

Budget to Spurt Growth

There is a tonal difference the budget can claim from the earlier ones. This stems from the government's comfortable resource position in terms of the mobilised money topped off by a sizably accumulated foreign exchange reserve.

It is another matter though as to why the surplus has remained unworked off through tangible investments. This brings to the fore the question of only 22 per cent of the ADP 1993-94 having been utilised up until last December. And, one is yet to know the closing performance figure of June, 1994. Still we are putting the ADP allocation for 1994-95 at Tk. 11,000 crore, evidently a good notch higher than the revised figure of Tk 9750 crore of the last fiscal year.

The new budget proposes a revenue deficit of Tk 8039 crore which is but a target set for generating surplus of that order. While this itself reflects nothing more than a percentage point drop in the deficit compared with that of last year's budget, the underlying air of confidence is unmistakable. The overall deficit is expected to be met by a foreign aid flow of Tk 6010 crore coupled with an internally generated resource quantum of Tk. 2086 crore. This projected 38 per cent contribution — better say, commitment — of domestic resource to the foreign aid in pipeline is good augury no doubt. But one must remember that even with 35 per cent of domestic resource at our disposal last year, the ADP utilisation had been that low.

Now, there are two broad aspects to the target of surplus that we are giving ourselves in the garb of a deficit budget. First, money will be raised from the non-banking sector — meaning whole range of bonds, treasury bills purchased by corporations through their surpluses, and savings instruments. A premium is thus put on the efficiency of the government's various corporations and revenue — generating institutions as well as that of the tax collecting agencies. This is more so because of the cuts sought to be effected on the duty or tariff structure.

But it is not by virtue of this alone that the banks, left with their deposits, will be self-inspired to advance credits for various productive purposes. What most likely will give an impetus to credit disbursement is the shot in the arm that the budget seeks to give to the agricultural sector by lowering the costs of farm inputs. The duty rebate on cotton yarn may help the moribund handlooms sector to an extent but the local textile mills spinning yarn will suffer. So, the backward linkage to the garments sector does not seem fully established, except for the fact that handloom checks might get a fillip.

Anyhow an export-led growth strategy seems to have been beefed up by a reduction of duty on capital machinery and acceptance of pre-shipment certification of value. To generate local investment, which is likely to boost foreign investment, we may have to rethink VAT not in principle but in some of its details.

Towards meeting the basic needs of the people and holding the price-line for them, the budget appears to have gone some distance. Since the declining inflation all by itself has not helped reduce the prices, the Finance Minister has per se taken recourse to duty cuts on a number of consumer and input items such as soyabean oil, sugar, kerosene, diesel, furnace oil and fertiliser. However, one does not quite see a reflection of the much-vaunted spurt coming to the construction sector as a strategy to break out of the persistent economic stagnation. The price of construction materials is likely to go up although elimination of wealth tax on house or apartment and reduction of stamp duty on transfer of property sound like some civic concessions made.

There are no specific poverty alleviation measures embodied in the budget even though the social sectors are to benefit by higher allocations. The Taka 300 crore provision for voluntary retirement is not an adequate safety net cover. On employment generation and income distribution the budget could have been more specific and forthcoming.

A Highly Welcome Visit

A Japanese trade delegation is now in the city. The team, comprising as many as 40 members who represent leading Japanese trade and industrial ventures, has arrived here to explore the investment prospects for them. So there is no scope for overemphasising the importance of the high-level delegates' visit. In fact, the increasing interest shown by both Japanese government and that country's private sector in Bangladesh is a very positive sign. Already Japan has become the largest donor country for Bangladesh. Now the trade team's visit may open up a wide range of avenues for economic co-operation.

That Bangladesh has been able to persuade Japanese businessmen and industrialists to look for investment prospects here by itself is a creditable job. Now the more important job is to get them involved in productive commercial ventures. There is no reason why the country with its macroeconomic stability and the package of incentives should not be adequately prepared for the job. Sure enough, the country is ready to welcome Japanese investments at a time when we are falling far behind compared to many other Asian nations in attracting foreign investors.

Japan, on its part, in relocating her industries, is redrawing its investment map where Bangladesh is known to be figuring for the first time. Now the interests appear to be mutual and if the two sides give a go to joint ventures between them, there is every chance that things will change for the better for both countries — but specially for Bangladesh. For Japan to move its capital to a country like Bangladesh, the ultimate consideration that will count is to make the production line more competitive here.

