Dhaka, Saturday, June 24, 1995

Debate on Defence Spending

The truth of the matter is that we do not often write about defence matters, and far less comment on them. The reason for it can be better guessed than explained. The fact that we, even after establishing democracy and putting into place what is a reasonably free and lively press, shy away from talking about defence matters, is both shameful and dangerous.

It is shameful because while claiming to enjoy freedom of press and expression, we in the media refrain from informing the public about one of the most important and vital public institutions of the country. Given that it is public money, and public money alone, that sustains the armed forces, it is vital that the same public be informed about how effectively their hard earned cash is being spent on building and training our defence forces.

It is dangerous because not writing and commenting in the press about our armed forces tantamount to depriving them of the valuable views, opinions, suggestions, evaluations and criticisms that public discussion usually produces. Open airing of diverse view points help to bring out the most suitable option, which strengthens the policy formulating process. By not bringing defence matters within the purview of public debate we, as a part of the independent press have, in a sense, failed our armed forces, just as we have failed ourselves.

We strongly believe time has come to change all that, and Osman Gani Khan, a ruling party MP, has given us a chance to do so. During a general discussion on supplementary budget last Tuesday, he pointed out that an additional amount of Tk. 300 crore, over the allocated amount of Tk 1,824 crore was spent during 94-95, without consent of the parliament. "They do not care about rules and regulations, and spend as they like." he claimed. This is a very serious accusation and one that should be looked into - both by the government, and by the press.

Senate investigations of US defence spending have always revealed an enormous amount of wastage and inefficient use of resources, and it ended up improving the defence forces. Similar has been the experience in France, UK and Japan. Because the former USSR never permitted public scrutiny of its armed forces, look what happened to it. An example closer to home is the armed forces of Pakistan. The corruption of ISI, its role as conduit of CIA money and later drug money, and the involvement of many generals in corrupt practices have done a great deal to destroy the professionalism and efficiency of Pakistan's armed forces, and they all occurred because of lack of public scrutiny of its affairs.

Therefore we suggest a far stronger supervision, by the parliament, of the armed forces through in-depth debate on its budget allocation, and justification of every expense — a process that every other part of public funded body has to go through. Let it begin with this budget session.

Confidence, the Crucial Factor

Few people know that Bangladesh has the appropriate facilities to perform 25 to 30 coronary bypass operations a month, Professor Akhtaruzzaman, director of the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases, has done a wise thing by briefing the press on this point. He said he did not understand why people would not avail the efficient service of the NICVD at prices like Tk 50,000 for bypass surgery and instead go abroad and spend millions. We assure him the picture is bound to change with time provided the NICVD does not start following in the footsteps of all other medical facilities in the country.

In our imperfect stage of social development it is still the afflicted and his or her kins who decide what healer to go to. However, the key thing, as the doctors know only too well, is neither excellence of equipment nor height of skill and knowledge — but confidence - patient-confidence. There is no gainsaying the fact that Bangladesh medicare system as a whole has largely lost the faith people traditionally put in local doctors and institutions. Coronary surgeons are not to blame for their present scant customer. They are new in the trade. For some time they must bear the burden of what the whole profession has come to.

Bypass surgery at less than Tk 50,000 will be accessible to so few. We are certain very soon this will be available in the so-called clinics as lesser coronary manipulations already are. This service would be offered more or less by the same manpower as the NICVD's using most inadequate equipment and the private joints charging more than double the government price. Who would be at fault in that scenario? Not the patient. People in terror and in a mob act foolishly. The biomedical sciences and their practitioners and the whole medicare system lives only for these doubly foolish lot. The first thing very crucial to the welfare of both the patients and the practitioners is confidence.

Not Pious Words Only, We Hope!

Both the foreign secretaries of Bangladesh and India are new in the driving seats of their country's foreign offices. But both are highly experienced hands at diplomacy. We know that new appointments do not change policy or previously held positions, especially if they happen to be as entrenched as in this case. Yet, there are dozens of examples, world over, where far more complex problems, lasting over decades, and involving far more desperate partners than we are, have moved forward because new people took fresh looks into old problems. Without raising too much hope, can we expect that both sides will take a fresh look at the water problem and move away from the stalemate that has so severely deteriorated our relations.

Given the fact that both governments are going to polls within the next year or so, and that looking soft to voters will not serve the cause of politicians of either countries, the two foreign secretaries will have strict political briefs, of their respective governments to follow. So, most likely, it will be a 'deja vu' encounter. Yet hope springs eternal, and we do hope that some ground-breaking thinking will commence from this meeting, whose results, if not now, may bear fruit in the near future.

