

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

On 15 June 1995, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman presented the 24th national budget in a parliament comprising the treasury bench only.

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.

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.

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.

atures 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 structural 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.

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.

ermment 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 complications. It appears that the minister raged the war in 1991 and discovers in 1995 that there were no cartridge in his rifle.

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.

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.

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.

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.



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.

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

Firebrand Leader Cashes in on the Common Touch

Rahul Bedi writes from New Delhi

INDIA'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 superior 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 organisations.

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.

France's nuclear bomb according to her, is vital to her security. What sort of nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty we have been talking about for the last several years?

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 Bijpore, 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-middle-class 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 downtrodden.

She declared war against Manuwardi vyavasha (the caste hierarchy), attacking those in

the establishment who promoted the oppressive philosophy of Manu, the creator of the caste system.

The firebrand Chief Minister risked the ire of politicians and the media by saying Mahatma Gandhi — the Father of the Nation and champion of the untouchables was the 'worst enemy of Dalits.' She remained unrepentant despite the opprobrium which followed.

She worked patiently to garner support for the BSP which after initial electoral setbacks in the 1890s emerged as the main coalition partner of Yadav's government in Uttar Pradesh after state elections in 1993.

But BSP legislators were in constant, often violent, confrontation with Yadav's supporters, most of whom are farmers from marginally higher caste or backward communities.

Matters finally came to a head around the end of May when the BSP withdrew from the coalition and made a successful bid to form the government.

Mayawati immediately began trying to stitch together a coalition along caste and community lines in the 425-member state assembly.

She had the support of the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the single largest party in Uttar Pradesh, although the BJP is a party of high caste Hindus. Its aim was to get Yadav's backward community supporters out of office at all costs.

Mayawati made it clear remained 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.

To the Editor...

France's nuclear bomb according to her, is vital to her security. What sort of nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty we have been talking about for the last several years?

"A thorn in your flesh" Sir, I had an opportunity 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-

per cent the governance capacity of the government should be improved. As we should value quality of investment more than quality, so should we rank quality of governance rather than the numbers of those who govern.

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Art Buchwald's COLUMN



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 pass.

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 here."

He let me in and I started moseying around. I asked another guard, "Why do Secret Service guards wear rubber gloves?" He replied, "Because of the squirrels — they 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 congressman. "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?"

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OPINION

Our Sad World

B.A.B

Are we still living in a savage world? This question has been bothering me very much these days. Uppermost in my 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.

Due to the fast deteriorating law and order situation in 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 the 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 continues the domination and exploitation of the weak nations, at times even in disguise of humanitarian considerations. Why then there is no effective law to punish such

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

My heart deeply hurts and I 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 bleeds.

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 lives.

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.