Certainly questions may be raised once again about the bureaucratic tangles, labour output and infrastructural shortcomings. But the exclusive industrial zone being offered to the Japanese in Chittagong will help overcome such problems. Now if there are other drawbacks, the two sides can discuss these openly and come to an agreement, satisfactory to both. But we consider it a great opportunity for the country to open up to the world outside — and in a big way. Private entrepreneurs in Japan have both money and expertise. Bangladesh can use such advantages to enter into international manufacturing and export markets in a way it has never done before. So we welcome these trade delegates to our country and hope for the best from their visit.

MILITANCY in Kashmir has declined noticeably. But alienation has not. If anything, the people's resentment against India has grown. The four-year-old stir has entered a phase where the militants' guns are falling silent but where bitterness is burrowing deep in the minds of people and acquiring an edge of hostility.

The fall out is of two types. One, islami fundamentalistic content is thickening the brew and diluting the Kashmiri, representing sufism and softness. Two, the cry for azadi (independence), still loud and clear, is losing a bit of its ring. Exasperated by India's intransigent attitude, an argument that is appealing to some adherents of pro-azadi movement is that by supporting the option of joining Pakistan they may be able get rid of India quicker.

The JKLF, which has concentrated on the azadi demand, continues to hold the imagination of the people. But the Jamaat-e-Islami and Hizbul-Mujahidin, a militant group, which tilt towards Pakistan, have had a field day when the JKLF leaders like Yasin Malik were in jail. Part of their cadre has also been appropriated by the Hizbul-Mujahidin, which is flushed with money and material coming from across the border. Undoubtedly, the pro-azadi sentiments sway the Kashmiris most. But the JKLF's reluctance to use the gun has lessened its fear. And it is the fear that gives the Hizbul-Mujahidin its most support.

Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto's statement that her country would lose the plebiscite if the option of azadi is given to the Kashmiris

has infuriated a majority of them. The observation is being considered a message that Pakistan cannot be of much help to them. When there is a growing belief in the valley that Pakistan has failed to wrest them from the hands of India, Benazir's statement has dampened their spirits. The Jamaat has been trying to retrieve the ground by arguing that if the Kashmiris were to agree among themselves that the third option was best for them, it would be available. Since the Jamaat's hold is limited, the damage has been done. The JKLF is also using this stick to beat the Jamaat with. "Whatever Benazir's stand, our struggle for azadi will not be affected," say the intellectuals.

Jammu and Kashmir Governor Krishna Rao makes no distinction between the azadi and pro-Pakistan elements. For him, both are militants. And he proudly says, "We have broken the back of militancy." It is true in the sense that there are no encounters, no running battles between the security forces and the militants. It is also true in the sense that the killing of many militants — nearly 15,000 — has had an effect.

"But militancy has spread all over," as an Urdu daily editor says. "Every boy and girl, from the age of 12 to 30 is a militant even if he or she does not

wield a gun." He explained that militancy was only an expression for defiance. It may take some other shape. "Even if all guns become silent, India should not believe that it has normalised the situation in Kashmir." Yet Srinagar is a changed place. When I was here last year, the city was like a garrison, a profusion of security forces and the protruding gun from bunkers. Now there

Anantnag, Baramulla and Sopore, which I visited. Their lives would have been simpler — and more peaceful — if they had been allowed to lead life in their own way. They are under pressure from the militants as well as the security forces, more from the latter. The militants extort money and even force parents to part with their children to fight against the security forces. There are instances of barbarity. One

in the sun for nearly eight hours, while the suspects were interrogated at a make-shift centre in the full gaze of the public. I saw eight boys in the local hospital lying with serious injuries that the security forces had inflicted. Some houses had been ransacked; the TV sets broken, clothes strewn all over and the furniture chopped into pieces. Many complained that their valuables — and cash — were missing. When I told the Governor about the incident, he just brushed it aside.

More than the incident is the treatment meted out to the people. They feel humiliated as if they do not deserve even a polite word. There are numberless incidents of search and severity. And each one of them has distanced the people from India. And as the security forces are busy in their combing operations to catch the militants, the attitude of an ordinary man towards India is hardening because of the havoc, anger and estrangement the forces leave in their wake.

Still more disturbing for the people is the detention of suspects. The authorities put the figure around 3,000. But their number is at least double. Apart from the detainees, there is a long list of people who are not traceable. Instructions are that within 36 hours the household should be informed if someone connected with it is picked up.

But these instructions are only on paper. Parents and wives, in hundreds, go from pillar to post to enquire about their missing son or husband. But there is no news. Even where the authorities have given in writing that their dear ones are in custody, there is no trace of them. Hundreds of habeas corpus petitions are pending before law courts, and even when the courts have passed order, there is no compliance.