15 June 1995, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman presented the

24th national budget in a parliament comprising the treasury bench only. It was 7th presentation from honourable minister's an enviable opportunity for any one, perhaps anywhere, in the world. The of the absence of opposition members en masse from the session visibly soared our finance minister who took no time, while submitting the budget, to express his sorrow over this unhappy episode. It may be mentioned here that three of the five budgets presented so far during this regime were discussed and passed without the opposition parties in the parliament — a rare event for any parliamentary experience, perhaps again, anywhere in the world. How far this tells upon the credibility of the budget, the building of consensus and, above all, the establishment of democracy in the country, should better be answered by our learned

politicians. This year's budget postulates a revenue earning of Tk 15450 crore, a revenue expenditure of Tk 11070 crore and a development outlay of Tk 12,100 crore. This would entail a revenue surplus of Tk 4,380 crore (Tk 15450-11070) which would go to finance 36 per cent of the ADP allocation of Tk 12100 crore This implies that 64 per cent of the total resources required for the ADP would have to come from outside in the form of aid and grants. The deficit, in aggregate, is projected at Tk 9257 crore. Education sector tops the list in terms of allocation of revenue expenditure (Tk 2145 crore) while followed by the defence at Tk 1935 crore.

How far can we bank on those figures? The historical convention seems to be that a finance minister presents few figures of allocation which are substantially changed during the revised budget. When the revised budget is accepted or approved, as it has to be, the original budget appears to be a gift from the ghost. Take few examples. For the year 1994-95, an amount of Tk 9948 was stipulated for revenue expenditure which was revised and posited at Tk 10300 crore - a rise by about 4 per cent. It has further been observed that most of the unproductive expendi-

Budget 1995-96: Retreat from Reforms?

By and large, this year's budget is a soft budget with no new tax imposed (unless it comes through (SRO), hefty concessions etc. Election budget as it is termed, there would be further concessions to please voters and that might jeopardise the macro stability.

tures tend to experience a hike in the revised version by a margin averaging 5-15 per cent. On the contrary, the development expenditure productive in narrow sense) this year experienced a rise by only 1 per cent.

The principal aim of struc-

tural adjustment and reforms

as could be learnt, is to contain the growth of revenue expenditures (unproductive in narrow sense. The expenses on account of salaries and other entitlements of government employees have risen by 19 per cent during the last three years. During the last four budgets about 40 per cent of the outlays went to 'feed' and 'seed' government employees. There is hardly any budget so far presented which could show up a decline in this line of expenses. In other words, notwithstanding lip services to adjustment and reforms, Bangladesh government is still grooming a big government and thus dooming a big prospect of resource mobilization for development expenditure. Just look at the allocation for Prime Minister's secretariat. It is reported that in the 1993-94 budget, an amount of Tk 11.96 crore was earmarked for the secretariat that rose to Tk 13.38 crore in the revised budget a rise by more than one crore. We feel that downsizing revenue expenditures should start from the helm to set a tradition to follow. Why should Bangladeshi taxpayers pay for a fleet of ministers and other governmental 'monsters' some of whose rationale of existence is in serious

question? Honourable finance minister rightly pointed out that if losses in the public sector (about 2 per cent of GDP) could be arrested, our growth rate, in tandem, would rise to 7 per cent per annum. We are, in fact, living with the impression that BNP is the longest serving government in Bangladesh with all its power to do something in this direction. Well, if it needed any national consensus, then the onus lays on the BNP government to do the same. The same argument applies in case of bank loan defaults. The finance minister adduced the failure to the presence of legal complicacies. It appears that the minister raged the war in 1991 and discovers in 1995 that there were no cartridge in his rifle. In fact two of the most serious failures of his government have been in respect of these above two

The finance minister, erstwhile complacent on account of food self-sufficiency, displayed seeming innocence on the recent rice and fertiliser crisis, although he informed us that deficit in food production might cost us extra bucks. But why the dawn of self-sufficiency settled into the dusk of deficit was not clearly elaborated. The nation

its movement. Likewise, historically, budgets have never shown any development expenditure on account of the defence sector. Well, that could be justified on the ground of national security which seems to be an acceptable argument. But defence budget should be discussed in the parliament — the highest citadel of policy making - to induce more transparency and thus to help the growth of a strong defence service for Bangladesh.

