisation (PULO), National Liberation Front of Pattani (NLFP) and the United Front of Pattani Fighters (UFFP). Their reduced membership makes it unlikely that they have suddenly become active on such a large scale.

But military leaders have proceeded as though these incidents were directly linked to Muslim separatists. 'With full-cooperation from Southerners, we will easily wipe out this terrorism,' said Wimol Wangwanich, Army Commander-in-Chief. 'But we haven't got that cooperation because the terror did not directly affect residents of the area.'

The Thai military's frustration only serves to mask a set of deeper problems — one historical and the other of contemporary vintage.

Historically, the majority 1.5 million Muslim population in Thailand's four southern provinces are linguistically, ethnically and culturally Malay and therefore very different from the dominant Thai Buddhist population.

To varying degrees, Muslims have supported separatist movements in the past against what is viewed as a succession of oppressive Thai governments.

Today, in the wake of a continuing economic boom, the situation has changed. 'Who cares about separatists?' said one young man from Yala province, who preferred not to be named. 'People now want to see their provinces become prosperous.'

The Thai militaristic approach has succeeded in raising suspicions of using the Muslim problems to settle old political scores. If true, it becomes a risky strategy with high potential for Muslim separatist violence and, worse still, risks forcing local Muslims into an unnecessary and divisive choice — Islam of the state government.

It's all still very confusing, said Dr Chaiwat Sutha-Anand, lecturer at Thammasat University's Political Science faculty and attorney for the four 'separatist' suspects. 'Actually, there are really many different stories about what happened. There is the government's story, the military's position, the newspaper versions and the Muslim community's own account.'

Certain Muslim members of parliament are prepared to take the Leekpai government at its word. 'Despite the deep rooted problems in the south,' said Wanmuhamadnoor Matha, a Muslim MP from Yala and advi-

sor to Prime Minister Leekpai, 'the southern people have accepted that this government is working on these problems.'

Local people don't think that PULO or the other separatist groups have the capacity to carry out such a coordinated attack,' continued Mr Matha, casting aspersions in the direction of fractious southern Thai military leaders. 'So the movement behind these attacks must be very powerful, have money and good discipline.'

Another Muslim government representative, however, has a different point of view. 'Poverty is the most important problem in my province,' said Muk Sulaiman, also legal counsel for the four charged separatists and Pattani Province MP, 'but in one year of this government, I don't see that they have done anything to solve the problem.'

Although popularly known as a Buddhist country, Thailand has a long history of Muslim influence. Islam's arrival in the area considerably preceded Buddhism. Arab and Persian

past. It possesses both glory and heritage. In the Encyclopaedia Britannica there is a paragraph written on Narayanganj. It is the Dundee of the East.

But the town's richness and tradition are gradually fading out due to absence of civic amenities and privileges.

The town has been without a park for hundreds of years. No government has ever ventured to establish a park. Neither the municipal authorities nor the elites have come forward to set up a park that is desperately sought by the people of Narayanganj. We hope the concerned ministry will look into the need with urgency.

Fayezur Rahman  
Masdar, Narayanganj

### Nagar Bhavan

Sir, I like to join with other letter writers in recent months for the utility of a neem tree. Every home of Bangladesh must have a neem tree which can solve many of our problems.

People of Bangladesh have a tendency to like imported things without giving importance to natural indigenous ones. Neem is a tall, spreading tree which is a relative of mahogany or other fast growing trees.

We must have more and more neem trees as neem's medical benefits are enormous.

Thousand year old Sanskrit

medical literature praises the tree called *arishtha*, the Sanskrit word for reliever of sickness.

Its leaves are placed in

books, beds or grain bins to

discourage insects. Neem's

leaves are used in tea as an

anti-malarial agent. The tree is

also ideal for use as firewood

and for making soap, oils for

lamps or lubricant to greese

cart wheels. Neem steaks

(miswaks) are used to scrub

teeth and gums — this kills oral

bacteria. Neem's leaf also can be

used to clean the teeth. Neem

leaf extract can be injected as an anti-dote for

malaria and kalaazar.

Though there is no pesticide

plant by neem, in Bangladesh

as in Bhopal, India, but the

neem tree, can bring pesticide

within the reach of even the

poorest people. Most of our

people cannot conceive of pur-

chasing pesticides but they can

have a neem tree at their

homesteads to save themselves

from most of the diseases as

stated above.

M Alaudin

West Nakhalpara, Dhaka

AZ  
Dhaka

### Narayanganj needs a park

Sir, Once upon a time

Narayanganj was a town of joy,

happiness and charm. It was

the real home of the British

colonial rulers. The town has its

own unique culture and

traditions. It has its own

identity and character.

But now it is a different

place. It has lost its

identity and character.