I have returned depressed from Kashmir, not only because even simple canons of justice are not available to the people there but also because the administration has not yet realised how its acts of omission and commission have made the Kashmiris go away from India. The Governor lives in a world of his own and does not know what is happening on the ground. If the administration, nay the security forces, could be humane, a lot of alienation may wear off.

But this alone will not do. The question of Kashmir will continue to stare at us. A political solution has to be found. Perhaps, to begin with, leaders and those detenus against whom there is no evidence of violence, should be released. They — also the representatives from Jammu and Ladakh — should be invited for talks without laying down any condition.

If the leaders from Jammu and Kashmir want to go to Pakistan to talk to the Kashmiris and the others, facilities should be provided to make the effort a success. Islamabad, which is important for any permanent solution of Kashmir, should be associated at some stage; it need not be from the very beginning.

A Visit to Kashmir

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BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

is a relaxed atmosphere. Bazaars are almost back to their usual hustle and bustle. Shops are well stocked and pedestrians are as waywardly free as the bulky vehicles. Even the public frequents the Moghul Gardens despite the militants' warning.

But this atmosphere is deceptive. It is not that normalcy has returned; it is that the people have come to realise that they have to live with dangers and their aspirations at the same time. Living with the conditions as they obtain is becoming a way of life for them.

I was in Sopore one day (May 27) — after the Border Security Force had searched a mohalla. It was a familiar story. Men were bundled off to the nearby road and made to stand

the security forces are the worst and their brutal methods have not changed a bit despite the protests made by human rights groups in India and abroad. It is as if none in the security forces is accountable. No amount of complaints, supported even by documentary evidence, moves the power that may be.

I found the same compromise in life on the part of lawyers, doctors, academics and businessmen I met in

ther in favour of a caretaker body or against it. Mr. Moudud Ahmed also referred to Magura episode pointing out the helplessness of EC when result sheets are signed by the returning officer. He states, "But the question is that everyone knows it is impossible that ninety to ninety-five per cent votes could be cast in a particular centre. Admittedly, there was rigging." This statement could be denied, but such denial only fortifies the contrary belief. In this allegation and counter allegation gulf of distrust only widens, because truth is the victim.

Mr. Moudud Ahmed, a senior JP leader, disclosed that JP, while in power, also held on to the view that caretaker government was unconstitutional. Yet under political pressures and the tidal wave of mass upsurge, JP had to give in. That is why Mr. Ahmed says, "but ultimately it is politics which decided the issue." Evidently, we are now faced with a similar kind of impasse. Will BNP heed the signal of a coming storm? One must thank Mr. Ahmed for the clarity of his expose of politics vs constitutionality.

Mr. Menon of WP questions as to why the BNP feels so touchy about the caretaking arrangement. He should know if there's an election under a neutral body, BNP (for that matter other big parties) could not vouchsafe outright victory. That is why BNP is perhaps fighting shy.

Given the kind of sky under which we live — distrust — Mr Menon seems sagacious by hindsight when he at the outset came out with a proposal — to be incorporated in the constitution — for a caretaker body for national election. Time passing since March, 1991 the way it has, we now see the widening of opinions on vital aspect of our national elections included. One may safely describe it as vicious hostility. As a voter, I ask the parties — what right have you to muddy the already muddled scene? You have all the right to agree to disagree in an atmosphere of political "surgery room" taking such caution as not to allow virulent virus to contaminate the national political health weakened with repeated broken promises. Mr. Jalaluddin Ahmed (The Daily Star, 8.6.94) in his deliberation cautioned us of this storm. Our sanity should not be stretched too far, and in that vein Mr. Sk Razzak Ali put in his words of hope. His words, "we must not push the country into a crisis." All of us should help to find a peaceful solution. While on this issue of a neutral body, it is time we ask:

a) Is politics only for power? This it had been all along. In the name of being a politician many made fortune from nothing.

b) Is election a vehicle to become a leader when such leader hardly contributed any useful time to build up his constituency for some long time? Affluent ones are seen as leaders/ministers overnight. Do we call it a legitimate process?

c) Why is it that our so-

called politicians do not try to grasp, study and plan their actions so as to apply these experiences when in "elected" seats?

d) Why does not a research cell to prepare action papers exist in parties vying for power? It is now obvious that parties without prior preparation are at a loss to aim at their target successfully when in power.

e) Do we have a declared plan of action from those who think they would be able to occupy the seat of power by virtue of elections held under a neutral caretaker government?

As a humble reader of The Daily Star, I feel mentally strong that the paper is now leading the public in a saner way to discuss this intricate matter more openly than probably any other institutions. Whether or not the political parties consider it their duty to keep the country calm and sober at such a problematic time, a number of good people contributed to the call of this paper to join in this discussion apart from the politicians.