There is no doubt that Bangladesh ranks top in terms of economic stability at least in comparison to its neighbouring countries. This news has been broadcast so much that people may get tired of hearing these again. What we are looking for is how far the

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

expected that the minister would pay more attention to this most unhappy and sensitive episode.

Over the years, a growing allocation to social sectors is well taken and appreciated. Bangladesh needs to upgrade the quality and quantity of its human resources - the most abundant factor of production — if sustained growth and development is to be upheld. To this effect, this year's budget also emphasises the same. But few points should be cited in this respect. For example, we fail to understand why the allocation relating to education and religion should be lumped together. A rise in the aggregate figure could emanate from more allocation to madrashas and other religious institutions rather than from general and technical education. The latter is dubbed as unproductive expenses and hence needs a

separate account to monitor

the establishment who

promoted the oppressive

The firebrand Chief Minis-

philosophy of Manu, the cre-

ter risked the ire of politicians

and the media by saying Ma-

hatma Gandhi — the Father

of the Nation and champion

of the untouchables was the

"worst enemy of Dalits." She

remained unrepentant despite

the opprobrium which fol-

garner support for the BSP

which after initial electoral

setbacks in the 1890s

emerged as the main coalition

partner of Yadav's govern-

ment in Uttar Pradesh after

constant, often violent, con-

frontation with Yadav's sup-

porters, most of whom are

farmers from marginally

higher caste or backward

head around the end of May

when the BSP withdrew from

the coalition and made a suc-

cessful bid to form the gov-

gan trying to stitch together a

coalition along caste and

community lines in the 425-

Hindu fundamentalist

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

the single largest party in Ut-

tar Pradesh, although the BJP

is a party of high caste Hin-

dus. Its aim was to get Ya-

dav's backward community

supporters out of office at all

member state assembly.

Mayawati immediately be-

She had the support of the

Matters finally came to a

But BSP legislators were in

state elections in 1993.

communities.

ernment.

She worked patiently to

ator of the caste system.

journey from stabilization to growth has been completed. The growth rate is still hovering around 4-5 per cent while, by this state of stability, it should have jumped to 7-8 per cent. Is it because of poor governance that failed to reap the harvest from the hard-earned macro-stability? Possibly yes. On the other hand, most of the reform measures have been shelved since the Mayoral election.

The reasons are, perhaps, not far to seek. Reform is a painful process with much of the pains clinched on voters. A government that seeks to stay in power at any cost can hardly go for reforms with a clear mind. The retreat of BNP government from reform seems to lure voters during the next general election.

Bangladesh's external sector is performing quite well and the country is now saddled with heaves of Forex reserves. But immediate policy emphasis needs to be given on

is one of convenience. Her

diversification and backward integration of exports. In case the MFA is lifted, the RMG exports might get a jolt to

adversely affect our exports. The various tax and tariff concessions on raw materials should help the growth of local industries. Reduction of corporate tax rate is also a welcome move But to achieve an investment level of 18-20

should value quality of investment more than quality so should we rank quality of governance rather the numbers of those who govern. By and large, this year's

per cent the governance ca-

pacity of the government

should be improved. As we

budget is a soft budget with no new tax imposed (unless it comes through (SRO), hefty concessions etc. Election budget as it is termed, there would be further concessions to please voters and that might jeopardise the macro stability. We do not envy an election budget but we would decry any move to deestabilise the macro stability.

Buchwald's COLUMNI



Rubber Gloves are in

HERE is a bit of a dust-up at the White House because Secret Service uniformed guards wore rubber gloves when 50 gay elected officials paid a visit there

The White House had to apologize, but so far no one has come up with an explanation as to why the guards took such extraordinary measures.

My visit to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue raised more questions than it answered.

As a precaution I wore rubber gloves when I showed my The guard looked at me suspiciously and asked, "Why are you wearing rubber gloves?

I winked at him. "You know as well as I do. You can never tell who you're going to shake hands with around He let me in and I started moseying around. I asked an-

other guard, "Why do Secret Service guards wear rubber gloves? He replied, "Because of the squirrels — thy are always

eating out of our hands." "What about the lobbyists?" "The White House staff are always eating out of their hands. We don't want to get infected by them either."

It sounded like a good reason, but not good enough. Another uniformed officer, who was wearing not only rubber gloves but a face mask as well, said, "You never know when you might get infected with Lyme disease by a visiting head of state.'

"Then you didn't wear the rubber gloves because you had gay visitors to the White House?'

That would be insanity and, also show prejudice against a certain group of people. Rubber gloves have always been part of a Secret Service uniform. They go extremely well in parades with our blue uniform. They also look very smart

when you're saluting the President "Whoever says we wear gloves to make a statement about homosexuality doesn't know what he's talking about.

The nearer I got to the White House administration more embarrassed everyone seemed to be.

One White House spokesperson said, "If people handling food in restaurants are required to wear rubber gloves, why shouldn't Secret Service police wear them when handling tourists?"

"I didn't know it was that unhealthy handling tourists." "Have you seen some of them lately?"

I tried to shake hands in my rubber gloves with congressmen and senators who had just seen the President. But they kept backing away. "What are you afraid of?" I asked one gay-bashing con-

"Why are you wearing rubber gloves if you don't have a

horrible disease?" he asked me. "All the guards are doing it," I protested.

"How do I know they're not sick, too?"

(By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and

Firebrand Leader Cashes in on the that the alliance with the BJP

NDIA'S first-ever chief minister from the Harijan or "untouchable" caste has assumed office in the country's most populous

state, Uttar Pradesh. Mayawati's appointment in the politically important northern state — it has more seats in Parliament, 85, than any other Indian state - may signal a whittling down of upper caste domination of politics by the numerically supe-

rior lower castes. Caste — the hereditary class system — has always been a key factor in Indian politics. Ten per cent of parliamentary and state assembly seats are reserved for lower castes and "backward classes" which form about half the population), as are 49 per cent of all vacancies in government and public sector or-

ganisations. Though publicly condemning the rigid caste system, Indian politicians have always contested elections with an eye on the caste affiliations of their voters.

This makes Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP, or Downtrodden People's Party) a potentially powerful political force.

For over a decade BSP's forceful head, Kanshi Ram, has been organising the lower castes into a countrywide political force, trying to turn its numerical strength into India's largest vote block.

With Mayawati's elevation, he seems to be getting nearer to his goal.

"If the BSP can hold onto power, it has the numbers to emerge as India's major political force," said an analyst.

Another party dominated by the lower castes and backward communities, Janata Dal, was also recently voted to power in neighbouring Bihar state. Mayawati replaces Mu-

layam Singh Yadav, whose

18-month old coalition gov-

ernment was dismissed after

the BSP withdrew support in

Common Touch Rahul Bedi writes from New Delhi

The formation of a state government in India's most populous state may be more than a personal victory for a firebrand leader. It could also signify a larger shift of political power in the country.

lowed.

the wake of incessant caste

and community rivalries. Mayawati says her government's objective is to raise the living standard of Dalits (lower castes), minorities and backward classes, ensuring an equal status for them all.

The 39-year-old Chief Minister, who is also general secretary of the BSP, says her government will strive to create a society "free from fear and inequality."

Mayawati has been unrelenting in her fight for the rights of the downtrodden and underprivileged during her 10-year political career.

She has been embroiled in several major controversies and does not mince her words. She developed an apathy to the upper castes during her childhood in Bijnore, a small Uttar Pradesh town, after seeing widespread social injustices meted out to them and has often been in trouble for her controversial, frequently offensive, remarks

against them. Born into a lower-middleclass family, she graduated from Delhi University and though trained as a teacher she joined the Backward and Minority Central Employees Federation, a forerunner of

the BSP, as a social worker. With the formal launching of the BSP as a political party for the upliftment of India's lower castes in 1978, Mayawati emerged as the champion of the downtrod-

She declared war against Manuwadi vyavastha (the caste hierarchy), attacking those in

tactic appears to be to consolidate her position and then go to the polls in the hope that her party will win enough seats to form a government on its own. — GEMINI NEWS

RAHUL BEDI is a New Delhi-based freelance journalist.

OPINION

Are we still living in a savage world? This question has been bothering me very much

mind and thoughts at this moment are the dangerously deteriorating law and order situation worldwide and the erosion of moral values in our society influenced by the undesirable aspects of so-called 'modern' ways of life.

In ancient times, people were ignorant of the fact that they lived naked. Later on, people covered part of their body with leaves from the trees. Gradually, they also searched for better way of life and improved from the stone age to the tools age. Then, by and by, they aspired for peaceful life. By the discoveries of science they tried to become enlightened. And people continued struggling for still more happy and peaceful life.