What one wishes of the parties is to have the tinder-box attitude reduced — let them avoid war of words, let them approach with statesman-like bearing, let them not reduce dignity of one another; Mr. Jalaluddin Ahmed in the first paragraph of his write up gave a fearful picture of an oncoming wave, but with elder politicians in each camp one has hopes there will be an element of restraint.

The Daily Star Public Debate: What do Our Readers Think?

Let the Muddled Political Air be Clear

by Kalam Kamran

As a Daily Star reader, I must thank you for opening a dialogue on caretaker arrangement for holding national election.

In their opening arguments the General Secretaries of AL and BNP showed the trend of their minds. While the BNP argues on constitutionality, the AL and other parties are convinced constitution could be amended, provided the BNP brought in a bill in the House. The point is why this amendment question has cropped up. From newspaper reports (not over radio) it appears that in the recently held Magura-2 election some violations of EC rules and regulations caused widespread dissatisfaction among the opposition parties. For instance, certain transfer of officials during the prohibited period (EC regulation) among other violations, has been most unseemly.

Mr. Zillur Rahman has furnished a list of complaints of the AL, regarding elections held under the government though conducted and supervised by the EC. Trouble is, the EC was made almost inoperative in holding a free and fair election as alleged by Mr. Rahman. He does not believe so long as BNP is in power there is any chance of a free and fair election.

Mr. A Salam Talukder, on the other hand, surmises that election is not conducted by the government, it is the EC which actively conducts and supervises such elections. According to him, if the opposition desires, EC may be further strengthened. This the

opposition rejects.

Apparently, there is thus the element of distrust. The question we may ask is: Do the opposition parties have reasons for this loss of trust? What happened during the period between 1990 and 1994? In this period the 8-party and 15-party combines acted unitedly to usher in a new era in Dec 1990. While in the combine, there were some compact namely that while in power (whether BNP or AL) the government will: a) repeal SPA; b) repeal indemnity act; c) turn electronic media into an autonomous body, independent of direct government influence; and d) separate judiciary from the executive branch. As of now, all these are in cold storage.

AL and other parties see this as a betrayal of solemn trust. According to them, there are other such instances like Golam Azam case, alleged corruption in the ministry of agriculture, corruption in tendering matters, etc. This and other forms of intransparency in the action of the government have now led the entire opposition to rise in unison calling for a caretaker body for election.

Mr. Rahman narrating election anomalies from 1954 referred to "basic democracy, controlled democracy, military democracy, etc." But curiously, he seems to explain BAKSAL in quite a different tone and style. He was aptly replied on this score by one reader of The Daily Star (5.6.94). To the general mass, BAKSAL was the fi-

nal chapter of the then AL. Mr. Rahman mentions about "muscleman" in his list of complaints but I am not sure he would be able to speak for "Lal Bahini" or even "Rakshi Bahini". Today, he refers to the ministers visiting in horde the Magura-2 constituency, were ministers absent in their constituencies in 1973? Thus, the complaints he made are common to all past and present governments, only exception being Justice Shahabuddin's government, but that was a caretaker one.

On the other hand, despite Mr. Talukder's assertions that EC conducts elections, there is raging controversy over Mirpur and Magura elections as a result of which we now face a drama of dead-lock in the House. Although Mr. Talukder offers strengthening of EC, who can guarantee that government will not find ways of short-circuiting it? Was it lawful to take recourse to transferring officials? When gentlemen beat around the bush, what can a little sparrow (voter) do? It does not look that his call for a dialogue will now be of any good. His clarion call to the opposition to settle the "issue" in the parliament — a sovereign body — will hardly bear any fruit, as because the majority party in parliament did not keep their faith with the opposition. An element of distrust reigns supreme. Why? Mr. Talukder knows best.

"Many other stalwarts of the BNP and AL and others came out with their arguments ei-

Caretaker Government is Not the Panacea

by NH Chowdhury

MAJOR opposition political parties in the country have made an issue of "election under a caretaker government" for boycotting Parliament as if all problems of the nation will be solved if an election is held under a caretaker government. The election in 1991 was held under a caretaker government. But have the problems solved or the aspirations of the people fulfilled? If the next election is held under a caretaker government, can the opposition parties guarantee that all the aspirations of the people shall be achieved?

It is really unfortunate that when the country is fighting

with illiteracy, unemployment, terrorism, natural calamities etc the opposition parties are not making any debate inside and outside the Parliament on those burning issues and are boycotting the Parliament on an issue against which they have neither sought for nor have obtained people's mandate.