Due to the fast deteriorating law and order situation in continues the domination and

exploitation of the weak na-

tions, at times even in dis-

guise of humanitarian consid-

erations. Why then there is no

effective law to punish such

B.A.B

ruthless leaders? No reasons whatsoever other than their masterly position. Every day we read in newspapers or watch on TV

> bulletins things absolutely heartless and cruel happening almost throughout the world. Every day so many innocent people are being systematically annihilated in the name of so-called justice and human rights. What harm these poor nations have done to the big brothers? Could not the advanced knowledge of scientific discoveries be made for uses other than to make bombs and mass scale destructive military equipment? Certainly those could have been better used for the benefit of the human race in their nourishment, free education and free treatment of danger ous diseases. All benevolent decisions by the big powers and their camp followers are in reality eyewashes.

All the present-day chaos are created through the assembly of the rich for their lust for the control of the poor countries. It is simply maddening. Instead of attaining higher living standards and peaceful life, one can even kill any one without any reasons, just to establish superiority over others. In our childhood, I used to

hear my parents say, "the more the bamboo grows, the more it bends." And now it has become just the opposite. If any nation wants to be powerful, then it plans the destruction of the weaker ones to prove its brutal supremacy. I really fail to find any reli-

gion worth the name which may support large scale mass destruction, killing and murder in any form, in the name of bringing peace and succour to the affected people.

The world today is full of crimes and criminals. And the crimes are committed in very sophisticated way by them. The powers that be are apparently meant only to carry out their planned operations for their selfish ends. What

they try to achieve through the UNO or other humanitarian organizations are all evewashes primarily because they follow double standards. But the people do clearly under stand their tactics. Unofficially, the world today is polarised in two distinct and difterent groups based on their respective beliefs.

My heart deeply hurts and cannot control my tears when I see small children are crying when their harmless and 'armless' parents are lost in planned operations. And they are destined to continue to suffer. They are not even aware of the reasons of their sufferings. My heart really

Are these the examples of wise and civilised world? Then it seems to be worst than the dark age. The education and knowledge of all aspects of crimes is so designed that all the crimes committed may easily be justified by them so that they can get away without punishment.

In the dark age the effect of the crime or anything wrongly done would have happened only locally. But alas, in this century through electronic and print media, these are flashed all over the world. It is so pity that even the cartoon pictures, meant for small children, are also not free from the crimes, as if otherwise they cannot create any entertainment and fun. From childhood the babies are being prepared to get used to crimes so that they can in due time justify all sorts of crimes in their own

We are supposed to be living in the so-called civilised world with mostly unbecoming examples. Definitely, the Almighty Allah may help us to overcome our present-day difficult situation.

Some day, I do hope to be able to express my thoughts on the important factors effecting the erosion of values in our families, societies, our country and the world at large.

Our Sad World

these days. Uppermost in my

our country and also elsewhere, it is painful to observe and hear of rampant murders, rapes, looting, mugging and state terrorism. Worst of these are the state policing over other nations by the self-declared so-called protectors. But the criminals are seldom properly punished. They somehow or other manage to remain outside the long hands of the operating laws. So the world appears to be heading for real disaster as people are killing each other for no good reason other than for the sake of power. The weak nations have to remain subservient to the powerful ones as they give alms and at times arms too. But why? Just because the powerful nations have under their full control the scientific developments and advanced technologies with their surplus wealth mainly acquired from and at the cost of the poor nations. Their military superiority does play the vital role in all such matters. So

Mayawati made it clear

according to her, is vital to

France's nuclear bomb

Sir, Only a few weeks ago representatives from many countries assembled in New York and debated Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The nuclear powers especially the USA, the UK and France made passionate appeal for banning all nuclear weapons testing to save the mankind from great catastrophe.

But to the bewilderment of people all over the world the cat has now come out from the bag and France has announced resumption of nuclear weapon test which,

her security. What sort of nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty we have been talking about for the last

several years? O H Kabir Dhaka-1203 "A thorn in your flesh"

to read the article "A thorn in your flesh" by Mr Kuldip Nayar published in your paper on June 9. He has narrated the creation of India and Pakistan on the basis of two nation theory. The creation of Bangladesh, however, re-

Sir, I had an opportunity

mained untouched. Well, the problems of Jammu and Kashmir may be solved like many other big problems; the political parties of both India and Pakistan should understand that. They cannot divert people's attention by creating new problems. They may create problems like "Farakka" for the time being but in the long run, they will be identified for their failure and the problems ultimately solved by the people themselves.

M Ali Rajshahi