Panacea of all problems lies, in fact, not in the system but in the sincerity and honesty of the elected representatives to face the problems, the country is beset with and resolve them. All the members of the Parliament, irrespective of party affiliations, barring a few, agreed

to increase their salary, emoluments, fringe benefits and to import duty-free cars when people are suffering from hunger, unemployment, terrorism, illiteracy, natural calamities, Farakka etc. Is the issue of "election under a caretaker government" included in the 'election manifesto' of the political parties? Are they not promise-bound in their respective election manifesto to work for providing the people with necessary fooding, clothing, housing and employment?

Why those are not discussed, debated inside and outside the Parliament and made issues for the next election?

The ideas of caretaker government is not a substitute for democratically elected government. The assurance for a fair election lies not in the formation of a caretaker government, but in the establishment of rule of law which can be achieved only by institutionalising democracy.

Democracy has been achieved in our country after a prolonged struggle and now everybody, both in government and opposition and also people in all strata of life should coordinate and assist in institutionalising democracy in the country through public debate, mutual discussions and not through public agitation in the streets. We have seen much of street agitations and we cannot afford to lose further time in the test of caretaker government. We all are to change our outlook in politics by looking around what is happening in other countries. This is the time we should think in terms of economic uplift of our country by drawing maximum foreign investment like that of Vietnam, China and even our neighbouring India. In India multi-party system works with divergent political philosophies but the major parties agree on the major national issues. Why not the major political parties in our country agree on the major national issues like poverty alleviation, education for all, fight against terrorism, provision for maximum employment opportunities, improvement of law and order situation, solution of the Farakka issue.

So, I urge upon all political parties to rise to the occasion. Without wasting time for petty party-interest, they should devote themselves to fight and come to a general consensus on all national issues and implement those unitedly to improve the lots of the common people so as to accelerate the economic development of the country.

In this connections, it may be mentioned that a major political party has suggested for caretaker government headed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court which I think deserves rethinking for the following reasons viz, once the Chief Justice is made the

Prime Minister or the Chief Executive of a country he should not go back to the Bench any more. As a Prime Minister, the Chief Justice has to take various steps, make many rules and regulations, issue many orders which are likely to be challenged in the courts of law. On the other hand, the judges in the lower courts naturally may feel embarrassed to take a decision on any law, order or regulations issued by the Chief Justice acting as Prime Minister of the country. So, the ideas of heading the caretaker government by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is not acceptable and Justifiable too, as before.

Lastly, I suggest that to ensure free and fair election under a democratic government, the Election Commission may be further strengthened with more and more powers and the election procedures including laws may be suitably amended through mutual discussions and experts' opinions. The suggestions of identity cards of voters, appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner by the President with ratification of the Parliament, banning of all wall-postings, restrictions on election camps and campaigning, handing over a copy of election result of each polling station to the election agent of each candidate, provision for punishment of fake voters, corrupt officials etc may be considered in framing future election rules for ensuring fair election for the Parliament and other municipal bodies.

Toiletopia

Sir, Your editorial of 1 June 1994 under the heading 'Toiletopia' was very interesting as you cite the actions taken by Sachiko Azal and Dr Ronald Leung in this regard in their respective countries. It is however glaringly noticeable by all that the metropolitan cities of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi are being developed through planning and improving the roads, lighting, communication, housing etc. spending crores of Taka every year. We can also see beautiful police boxes in busy corners of the city roads where toilet facilities are also available, only for the people manning the boxes. But imagine what happens to a visitor to Dhaka, arriving in the morning hours from a far-flung area by a night

train, bus or steamer and proceeding to this destination by rickshaw/scooter who gets the urge to urinate (minimum). Does he have an alternative but to stand up and use the city footpath or a wall? What happens if the passenger is a lady? We have been fortunate in getting, through democratic elections, Mayors for these cities. All elected representatives, high officials, ministers use the city roads but none of them are required to respond to nature's call in a public toilet (if available) as they can easily go to any of the offices, residences, hotels etc to be relieved of the urge. Major cities in other parts of the world do have very good roadside toilets, some on payment and some free. We were once a civilised people, before we were vanquished by others.

Now others have gone past us many decades ago. Do you think the DMC, with its dynamic Mayor, should show the way by introducing minimum civic amenities for the majority of Dhaka citizens and its visitors? I do not think this will be too big an expectation! I would like to add, this should be a claim by the city dwellers to our Mayor and through him to the independent sovereign nation. A N A H Siddiqui Motijheel C/A, Dhaka

China's MFN status Sir, Man is a social animal and China is world's most populous nation. So whether it is the USA or any other country which wants to isolate or ostracize China it may attempt so only to commit a vainglorious foolishness. Despite many threats and